

GOALKEEPER TIPS

Goalkeeper Mental Preparedness

What the Pros Say

Tony Meola, former Metro Stars and US National Team Keeper) likes to talk about how he responded after one of his worst mistakes (occurred in the US v Romania WC game, he gave up a near post goal, of course); but by focusing mentally, he went on to play the best game of his career.

Responses from some of the top-level goalkeepers on what sets them apart from the rest:

1. Leave all outside life in the locker room
2. Try to stay in line with the ball throughout the game
3. Focus on the present, don't worry about past mistakes
4. Stay in the game through communication
5. Have the ability to rebound after a mistake

Visual Preparedness drills

The visual functions are very important to goalkeeping - what the goalkeeper sees and how he or she processes what they see is important.

Visual acuity - Write letters on goal post 10 feet above eye level and ten feet below; jump up and down and stay focused on a certain letter

Ocular mobility - the ability to track; it's important to keep the eyes moving and the head stationary; train by watching a mini-ball move in a circle.

Speed of recognition - one goalkeeper in goal with two goalkeepers seated near the penalty spot; a server take shots from outside the area; the seated keepers save what they can and deflect what they can't save to create problems or the keeper in goal

Peripheral vision - focus on one object, yet be aware of details around them; two players passing, but looking each other in the eye, not ball watching. Players can also practice by walking down the hall or street, being aware of surrounding things, without looking at them.

The Gift of Failure

1. It is the BIG fear, but it is really a gift
2. Teaches players how to fail
3. Take risks (winners take more risks, fail more often, but succeed more too!)
4. Mistakes are the perfect stepping stones - IF you use them. Post competition analysis is very important
5. There is absolutely nothing you can do about mistakes except learn from them and then forget them
7. One must fail to succeed

Why do most players fail to develop mental toughness - they don't pay the mental dues; it all starts with training; you must train with emotion in order to cope with emotion during prime time. The Japanese cultural history makes it difficult for them to recover from failure. They tend to dwell on the failures. It is not uncommon to see a Japanese team win many matches in a row and start a long losing skid after one bad outing. 98% and 2% - 98% of a group will just show up day in and day out. The other 2% are emotionally involved in what they do, they are mentally plugged in everything they can to learn.

Other

Concentration - Fully connect to what you are doing, so you are aware of nothing else. It can be a paradoxical skill; when anxiety increases, performance decreases - if you see yourself getting anxious, bring yourself back to the positive. Whose side is your brain on? Make it your friend.

Here and now rule - this is the place where you can mentally crumble - always stay in the here-and-now. NOW is all you have control over; you can't change the PAST and TOMORROW has no guarantees.

Self-Talk - What are you telling yourself in that 200 words per minute self talk; the most important self-conversation you can have will link pleasure with achieving. "I enjoy succeeding at my goals." (But set yourself reasonable goals) Don't focus on the Uncontrollable - other players, field conditions, weather, referees, etc.

Do focus on the Controllable - you can control your eyes and ears; i.e. you can only control your individual performance.

Watch out for personal goals that depend on others.

Create an image before the game of the best you can do.

Have focal points. For instance, go out early before the game and sit in stands and visualize the game, and/or mentally create waste baskets that you can crinkle up a mistake and quickly throw it in, after game go to waste basket and review to learn, then discard.

Don't Hang Onto Mistakes - breathe slower, let it go, develop a ritual to handle this (for example, after a bad play pick a blade of grass, refocus, breathe slower acknowledge that you can't change the mistake, relax and throw away the grass). Do what works for you.

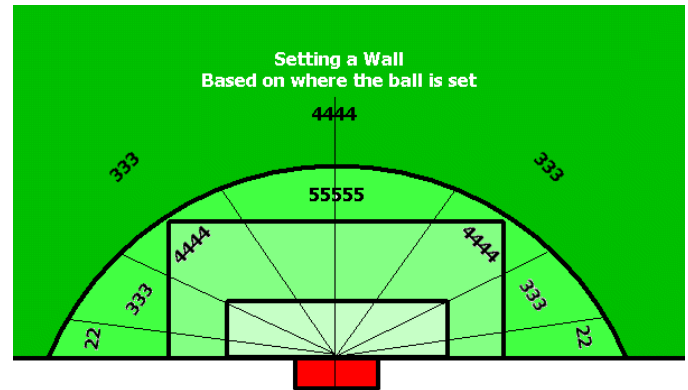
Avoid the Words Can't/Never/Impossible - at least add the word YET behind them. "I can't do it, YET."

The Line - once you cross the line onto the pitch, you are a player, nothing else. When you cross the line going back, you become a student, son/daughter, etc.

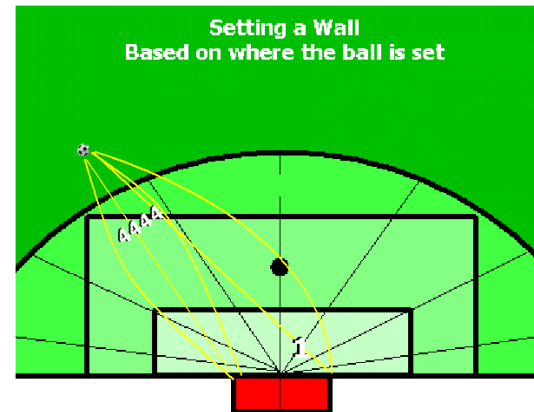
When Is World Cup? - It is now! - Play and practice as if now is the most important moment in your life.

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Placing a Wall



Set your wall based on where the ball is placed. Remember that the wall is to assist you as a keeper, not to hinder you. While positioning the wall, keep an eye on the Ref, there's no worse feeling than struggling to get your wall positioned, only for the other team to take their kick before you have moved yourself into position.



Once you have placed the wall, think about the kicker's options, and place yourself where you have the best opportunities to control the ball no matter what happens. Always remember: it's easier to run forward than it is to run backwards.

Warmups and Drills

Bounce and Catch

1. Hold a ball in your hands high over your heads, bounce it down to the ground and then catch it waist high. The catch should emphasize the classic "W" shape.
2. Keep moving around and changing directions during this drill.
3. Don't just drop the ball and catch it. Use the over-the-head throw down towards the ground.

A variation of this drill is to walk around, bounce the ball, lift your leg over the ball and re-catch it, always emphasizing the "W" catch. Do it ten times with the right leg, then ten times with the left, then alternate legs. A second variation of this warm-up is to hammer the ball out of your left hand with your right hand and then re-catch it with the "W". This is tougher because the keeper must quickly position their hands after releasing the ball. Try these without looking directly at the ball to improve reflexive catches and coordination.

Ball Between the Legs

Keepers stand back to back, with legs shoulder width apart. Bend over at the waist and pass a ball back and forth between their legs. Initially start out with the hands stationary, i.e. right hand in back, left in front. Ball moves quickly, through the legs, from hand to hand, first rolling on the ground, then off the ground. After you have the hang of this, pass the ball between their legs in a figure 8. This exercise improves hand eye coordination and stretches the back and leg muscles.

Sit-Throw

Sit facing your warm-up partner with your legs in a V. Your feet should be about 1' from your partner's feet. "Shove" the ball towards your partner's chest, they catch, using "W", and return. Gradually work higher and higher so you have to fall back after the catch, then do a sit-up to make the return throw.

GOALKEEPER TIPS

Shuffle Square

Lay out a square with cones, gloves, whatever is handy. The square should be about 2 paces by two paces. Stand in the classic goalkeeper's stance, knees slightly bent, hands facing out. Move around the four corners of the square, first clockwise, then counter-clockwise. Make sure you don't lose the stance. Next, on your hands and knees, crawl around the square, always facing in the same direction - do twice, once in each direction. Last, place a ball at each corner of the square. From the 'keeper's stance, smother the ball, crawl forward to the next one, smother that ball, get up, shuffle over and smother the next ball, roll yourself over and grab the last ball from behind you. Gradually improve speed (and don't knock loose the balls on the final rotation).

Explosive Scoop – Quick Roll Return

Have a player shoot a ground ball in to you. Explodes towards the ball and scoops it to your chest. Continue on and returns a roll pass to either the same player who shot it or to a third player who has gone wide. This simulates both the explosive step towards the ball a keeper needs to employ and the quick, on the ground counter-attack which is more conducive to possession play than just punting the ball away. It is also a good conditioning drill.

Diving

Dive as a last resort - keep your feet ALWAYS when possible, but if you do dive, commit all the way. Remember to use the "three-hands technique to control the ball, land ball first, hips and shoulders second. Don't land on your arms! Practice diving from sitting and kneeling positions - the ground doesn't look so far away, and you never know when you might need to recover a lost ball.

Use the ball as your shield once you have possession - don't curl your body around it (let the ball be kicked, not you!). Under Law 12, Decisions of the International FA Board, it states "The goalkeeper is considered to be in control of the ball by touching it with any part of his hand or arms." The referee should be (gently) reminded of this if they allow an attacker to kick at the ball after the goalkeeper has their hands on it.

Recover fast from every dive, even if you make the save. Remember, the day that one gets away, that recovery speed could be crucial. Variation three of the shuffle square drill is a good start towards increasing your recovery speed.

Dealing with Break-Aways.

Breakaways can be the most fun part of being goalkeeper. Nothing is more fun than stuffing a striker who is sure that she is going to score. And nothing lifts your defense and whole team more than stuffing the striker.

The first thing to remember about dealing with breakaways is that the pressure is on the striker--she is supposed to beat you. There is no pressure on you. So be confident.

Dealing with breakaways begins before the breakaway ever happens. You must constantly pay attention to the game and how it is developing. And you must be aware of where the last defender is and concentrate on the space between you and the defender. You must be able to control this space. If you can control this space, you can avoid having to deal with a great many breakaways.

The key to dealing with breakaways is aggressive play. You must be ready and willing to commit to exploding off the line with these objectives:

1. Option 1 is get to the ball before the attacker does.
2. Option 2 is get to the ball before the attacker shoots. Many times an attacker will make a mistake and allow the ball to get away from her before she shoots. This is the time to get the ball.
3. Option 3 is get the ball as soon as she shoots.
4. Option 4 is get the ball just after she shoots.

If you can't get to the ball before the attacker does, get out to a spot where you leave the attacker as little of the goal to shoot at as possible. Come out balanced, and force the attacker into an error. Make the attacker commit first. If/When you dive cover the near post with your hands and the far post with your legs and feet. Attacking players try to avoid shooting at a keeper's hands. So they will often shoot wide of the near post in an attempt to keep the ball away from your hands. Always attack the BALL, and once committed, DON'T STOP!

Saving PKs

Don't hurry to get on the line and be setup - let the shooter get nervous waiting for you, not the other way around. When the shooter is waiting to shoot you must assess several key pieces of information:

1. What side does the shooter prefer to go to? - Right footers typically prefer to score to the 'keeper's left, etc... (always helps to spot this before a PK!)
2. What side of the body does the shooter shoot with?
3. From what side is the shooter approaching the ball?

[Typically, if a right footed taker starts at an angle to the ball then he/she will place the ball to your left (their right) corner; if a right footed taker starts from behind the ball (ie straight run-up) he/she will strike the ball to your right (their left) corner. FOR A LEFT FOOTED TAKER THE CORNERS ARE REVERSED.]

After taking these points into consideration you must then decide which side the shooter will go to. You'll have a final fraction of a second to decide when you see

them move. You must pick a side and go there no matter what. If you wait to see where the ball is headed, it will be past you before you know it. Some suggest appearing to leave a side open slightly more (lean the other way, etc.), to "invite" the shooter to go for the opening. Stay low, and make yourself look big low (remember, more room for them to miss if they shoot high).

Make sure your teammates know to come in and cover as soon as the ball is kicked - if you have a deflection or your saved ball comes loose, they should be there to help.

One last thing, there isn't a shot in soccer that is unsavable, no matter what anyone says.

Ball Distribution

The keeper is not only the last line of defense, they are also the first line of offense. Don't give away the advantage that ball possession can provide you by a poor decision on ball distribution.

Kicks

A goalkeeper may simply drop the ball to the ground and take the kick normally, especially if they have a big foot. When more distance is required, i.e. to break pressure, a punt or drop kick is used.

Punts

A punt is usually the kick with the greatest distance, although the high trajectory and hang time usually mean 50-50 balls at the receiving end.

Drop Kicks

A drop kick, where the ball hits the ground before being contacted by the foot, gives a lower trajectory ball. This makes it better for driving into the wind and makes it easier for teammates to receive. It does not have quite the distance of a punt, however.

Timing is everything for both punts and drop kicks. Just like free-throw shooting in basketball, kicking distribution must be practiced over and over until the timing becomes automatic.

Throws

Throws are usually much shorter than kicks, but much more accurate. A quick throw right to the feet of an open teammate is often the safest distribution. The goalkeeper has several basic throws available.

Roll

The roll is the most accurate but shortest distribution. It is also typically the easiest for teammates to receive. The roll is underhand.

Javelin or Baseball Throw

In the middle of the accuracy and distance scale is the javelin or baseball throw. The form is similar to how a javelin is thrown. The ball starts in the palm beside the head and is thrown straight forward as the keeper steps into the throw. Some backspin on the ball will help it "sit down" and make it easier to receive, so the keeper can let the ball roll off their fingertips slightly at the end of the release to provide this.

Sidearm Throw

The sidearm throw lies between the javelin and overhand throw in both distance and accuracy, and also in its delivery. Because the arm position is sideways, the best way to put backspin on this throw is by passing the palm of the hand under the ball upon release, letting the ball roll off the middle and index finger and the thumb.

Overhand Throw

The overhand throw or "sling" is the longest but least accurate throw. Use it instead of a punt or dropkick, or when you can depend on getting the ball to a teammate.

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