Documentary Review - Goalkeepers: Inside The Minds Of The Loneliest Men In Football

Goalkeepers: Inside the Minds of the Loneliest Men in Football For my documentary I will look to produce a fifteen minute documentary on the “Psychology of Goalkeepers” in football. I have always been intrigued by the mind-set of a goalkeeper and how it differs to outfield players. There haven’t been many documentaries going inside the minds of goalkeepers so I feel this would be an interesting and informative documentary.

There are a lot of aspects I can cover in this documentary which I will go in to later in to the essay. First of all I’m going to examine what some writers consider makes a good documentary. Secondly, I will look at some academic studies which have been carried out on goalkeepers’ psychology which will help me get a broader understanding of the topic. When looking at what makes a good documentary there has been research carried out by various writers.

A documentary film in the words of Bill Nichols (1991 p29) is “one of the discourses of sobriety”. Documentaries according to Nichols aims to focus on politics, history and economics and the aim of a documentary is to describe the real or tell the truth. They are there to entertain but also educate. This idea from Nichols (1991) was further supported by Lipson and Basque (2018) who suggest “the documentary film form, whether for cinema or TV, was principally meant to inform its audience about topics they were not aware of”. In addition to these explanations, Carpini and Williams (2011 p164) came up with the notion of “infotainment”, which is “a new hybrid that combines traditional news with entertainment”. This again outlines that documentaries needs to strike a balance between being informative and entertaining. Likewise in Moore’s (2014) article, he states “the term ‘documentary’ was anathema and should be replaced by ‘movie’ as he feels it’s necessary to abide by the tenets of entertainment”, There has been debates as to whether documentaries are actually journalistic. Mertes (2001 p53) says, “deep suspicion remains in many quarters when judging a visually based medium in terms of journalistic qualities”.

An important thing to note about Mertes feelings here are that these views were aired in the year 2001, which is nearly twenty years ago. In that time social media and online video journalism has become a big part of society today. If a documentary educates, informs and is accurate then it can be considered journalistic in my view. Furthermore, Schneider (2001 p56) finds “the most effective films have an emotional honesty and personal voice that invite viewers to enter into a sort of relationship with the filmmaker”. This is what I will try to aim to do in my documentary. So for me to get a better understanding of the psychology of a goalkeeper and for me to understand the differences in psychology between a goalkeeper and an outfield player it’s important for me to look at some studies on goalkeeping psychology.

By looking at previous studies it will not only give me a better understanding of the topic, but will also prepare me to understand what questions I need to be looking to ask my goalkeeping subjects. Goalkeeper is often a lonely position. If a goalkeeper makes a mistake it can often end up being fatal. There is a train of thought that a goalkeeper needs to be confident and mentally strong as they have a lot of pressure on them. As Kendall et al (1990) suggests “positive

thinking leads to feelings of enablement and contributes to a successful performance". If this is the case how can a goalkeeper remain confident at all times?

Mahoney et al (1987) suggests "Psychological skills such as goal setting, imagery, emotional control and relaxation have all been identified as indicators of successful performance". It will be interesting to see in my documentary how many goalkeepers actually use these psychological skills and how they use them in a game situation. What drew me to looking at goalkeepers is that they are often the forgotten players in every team. When a football formation is presented on television, the goalkeeper is often left out. For example if a team plays a 4-3-3 formation, very rarely do you see the goalkeeper mentioned in the formation. If that was the case the formation would be 1-4-3-3, not just 4-3-3. As Weigand et al (2000) suggest, the goalkeeper "requires a specific skill set, both mentally and physically different from other players on the same team". Mentally goalkeepers during matches sometimes don't have a lot to do so they have to stay concentrated throughout. How do they do this? This is what I will be trying to prize out of my contributors in my documentary. Especially after a goalkeeper has made a mistake in a game, how do they recover? They have a lot of time to themselves on the field when they are not involved, so do they engage in negative thinking and how do they get back in to a positive mind set after they could have just cost their team the game?

Sewell et al (1996) states "goalkeepers play a highly complex position and when coupled with the mental and physical demands, the position leads to higher levels of pregame cognitive anxiety when compared to other positions". This higher level of cognitive anxiety can mean a "greater probability that a mental error in sport performance will occur" (Bird and Horn 1990). Obviously if a "mental error" occurs then this can result in a decrease in confidence from a goalkeeper. Similarly to Weigand et al (2000), a study carried out by Laws (2006) looks at goalkeeping psychology and also finds goalkeepers "have a different set of mental skills and beliefs compared to their non-goalkeeper counterparts" and that they demonstrate "a stronger mental skills profile than non-goalkeepers".

Laws (2006) also looks at the psychological skills of goalkeepers and speaks about how they use "positive talk" in game situations. What she means by "positive talk" is when there is a big break in play, or the goalkeeper is not touching the ball for a long time, they are still concentrating and saying positive things in their mind and not obsessing over past mistakes. Sewell et al (1996) study indicates "goalkeepers possess higher levels of psychological skills" which in turn can lead to increased level of confidence and a better ability to overcome adversity. Some goalkeepers are calm and others not so. Ex Manchester United goalkeeper, Peter Schmeichel would often shout and bellow at his defenders and he would say this was his way of staying focused during games. Whereas present Manchester United goalkeeper David De Gea rarely shouts at his defence but is arguably up there with Peter Schmeichel as Manchester United's best ever goalkeeper. These days a goalkeeper uses a lot more psychological skills, so it will be very good to examine these skills in my documentary.

The audience I will be targeting for this documentary will be a YouTube audience. There have been very few goalkeeping documentaries on YouTube. I would target the YouTube audience as I think the documentary will get more views on YouTube because there is a big football community on the site now (e.g fan channels, Four Four Two, Copa 90 etc). Goalkeeping psychology is not a topic that seems to be covered a lot in general, especially on YouTube. Looking at this, I feel there is a gap in the market for a documentary like this and it would interest people, especially the football community. In preparation for making the documentary I

thought it would be a good idea to watch some past goalkeeping documentaries on YouTube. One which I like and will look at for inspiration is a documentary by Manchester City (2014) on youtube called “In safe hands: A Keeper’s Psychology” (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=auv-Qv9OpEc).

This follows Manchester City’s goalkeeping coach and youth development goalkeepers. This is a great starting point for me and I will take little ideas from this. For example, the way the training shots are filmed. I like the fact we see the goalkeepers separate from the whole squad and training on their own. I will look to film a goalkeeping session and get some nice shots in my documentary. What I like most about this documentary is that we have an interview from a goalkeeping coach and a psychologist which for me is what I will be looking for in my documentary. I will want one goalkeeping coach, one psychologist and an ex professional goalkeeper.

The way the interviews are shot are quite nice, but I would like my main interviewer (the ex-professional goalkeeper) to be interviewed in a studio. In addition to this documentary I looked at a documentary by Four Four Two (2017) “Goalkeeper, the loneliest job in football” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KWz2hqjBbrg. This again was a good documentary to watch to give me ideas. In this documentary they are all current professional goalkeepers or ex professional goalkeepers so it will be difficult for me to get interviews with this calibre of goalkeeper, but what I did like about the documentary was how there was little archive footage of the goalkeepers in action. As the goalkeepers were speaking they were using footage from lower level league games and even just extras acting out being a goalkeeper. This was good for me to see as if for example you can’t get much footage of someone as a goalkeeper there are always ways around it.

The questions the goalkeepers answer in this documentary gave me a lot of good ideas of what to ask my contributors. What struck me most was the competitive nature between goalkeepers also. They are in the same training space every day so you think they’d be friends, but there is only one spot in the team for a goalkeeper and the only way the second choice goalkeeper will get in the team is if the first choice goalkeeper is performing badly or injured. It would be interesting for me to find a goalkeeper who is a second choice goalkeeper and ask them whether or not they really support the first choice goalkeeper and whether they actually want them to do well.

The final documentary I’m going to talk about is another one by Four Four Two (2018) called “The Science of a Penalty Shootout” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nY7opJmgITw. This documentary is a good one, but it focuses more on the shooters of the penalty and not the goalkeepers. I would be interested to find out the psychological skills goalkeepers use in a penalty shootout and how actually everything flips on its head for a penalty. The outfield players are the ones with all the pressure on them and the goalkeeper can be the hero. It will be interesting to examine how goalkeepers down the years have got in to the minds of penalty takers and do things before the players take the penalty to put the players off (e.g Bruce Grobbelaar, Fabian Barthez). One of the main questions I will be asking in my documentary is once a goalkeeper has made a mistake during a game, how do they move on and recover from that? There are many examples of goalkeepers after making one mistake in a game, they make another one straight after (e.g Lorius Karius for Liverpool against Real Madrid in the UEFA Champions League final last season the most recent). What psychological techniques does a goalkeeper use to try to cope with this and do they actually work?

One of the greatest ever Premier League goalkeepers Petr Cech, who plays for Arsenal, is retiring at the end of the season and one of the main reasons seems to be down to the style of play at Arsenal. In an article in the telegraph by Wilson (2018) Cech reveals his “personal challenge of adapting to Arsenal’s new style of play”. For years he didn’t have to worry about playing pin point passes out from the back but now the way in which modern day football is going it is a necessity for goalkeepers to be good passers of the ball. Cech states in Wilson’s (2018) article “You can see at this level that one v one is difficult to play so you need to use the goalkeeper as a spare man every time you can. That is the role of the goalkeeper”.

The distribution of a goalkeeper is just as important as their shot stopping ability these days. Does this create and extra pressure for goalkeepers and effect their psychology and confidence? The documentary mode I will be looking to use is an expository documentary mode. This mode is one of the oldest forms of documentary and involves giving priority to the spoken word to convey perspective. I will look to combine images with my voiceover as I think I have a good voice and can convey the information well. Henderson (2013) states “in expository documentary mode the narrator speaks directly to the viewer through voiceover, in which the audience do not usually see the speaker”. This would be a perfect mode for my documentary. Along with my contributors, I will be able use my voice as well as the images to give the audience a clear understanding of the psychology of the goalkeeper.

The first thing I need to look at is who I want to be in the documentary. The main contributor to the documentary I would like to interview is ex professional goalkeeper Neville Southall. This would be a huge coup for my documentary as Southall is one of the greatest goalkeepers of all time, but also has an interesting story to tell. He started off as a dustbin man and worked his way in to the professional game. He suffered adversity when he first joined Everton from Bury. He was sent out on loan to Port Vale, after Everton had just lost to Liverpool 5-0 in 1982. He came back triumphantly from his loan spell and in 1985 amazingly became the only goalkeeper to win the football writers players of the year award. It would be interesting to find out how he stayed so mentally strong when he was on loan at Port Vale. Interestingly Southall seems to be the stereotype of a goalkeeper. He has done and said some crazy things. For example, a game against Leeds United in the 1990-91 season instead of going in at half time with the rest of his team, he just sat by the post the whole of the half time interval. Also he didn’t celebrate when Everton beat Manchester United in the 1995 FA Cup final. He even said about himself “that he was seen as different” and “perceived to have eccentricities”. Also it would be interesting to touch on life after football and how he has become a teaching assistant, helping young students in Gwent.

I listened to an interview online with Neville Southall for Goalkeeper magazine (2012) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t05cShAqOj. He spoke about a range of topics and he would be an interesting contributor to get hold of if I could get him as he does sum up the madness and psychology of goalkeepers perfectly. I would certainly want to speak to a goalkeeping coach also. There is James Hollman who is the goalkeeping coach for Newport County and would also help me be able to tap in to the psychology of the modern day goalkeeper. He was also goalkeeping coach for Cardiff City when they got promoted to the Premier League in 2013 so he would have a wealth of knowledge about what goes in to being a top class goalkeeper. Particularly an interesting topic to ask James Hollman about would be how does the mentality of goalkeepers differ to outfield players and how does he go about maintaining the motivation of the second choice goalkeeper when they very rarely play a game?

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