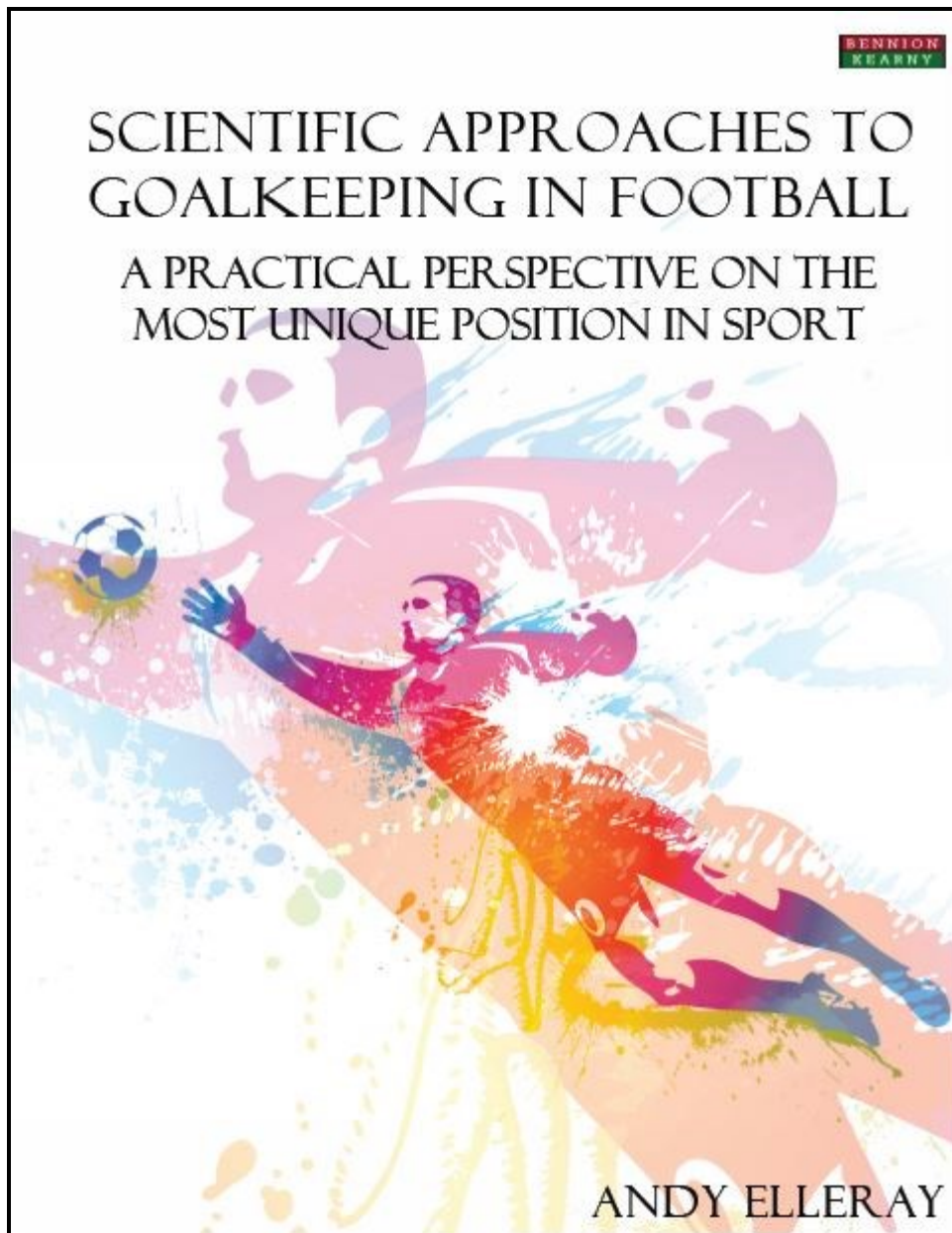


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Goalkeeping in Poland

Daniel Pawlowski is a goalkeeping coach from Poland who has worked with the country's youth international teams, as well as top teams in Poland, and who runs his own Academy. He is a former goalkeeper, and was educated in Sports Sciences in Edinburgh. For him, Messi and Ronaldo would have been the best goalkeeping coaches. In his coaching career he has visited many football academies around Europe and learned various goalkeeping training methods at FC Porto, Tottenham Hotspur, Fulham FC, Valencia CF, PSV Eindhoven and FC Barcelona. He discusses aspects of goalkeeping with great passion and deep knowledge of this peculiar position.

Daniel writes...

A few months ago, I was asked – what is goalkeeping in Poland?

I would have loved to reply and talk about the structures, philosophies and methodologies of something that could commonly be called the Polish Goalkeeping School, but sadly to say we do not have transparent structures, philosophies and methodologies when coaching goalkeepers.

Despite this Polish goalkeepers were (and still are) praised in European football competitions, and as Arsene Wenger put it in one interview: “In Poland they produce some fantastic goalkeepers”.

It is difficult to explain this phenomenon. No one has conducted research into Polish goalkeepers yet the country has produced a nice historical line of excellent goalkeepers naturally. Józef Młynarczyk in the 1980's, Wandzik in the 1990's, and Dudek in 2000. Then Boruc, Fabiański, and Kuszczak appeared a few years later, and we now have Szczęsny, and Tytoń.

On the streets you can see young lads wearing T-shirts with goalies names on the back. Goalies are idols. Whilst we still have living memories of Jan Tomaszewski (our hero from Wembley in 1973 when he singlehandedly held back England) the message is clear – Polish goalies can succeed. This is a powerful motivational kick for youngsters. I do not want to be controversial but I worked for nearly 30 months in Scotland, visited many football academies in Europe and I never saw the motivation and eagerness to succeed that I see on the faces of Polish goalkeepers. We do not have excellent facilities, or medical and educational support - the only way for a young goalkeeper to succeed seems to be through hard work, dedication and constant motivation.

The game

Throughout my semi-professional playing career and almost 10 year coaching career I developed different teaching and learning strategies. In simple terms I would coach by using different methods in Scotland compared to England or Poland. Cultural differences must be taken into consideration first. However, I believe that the most successful coaching concept needs to be based around the game itself.

I always thought that I knew a fair deal about the game, but I view the game a little bit differently these days. In fact, I would say that there are underlying problems in understanding the game of football. For years it has been viewed from a deterministic, mechanical point of view, that if A passes the ball to let's say B then something happens. If B passes to C something happens, etc. But we never asked: what happens after the ball is passed? What has happened to B before he received the ball? How has the movement of the A influenced the decision made by B and C?

As a goalkeeping coach I think we have to resolve crucial questions like: how can goalkeepers improve their positioning against *particular* opponents? Or how can a keeper use the space left by opposition midfielders? This is much more than simply – what is the best shape of a keeper's hands or the best footwork.

Neurosciences and Mourinho

The former top English player and TV pundit Jimmy Greaves said that “*Football tactics* are rapidly becoming as complicated as the *chemical* formula for splitting the atom.” He was right, with new discoveries in science, especially in neurobiology the actual thinking of the game has changed. Look at the human brain and how our neurons communicate, its analogy is similar to the football field. Look at José Mourinho's latest book *Por qué tantas victorias* where he mentions *Periodización Táctica* (Tactical Periodization) and *Modelo de Juego* (Game Model), which nicely touches upon the complexity of the game and presents a different understanding of soccer training and conditioning too.

If we do not know what the game is, we do not know its proper training methods. Quite frankly, there is no valid algorithm that might help to understand the complexity of the game. Software like ProZone and others do not tell us enough about it. However there are nice approaches from network analysis perspectives in team sports. Using them might be a big shift towards knowing more about its

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complexity. Great coaches actually feel the game, have this intuition. The best coach in the NBA, Phil Jackson at the Chicago Bulls, developed triangle offence, which was basically a mutual sharing of the ball. Obviously we had seen this sharing before, during Rinus Michels times, for example.

Who do we develop – master of the training or the game?

I always believed in learning the game. As former player I always asked questions like: how will this training help me to improve myself? Traditionally, goalkeeper training is performed away from the dynamics of decision making and lasts between 50 and 80 minutes. It is very isolated. The coach shoots the ball, the goalie makes the saves, and you might think – this is ok, he is making fabulous saves, let's take this type of training and apply it to my athletes. But after such training - when the goalie is back in a game situation - he will struggle. Why you might ask? Because he had just trained in the context of a simple situation and now he is back in a dynamic, complex one he will not function properly. This creates what I have called “Master of the Training”. Coaches often say: “He is excellent during training but chokes during games”. I am not saying that isolated technique training is wrong but one also has to include: decision making, the impact of emotion and cognition, the positioning of the goalkeeper (in particular dynamic action).

Human movement studies are an emergent phenomenon. We have to understand an athlete's ‘intrinsic dynamics’ (i.e. those coordination tendencies that are present within an individual). So saying to the goalkeeper – “Keep your elbows bent at some magic angle” is not a proper approach. Elbows will simply bend because of momentum and that's it. There is no biomechanical need to improve it. Football does not belong to some closed skills classification as many apparently believe.

Simply speaking, as the coach, my role is to match *intrinsic dynamics* with *task dynamics* (i.e. those coordination tendencies that are required to successfully perform a task). From a motor learning based perspective, within a dynamical systems perspective, learning is a “search and refinement” process. The coach is there to help structure practice environments and channel movement dynamics by allowing players to explore different configurations in changing settings.

In simple terms, specially designed games for goalkeepers allow them to explore new movements and be faced with the opportunity to use techniques to succeed. When I look back on my development, I started kicking the ball around by

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playing and the goalkeeper should be faced with environments such as these.

Zaluska creatively succeeding. But for some it is the wrong technique.
(Photo by: Richard Tucker)



Messi and Ronaldo

For many, saying that Messi and Ronaldo would/could have been two of the best goalkeeping coaches is blasphemy. But, as I have said previously, if I could have had Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo at my practices, developing goalies would have taken little time.

Let's imagine two distinct situations: a coach is shooting the ball at the goalkeeper, low drives, higher ones, etc. He kicks it from the ground, maybe does some half volleys. In the second scenario, the coach can use the services of Messi and Ronaldo playing together against two defenders and the goalkeeper. Look at the shoots, the variety, difficult spins on the ball, not much time to think for the goalkeeper; anticipation is involved, and communication. What scenario do you

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think will make a better goalie? I leave the answer to you.

Coaching senior goalkeepers

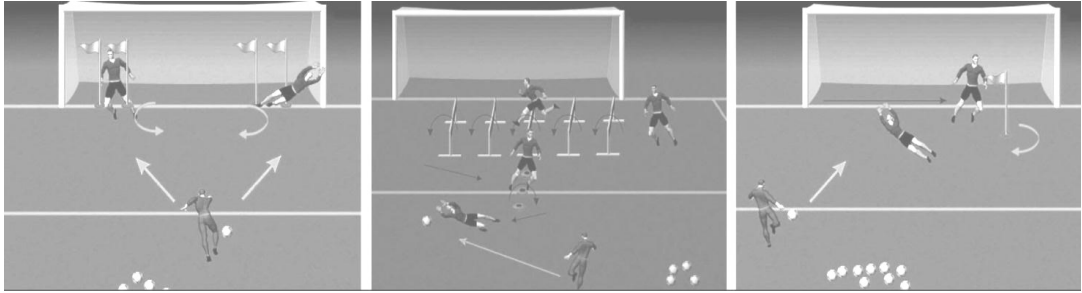
It is important to talk openly with players about emotions. I particularly like the quote from Guus Hiddink: “To get to the highest level, the first thing people must do is to have a better understanding of themselves.” Would you disagree with that? At a professional level we have to create caring environments where players can develop this mutual, open understanding. Read what great players, Champions League and World Cup winners, are saying about their teams and they often talk about team chemistry. This is not achieved by accident, you have to talk openly about emotions which may sometimes lead to conflicts but a real leader can channel such conflict into positive outcomes.

Ancient wisdom

I do tactical questioning. It’s a Mourinho paradigm, but known before him, and involves asking players meaningful questions like: how did the position of this player influence your movement? What happens if your starting position is here or there? Etc.

This is guided discovery learning; players are more attuned to important sources of information; get them to understand the game better. In ancient times it was already applied (*Tell me and I will forget, show me and I will remember, engage me and I will understand* – Confucius) and I think we have to come back to sheer fundamentals in terms of communication so the player feels that the answer *belongs to him*, not directly provided by some other source.

Normal training session for footwork, but this is footwork for this training not for the game. Footwork in a game is totally different.



Coaching young goalkeepers and 10,000 hours of training

I do not see why we should train youths differently to seniors. Of course, there are physiological, psychological and physical differences that we have to take into consideration, but if you look at FC Barcelona's methodology, youth player training sessions are similar to those done by seniors - 80% of the time.

There is one powerful framework in developing talent called 'ten thousand hours' or the 10 year rule. Research into expertise has regularly shown that many athletes who reach international level devoted at least ten thousand hours on their way to becoming great. Putting it into numbers: that's devoting three hours per day for ten years. Obviously, you have to take that message into the perspective of long term athlete development because it does not mean that training more will make you better. Quite surprisingly, English players who sign international contracts at the age of 16 started very early and engaged mostly in football activities. Apart from that, they spent many hours in non-led coaching practices, that is, they just played the game with friends. There is evidence from Brazil telling us that many players, who went international, had not participated in structured activities led by a coach up to the age of 15 or 16; street soccer was their teacher!! Due to these street games intrinsic dynamics match smoothly with task dynamics and we can see great creativity being born. For youth goalies my advice would be: play the game and be passionate about it!