



PERFORMANCE GOALKEEPING

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PGK Newsletter December 2008

Issue 4: Q&A with Will Hesmer, Goalkeeper for the Columbus Crew and US National Team.

Welcome to Performance Goalkeeping Newsletter, this issue is a Q&A with goalkeeper Will Hesmer of the Columbus Crew and the US Men's National Team. After helping the Crew to an overall first place in the regular season and the club's first MLS championship trophy, Will spoke with Performance Goalkeeping about his ascent into the professional ranks, his training routines and match-day preparations and the impact of coaching on his success.

What was the biggest transition from college soccer to the professional game?

The biggest adjustment from college soccer to the professional game, aside from the obvious fact that the players are much more talented, was the length of the season. A typical college season lasts no longer than four months, so after the first four months of a professional season you aren't even at the halfway point. Mentally and physically that is a tough adjustment.

What has been the highlight and low point of your career so far?

It's hard to point to one specific highlight in my career. There have been a lot of great moments along the way, but so far I would have to say that 2008 has been the most rewarding year of my career. Obviously, being called into the national team was a huge honor, but what we (Columbus Crew) have been able to accomplish so far this season has been extremely rewarding. No one believed that we were capable of accomplishing the things we have, but us. We all put the work in, day-in, day-out, and to see that come to fruition, finishing top of the league, is a very good feeling.

In the last regular season game of my college career, I tore a ligament in my knee and also tore my quad, which resulted in compartment syndrome and a long hospital stay. Being unable to play in the ACC and NCAA Tournament after working so hard for so many years to win a championship was

heartbreaking. This also happened to be right before the MLS Draft, which really hurt my chances of going into the league and being able to compete for playing time right away.

You were called into your first full national team camp in January 08, how did you find out, and what was your reaction?

I was out to eat with my sister for her birthday, and my mom called me and told me. She had "accidentally" logged into my email account and read the email. I couldn't even get upset with her because I was so excited for the opportunity. I was shocked to be honest. There are so many good American goalkeepers. It was my first year of being a consistent starter in the league, and even though our team didn't finish as well as we had hoped, I still felt like I had a really good year. It was nice to be noticed for that.

What is a typical game day routine for you? What is a typical training day routine for you?

On game days, I try to do as little as possible. I will wake up in the morning, eat a good breakfast, watch some tv, and stretch a little. I will eat a good pregame meal four hours before kickoff, and maybe take a short nap after. Sometime during the day, I will study film and watch the opposition's tendencies, set pieces, penalties, etc.



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On training days, I will arrive at our practice facility about an hour before training, eat some breakfast, get some treatment, and suit up for the session. Training days earlier in the week are much more intense, and the days before the game are spent fine-tuning other aspects of my game.

As a youngster you were a solid athlete in many sports. How and why did you ultimately choose soccer, and to become a goalkeeper?

Soccer is actually the first sport I ever played, the sport I dedicated the most time to, and I think that had a lot to do with it. I was way too competitive for my own good as a kid, and the only healthy way to get that out of me was to be on a field or court somewhere, so my parents always had me playing something. At times I was often was playing two sports at the same time: basketball and soccer, football and soccer, baseball and soccer. I actually took my first ever-recruiting trip to Wake Forest as a football player. However, I just couldn't see myself going down that path. I had so much time dedicated to soccer, as well as success, and I think that ultimately drove me in that direction (however, if you had asked me in middle or high school my favorite sport I would have told you basketball). Another bit of irony is during my time playing soccer rarely did I play as a goalkeeper. I would always mess around during practice in goal, and was by far a better goalkeeper than midfielder, but because I was actually one of our better midfielders my coaches always played me in the field. I think in the long run that really helped me become a better goalkeeper.

How do you think that playing multiple sports helped you develop athletically?

There is no doubt that playing a multitude of sports growing up made me a much better athlete, and therefore, goalkeeper. I think playing basketball helped me to develop quickness and agility, and football, playing as a receiver and cornerback,

helped not only with my strength and hands, but also in being more aggressive and courageous, which is a big part of goalkeeping.

What are your main goals to reach in your career?

I have always believed that setting short-term goals are the best way to get to the loftier goals. Therefore, I am just trying to take it one year at a time. And, as of right now that goal is to win the MLS Cup. After that, I would like to make my way into a more integral part of the national team. Obviously, right now Tim Howard and Brad Guzan are the front-runners in goal, but I would like to think that I could make a strong push to be a part of World Cup qualifying and hopefully make the 2010 World Cup Roster. That is obviously any soccer players dream.

What's the best advice you've received?

"choose a task, big or small; do it right, or not at all"

A lot of pro clubs around the world don't have GK coaches on staff. How important do you think it is to have a Full time goalkeeping coach at your club?

Having a full time goalkeeping coach is imperative. I have been fortunate to have had great goalkeeper coaches throughout my career, and without them I definitely would not be where I am today.

How long do you like to warm up on game days, and briefly what is your routine?

I'll typically warm up about 35-40 minutes before kickoff. I like to start with a little running/dynamic movements and stretch. After that I will strike a few short passes just to get going a bit and get use to the playing surface. After some volleys and half volleys into my hands, I will go into a progression of diving. Some shots from angles/straight on, crosses



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from both sides, and a little bit more kicking/throwing and I am good to go.

In a typical week how often do you do speed work, resistance work, and on field training?

During the season, I typically will spend one day a week outside of normal practice time doing speed work, and one day a week (maybe two depending on the schedule) in the weight room. Most of my daily goalkeeping training sessions incorporate some sort of speed/strength training.

What was some of the most important training you had as a youth player (what helped most in your development)?

As a youth player, some of the best training I received was through ODP (Olympic Development Program). Growing up in North Carolina, I was fortunate to have a lot of very good college coaches around to aid with this program. However, the best training I received as a youth was with Eric Vaughter. I would spend two weeks or so a summer and a few weekends during the year training with him. We had a very good, small group of goalkeepers (which included Troy Perkins, Jon Busch, Ronnie Pascale, just to name a few) that would stay at his house and train twice a day. He was the first true goalkeeper coach I ever had and no doubt was a huge part of my development.

How has goalkeeping changed throughout your career and how do you see it continuing to change?

As far as rule changes go, I was just on the verge of starting to play when they eliminated the pass back rule, and then shortly thereafter eliminated the use

of hands from a throw-in. These rule changes obviously made it much more important for a goalkeeper to be able to play with his/her feet. I have heard various conspiracy theorists claim that they might make the area for which a goalkeeper can use his/her hands smaller, but I think that they have found a good balance now and that the game is in a good state with the current rule changes. The only thing I think that might be adjusted rule wise is the strictness of the six-second rule and how long the ball can actually be in a goalkeeper's possession (whether at your feet or in your hands). Outside of rule changes, I think the biggest obstacle now facing goalkeepers is technology. Each new ball designed and introduced seems to be more lively and wicked than the last. Because of the desire to see more scoring and action, unfortunately, I don't see this getting any better... only worse.

Do you have ambitions to play outside of the US, and if so where?

Of course, every athlete wants to test himself at the highest level possible, but I don't think that you can judge yourself as a success or a failure if that opportunity never works itself out. There are a lot of factors to overcome to play in the top leagues in Europe even if a top club desires you. Your current club has to be willing to sell you and you have to be able to qualify for a work permit, so there is a lot more that goes into it. With all of that being said, I would love for that to work out one day.

Performance Goalkeeping would like to thank Will and wish him all the best in the future both on and off the field.