

YOUNG GOALKEEPING DEVELOPMENT

3v3 or 4v4 age 6-8 Goalkeepers or no Goalkeepers?

Firstly let me introduce myself to those of you that do not know me. My name is Peter Mellor and I am the full time National Teams Goalkeeping coach and Coordinator for the United States Soccer Association. I played over 18 years as a Goalkeeper in the English leagues, also representing England as an International at U16s and U23s. I retired from playing in 1980 and moved to America where during the past 21 years I have devoted most of my life to coaching and developing our American Goalkeepers.

Since my appointment by US Soccer 4 years ago, I have had growing concern that there has been a push not have Goalkeepers in the 6-8 age group. I have been asked many times my opinions and thoughts as to whether we should have Goalkeepers or not in our 3v3 and 4v4 games at age 6-8. **I feel very strongly that we should mandate that all of our 6-8 year old players should be exposed to Goalkeeping, not necessarily made to be a goalkeeper but given a minimum of time in goal in a ROTATION basis. Or for short periods of time, with any condition that recognizes the Goalkeeping Position. (Nearest player to the goal can use their hands etc.**

Let me share some of my experiences as I developed as a child to how I believe I became a very successful professional Goalkeeper in England. When I was only 5 years of age the system, or should I say the lack of a system in our development was quite simple, **let the game be the teacher.** We did not have organized soccer, no coaches, and no referees in fact any adults at all! However we would always have a Goalkeeper in all of the street soccer and pick up game's we played. I remember enjoying playing in the field at the age of 5-6-7 and 8 and I guess I thought I was going to develop in to a world class striker as did most of my friends. As my 9th -10th and 11th birthdays came and went, and after hundreds of pick up games in the local park or streets, it became quite clear that I was not going to live that dream. I did not have the skills to make it happen.

At the age of twelve, I was given my very first opportunity to play competitive soccer in the field as a goal scorer. It only took the coach of the team a few games to realize I was not going to live my dream, I simply was just not good enough! However all was not lost, the coach offered me a chance to play in goals. Sure I had played that "strange" position on many occasions in pick up games and street soccer in my early years of development. Looking back I firmly believe that all of those early visits in to goal paid off!

Now that I have shared my own young development with you and tried to paint a picture of how I developed specifically as a goalkeeper, I would like to share with you my philosophies of how we should approach Goalkeeping awareness/development in our American game.

The Goalkeeper or Goalkeeping is an integral role and part of the game and **should not** be neglected or overlooked. At early age's children ages 5-9 are playing in organized soccer therefore, we must organize those brief visits in to goal for them to be exposed to goalkeeping. The advantages of doing this can only lead to a better understanding of the game at an earlier age as they develop. Lots of players will not go on to be Goalkeepers, however, just by being exposed to the position it will go on to help them by **(1)** The way they may have tumbled (something most 6-7 year olds love to do) or fallen. This may help them when they play the field and are tackled or get knocked off balance. **(2)** The Goalkeeper will play deeper in a supporting role as a sweeper keeper and should be encouraged to use their feet when out of the goal area, acting as the defensive point in the team and forming triangles without any mention of tactics!! (An integral part of the game) **(3)** Understanding what Goalkeepers like or dislike (shots etc.) and then using it for their own knowledge when you come face to face with Goalkeepers as the player develops and gets older. **(4)** The coach can observe and identify **the** psychological make up of each child in their team by looking to see who is aggressive or not and monitoring who deals well or not with the challenge. Do they have an early liking for the position? This is invaluable information for the coach in getting to understand how best to help and support each child's own personal development.

I have discussed this whole issue with not only our National Goalkeeping Staff but also many other very respected Goalkeeping coaches. We are unanimous in our decision that goalkeeping should not only be a part of early development but also should be included in our National Youth licensing as soon as possible.

Coaches, I also ask you to research with your Goalkeepers from age 13 and up by asking them what experiences they had with Goalkeeping during there early soccer years (4-8) I think you will be surprised with your research!

If you would like to give your thoughts, suggestions or opinions please email me at pmellor@ussoccer.org or fax me at (727) 786 7301.

Respectfully Submitted by:

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