

A Collection of Articles by Rob Walker
USSF National Goalkeeping Staff

Supplement to NSCAA GK Institute
Hosted by Minnesota Youth Soccer Association

June 12-13, 2010

The Goalkeeper Warm-up Palooza

I was driving by a field the other day and I slowed to watch a goalkeeper in his pre-game warm-up. In the 20 seconds or so of watching, I saw 3 shots: one shot slamming into the roof of the net and two “skying” over the goal with great majesty, but little effectiveness. At Washington Youth Soccer’s recent “Soccerpalooza” in Tacoma, the scene of the goalkeeper watching the ball sail over the goal was on my mind, so that was my topic for an afternoon session at the event that I had always known as “Soccer Fair.”

Putting a good warm-up together for a goalkeeper takes a little planning and a little organization from the coaching side. Here are the main phases that should go into the considered in putting a warm-up together:

Phase One 8 minutes

The goalkeeper should warm-up in phases. The first phase should involve a variety of movement: jogging, backpedaling, skipping, side shuffling, carioca and “grapevine” foot movement. Also in this phase, the goalkeeper can do a variety of leg swings (similar to the leg swing on a punting motion), lunges and simple stretches. These are all movements that build on each other to warm the goalkeeper’s body and can be done with the team or separately (sometimes space available before a game can be tight and there’s not room for the whole team to work in the same area).

Phase Two 8-10 minutes

The second phase should incorporate a ball and some sharp footwork (think a speed ladder with 4-6 foot movement and a couple of catches). Some one and two footed jumping and some more catching should round this phase out. As the phase comes to the end, the goalkeeper can be taken through a little diving too. The coach should arrange for a person (the coach him/herself, an assistant, a parent etc) to provide service to the goalkeeper. The goalkeeper should receive some sharp service (can come from the hands initially, but the bulk of the work should come from a ball served from the ground).

Phase Three 11-15 minutes

A series of shots, 6-8 at a time, from the top of the Penalty Area should follow, this is where the example that this article began. The server should target the goalkeeper. The first set of shots should be at and just to the side of the goalkeeper. The goalkeeper should be allowed to rest in between sets and then

begin again. This phase should progress to get the goalkeeper diving and taking up good angles.

Phase Four, Five, Six 20 minutes

The goalkeeper should move on to crosses (phase 4), a little work with the team (phase Five) and some punting, kicking and backpass work (phase 6). The crossing work should involve both pressured and unpressured crosses that the goalkeeper can come for easily and then build into tougher decisions of “KEEPER” or “AWAY.”

Young goalkeepers can often benefit and enjoy a little work with the team in some sort of shooting activity (which should involve the shooters not shooting from close range). So creating a phase where this happens is certainly appropriate. There will be a time when the starting goalkeeper needs to step out and work on punting and kicking, so having a back up for the team shooting should be part of the plan.

The phase six activity should allow the goalkeeper to focus on his / her punting, kicking and back-passes. Typically, a field player can be added to this activity as a long target. Typically 6-12 serves out of the hands off the grand and then with a moving ball (back-pass) will pull this phase together nicely.

Phase Seven 5 minutes

The final phase in the “warm-up palooza” is an important one. This is the time when the goalkeeper might need to get into dry gear: a change of a shirt, switching from “practice” to “game” gloves etc. Setting aside time to get changed can help the goalkeeper stay focused over the course of the match.

The Final Phase

The whole purpose of a good warm-up is to get the goalkeeper physically and mentally prepared for the task at hand. The warm-up should push the goalkeeper without creating discomfort or anxiety about getting ready to play. So, plenty of rest, plenty of positive talk and a solid plan to carry out the warm-up should all be ingredients in the plan. There should be provisions for the conditions of the ground (doesn't make sense to dive in mud puddles if moving would solve the problem on a rainy day. Taking into account warming up with or

against the wind (might want to defend the same end of the field in the first half), or having a plan for bright sunshine in the eyes (a soft billed cap comes in handy) should be part of the planning.

In cases where there are two goalkeepers playing in the same game, the “starter” should get through all of the phases and the “back-up” should stay with the team and get the majority of the repetitions in phase four and five. If there is going to be a change of goalkeepers for the second half, the 2nd half goalkeeper should complete phase one and two before half time and get some shots, crosses and kicking in at half-time.

The goalkeeper who gets a good warm-up may not always come out on top (teammates need to score goals), but a good plan can help the goalkeeper make the critical save or kick when it counts.

Clearing Up the Goalkeeping Focus

I often find myself standing on the sideline with my “coaching hat” on and think (or more truthfully yell) about the goalkeeper’s attention to a detail. This usually comes out as, “get focused” or for variety “concentrate!” Then the goalkeeper looks at me with a questioning glance (sometimes more of a glare) and it is clear that the coach (me) has clearly not put this right. What I am looking for from the coach’s box is for the goalkeeper to look at a situation in at least 3 parts: on the ball, near the ball and away from the ball. The concept sounds simple, but can be extremely difficult.

A goalkeeper’s manner of concentrating is almost always magnetized to the ball. The old adage, “it’s the ball that beats you” runs through the great majority of the work a goalkeeper does. Thinking of training alone, coaches work goalkeepers for 4, 6 or 8 serves, trying to get as much replication of the right technique, positioning or decision on each ball. So, the focus on “what” the goalkeeper does is almost always on the ball and the ball alone. Asking the goalkeeper to “see” more of the game runs contrary to the environment we put the goalkeeper in the practice and game environment.

How to “See” the Little and the Big in the Goalkeeping Picture

On the Ball:

- The goalkeeper should recognize the player on the ball and that player’s body posture: over the ball, leaning back etc. This posture can be a key to the kind of shot or swerve that will come from the player (driven ball when the player’s head and shoulders are over the ball; flighted / chipped ball when leaning back).
- In training, the goalkeeper should see as much of a moving ball when training as possible, this is more realistic to recognizing what the player is doing on the ball than serving a ball that is not moving.

Near the Ball:

- The goalkeeper should be asked to look at players near the ball (both teammates and opponents). The goalkeeper should “look” for pressure on the ball and in covering situations from teammates and also recognize when opponents near the ball could effect a dangerous situation (take over, wall-pass, overlap, or simply be played “in” with a pass from the player on the ball).

- As the goalkeeper looks at the situation, clear, short and concise communication is critical. A shout of “show in/out” is often the key that is missing to what the goalkeeper misses. If you can see it, can you shout out clear direction to make the picture better; that is the question.

Away from the Ball:

- Using “field vision,” which is the use of the eyes to look at something to the side of the goalkeeper without turning the head, can be helpful in picking up (and verbalizing) runs away from the ball and working with teammates to pick up those runs.
- Taking regular “peaks” away from the ball is also helpful to set up options when the goalkeeper makes a save and wants to play quickly (based on taking these peaks, where are my players) or organize teammates to push up and defend a more deliberate choice in getting the attack started.

Seeing is Believing

Concentration in goal comes from paying attention to the details: on the ball, near the ball and away from the ball. What the goalkeeper “looks at” is an important part of the process. When the goalkeeper has processed what is seen, there is a lapse of time before that information can be processed to making a decision and communicating can occur. From the sidelines, this looks like a really simple process. But, because the goalkeeper is magnetized to the ball (this is natural and we also train for this strong focus on the ball) work has to be done to see and talk about more of the picture away from the ball.

Working on recognizing the cues discussed above and learning to verbalize those (the goalkeeper can talk to him/herself and also aloud to teammates) can be a helpful step in translating focusing to decision making to communication. This process can be cloudy at times, but hopefully these points clear the picture just a little.

Goalkeeping Psychology: Having a plan to Concentrate and Recovering From Big Mistakes

Goalkeepers have a tough job: theirs is a game of inches, feet and yards and a decision as to “how to do the job” must be made in an instant. Having a method to keep the “creep” of distracting self-talk and negative verbal images from teammates, coaches and fans out of the goalkeeper’s head is an important skill. There is a “place” where the goalkeeper can go to get into a mental and emotional groove. Getting there and staying there involves concentration.

As a goalkeeper, the specifics of the position play a part in “how to concentrate.” A field player can influence their concentration by “getting into the flow of the game,” where a goalkeeper does not tax their physical fitness to an extent where physical activity can aid in getting into a good mental rhythm. A good skill is to learn how to focus when the game gets stressful or anxious. These steps take practice and time to develop:

- Breath—in and out and say, “relax”
- Listen—what sounds, voices can the goalkeeper hear?
- Purge—cut out the “bad” or unnecessary information from the listening stage
- Cue—what should the goalkeeper be hearing or seeing; have a word that can be associated what needs to happen—a word that describes what needs to be done.
- Reinforce—reaffirm what the goalkeeper should hear.
- Enjoy—relish the opportunity to play in the flow, or in the zone.

The goalkeeper should be taken through these steps in stages: off the field, during practice and then in the game. Getting focused is something that has “ebb and flow” to its process. How the goalkeeper concentrates early in the game may wobble as time passes from the warm-up, into the first half and finishes at full-time. Mental Focusing will rise and fall with the momentum of the game. The repetition of focusing and refocusing over the course of a half is where the goalkeeper learns the “craft” of concentration.

Learning how to concentrate is the same as a technical skill: it is all in the application. Being focused makes the job easier; it doesn’t make the job mistake free. Perfection in the game rarely occurs, permanence however is something

the goalkeeper carries from practice to practice and game to game. The bottom line for the youth goalkeeper is this: mistakes will occur (the ball will go under, over and sometimes through the hands) no matter how much a goalkeeper is prepared and focused for the moment. Having a “mistakes policy” is what will help the goalkeeper recover the quickest. This is a plan that is worked out ahead of time between the goalkeeper, the coach and even the team. When an occasion arises where the goalkeeper makes a big mistake, there should be a plan that involves:

- How to take care of the ball—if a goal results in a mistake, an outfield player gets the ball, if a corner or free kick result, an outfield player slows the play long enough to keep a quick restart from occurring.
- A player whom the goalkeeper trusts / respects to survey the situation and say something positive to the goalkeeper or even allow the goalkeeper to “relieve pressure” by being the target of the problem.
- The goalkeeper should have a trigger mechanism to help him move on (“no problem, there’s still time.”)
- Players not involved in “the plan” should know what their role is (maybe a quick positive shout to the goalkeeper or simply running or jogging to get ready for the next “play”).
- After the situation is over, a verbal sign can help the coach on the sideline know that the goalkeeper is back on track (this saves from saying too much right away in a verbal exchange).

The team coach or goalkeeping coach should assess what to say at half time or right after the game. This decision should often be made on a case-by-case basis and the goalkeeper should expect a short discussion about a mistake at some point after the incident is over. The big point is that this should be a discussion, not an argument or lecture from the coach to the player.

The best response a goalkeeper can make after a mistake is to get back on track and be prepared to “do the job.” Sometimes, goalkeepers can redeem themselves in a game where a miscue has caused a goal, while in others there may not be an opportunity to do so. The reality of soccer is that there will be highs and lows within the game itself. The goalkeeper that is ready to work

through the events of the game will be the one who is valued by teammates and coaches alike.

The Goalkeeper and the Shooting Practice: Tips For Success

Recently, A goalkeeper I'm fond of was telling me about a training session that he was involved in that featured a shooting exercise that went on for what seemed like "forever." He said, "For the first few shots, I felt like I was doing all right. I made a couple of saves; there was a miss or two and a couple of good goals. I wanted to come out and the coach said, 'stay in, it's good for you.' Clearly the level of performance for the goalkeeper did not get any better.

Soccer coaches are constantly developing creative ways to bring positive shooting practices into their training sessions. As coaches work at improving the important aspect of goal scoring, they realize the importance of quality shooting practices as one of the key benchmarks in our future success as a soccer-playing nation. The days of the "10 players in a line" have come to an end (we hope.) So, as coaches come up with ways to involve players in quality technical and tactical situations (drills, exercises, competitions and games) the "other side of the coin" is how to make the goalkeeper experience some of the same "quality of life" moments as the field player gets.

Shooting Practice Keys

- The goalkeeper should have a proper warm-up that ends with activities that will be similar to the work he / she will be doing in the shooting portion of the practice.
- The goalkeeper should have access to water as he / she works--much of the work a goalkeeper does is anaerobic and water often helps in the physical recover and readiness of the goalkeeper between sets.
- The goalkeeper should be active for a short time period: 20-60 seconds (a little more for crosses). The higher the amount the energy that the goalkeeper needs to expend, the shorter the amount of time that the 'keeper should be in goal.
- The goalkeeper needs to be given clear direction as to "how" a ball is to be played in the shooting practice. In some exercises / drills / games, the ball is simply thrown into the back of the net, thrown back into a "pile" of soccer balls etc. The key point here is that the ball should be distributed in a way that is realistic to the game. Coaches would agree that throwing the ball into the back of the net is something they would not want to see in a game, so why do it in practice?
- The goalkeeper(s) being used in an exercise should be allowed to start in the right position for any given situation. When the purpose is to get a high number of repetitions for a shooter in a short amount of time, it doesn't make sense to have goalkeepers presenting a picture that is not realistic to what would be seen in the game.

- The goalkeeper should be given the chance to finish a shooting practice as a player in the real game. Finishing up a practice where there has been a lot of pressure on the goalkeeper with some "free play" is a great way to "test" what the shooter and the goalkeeper can do.
- The goalkeeper should finish the practice with a few easy "technical" repetitions: some easy catching or diving will do. If the session has been particularly stressful (maybe there has been some technical breakdowns along the way) this tip is a good way to rebuild for the next day out.

Coaches often try to "squeeze" the needs of the goalkeeper into a pretty tight box. By using some of these tips (especially providing a little rest) the goalkeeper can get quite a bit out of a challenging shooting practice. In some clubs, goalkeepers can be borrowed and shared from one team to another to support teams that may not carry two goalkeepers. With a little planning, the goalkeeping "staff" in a team and the field playing group can get a great session that with repetition, can lead to success in both goal scoring and "goal saving" on game day.

The Quick Counter-Attack: Questions for the Goalkeeper to Answer

A reality of our game is that one team can dominate another on the ball, off the ball and in defense and still lose by a goal. Chances are, the “counter-attack” has played a role recently in one of your versions of “the silly ‘ol game.” In the January-February 2009 edition of Soccer Journal, NSCAA Director of Coaching Education and Development Jeff Tipping, has written an excellent analysis of Euro 2008. As a part of that report, Tipping outlines the counter-attack’s role in the Championship: 46% of the goals scored in the tournament came from the counter-attack (p.22).

In his article, Tipping examines 4 types of counter-attacks that marked “the transition moment when the opposition is disorganized and defenders spread out and push up.” (p.22)

- Classic counterattack: They begin in the back third and end with a shot on goal
- Collective counters: Ball is won in midfield and advanced at pace by a group of players against a disorganized defense.
- Advanced counters: Ball is one in opponent’s half and quickly moved forward as defenders are still running forward.
- Individual counter: Following a quick transition a forward gets the ball and uses direct running with a solo finish.

As the Washington soccer community is about to embark on its first MLS season with our very own Sounders, how many goals will we see first hand coming off the counter-attack? Hopefully, more goals scored for us, than against! Looking at the defensive posture that a team must take, what are the key questions for the goalkeeper and for the team in defending with and dealing with the counter-attack?

Where is possession about to be lost and what is the status of players around the ball?

This is the start of the “transition” from offense to defense. The goalkeeper should look for the “speed” the opposition is able to build out of winning the ball. This location on the field is vital as it determines how much space there is between the goalkeeper and the ball, which effects future decision making. Another associated part of this question is recognizing if there are any players “caught out” on the play (on the ground, momentum has sent the player the wrong way, etc) that will help to break down the organization necessary for organizing other recovering players.

How is the loss of possession being pressurized by outfield teammates?

The goalkeeper should look for chase being given as the ball is played forward or an opponent dribbles quickly through space on his / her way towards the goalkeeper. As a part of this scenario, the goalkeeper should also observe if there are teammates moving to the ball from goalside positions. There is a time to pressurize and there is a time to fall back and deal with the ball or the speedy dribbler in a withdrawn position. Generally, pressure on the ball is helpful when the defender can win the ball or force the countering player into a wide position. Dropping off creates a "line of defense" with other teammates that consolidates the players left to defend the goal.

Where is the countering team's service going?

Determining where the ball is going to be played (straight forward, at an angle, backward and then forward) will help the goalkeeper make a decision as to where to take up a defending position. Taking into account how teammates are recovering, the goalkeeper may want to adjust the position where he / she is to a more advanced position that is in-line with the ball. This might mean moving straight out from goal or across the field "in an angle" with the ball. This decision is part of the goalkeeper's job of "staying connected."

What are the most dangerous runs being made on the counter?

Associated with where is the ball being played, the goalkeeper should also scan the field quickly to see how many opponents are running forward (and how they are running) in advance of the ball. A properly played diagonal ball and corresponding run can split the space the opposing team is playing through and increase (finalize) the opposition's attacking plan. From this point, there are several choices the goalkeeper can make. The goalkeeper can come to win the ball, or hold a position because the defense has the situation handled. The goalkeeper may choose to drop off because the defender is slowing down and the ball can be played over the goalkeeper (withdrawing would mean the goalkeeper has time to withdraw and still win the ball). This is a situation where coaches refer to an error as "being caught in 'no-man's land.'"

What is the final position of pressuring and recovering defenders as the ball is about to enter the goalkeeper's defending third of the field?

A quick check of the defensive picture can help the goalkeeper to determine a final decision. Has the defense held up and won the ball? Is a recovering

teammate in need of support after intercepting the final ball from the opposition?
Or, is it time for the goalkeeper to "make a move."

Is there any quick communication that can be given to teammates?

Communication in the counter-attack is essential. Upon losing the ball, the goalkeeper should quickly observe danger and shout for the proper support from defenders. As the play develops, it is hard to communicate and react to the play simultaneously. This is a moment where the goalkeeper must give consideration to the points discussed above. Upon making a decision as to whether to come for the ball, or demand a clearance, the goalkeeper simply must shout "KEEPER" or "AWAY." This shout must be clear and decisive.

If the counter-attack ends without a goal being scored, what issues does the goalkeeper need to deal with?

The end of the counter-attack brings up many situations. If the ball has ended up in the goalkeeper's hands or feet, can a quick pass made to "counter the opposition's counter." If the ball has not been dealt with cleanly by the goalkeeper or the defense, can the goalkeeper recover to "clean up" the situation. This is especially important when a shot has been taken and the goalkeeper has put the ball back into play or a shot by the opposition hits the framework of the goal and rebounds back into play. If the ball goes out of play for a goal kick, the goalkeeper might "slow down" the re-start to allow teammates to re-organize and communicate.

The Quick Close

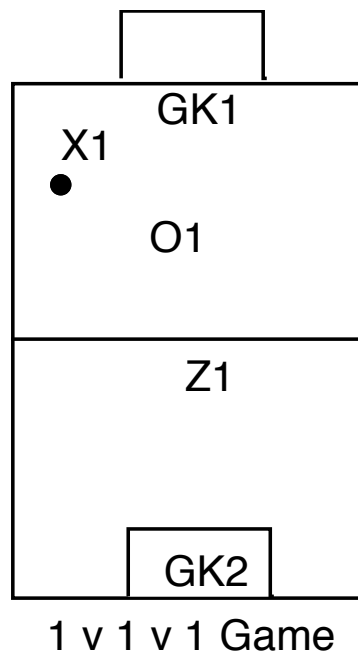
We now have the ability to watch top-flight right here in our own backyard (Qwest Field on a warm summer night will be special. As the questions above illustrate, there are answers to one of the most important detail areas in the game: playing in transition. Hopefully, this article sheds some light onto the counter-attack from the goalkeeper's perspective. The key to having a pro team to watch here in our own state is to take what we see and learn out to our practice and game environment.

Goalkeeping Practice: Dealing with the Counter-Attack

In last month's "Between the Posts," the column took a look at the goalkeeper's role in recognizing counter-attack situations against and how to defend them in "micro-seconds." This month, the discussion on the counter-attack moves from the game to the training ground. The practice below can help the youth goalkeeper (age 13 through 18) deal with many of the issues discussed last month.

Activity One: 1 v 1 v 1

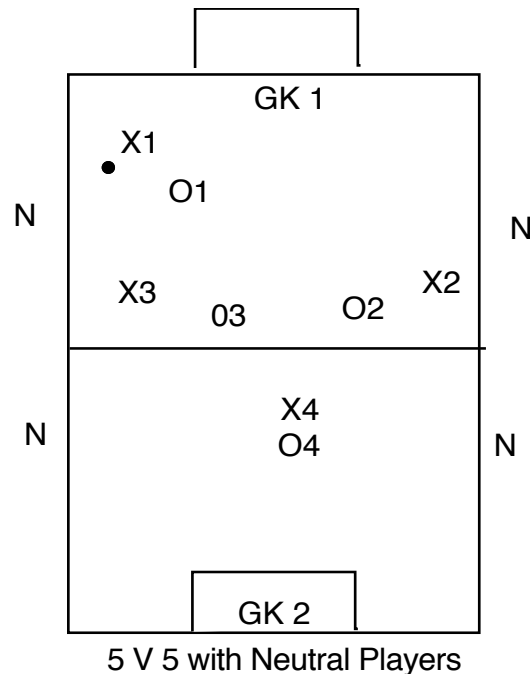
On a field 40 yards long x 20 yards wide, 3 players (X1, O1 and Z1) play a goal and counter-goal game (Goalkeepers 1 and 2 are positioned in each goal as shown).



Coaching Points:

- X1 must be encouraged to take both defenders on.
- The goalkeeper in defense (GK2) must take up a starting position to deal with impending penetration from X1 and to give support to either O1 or Z1 if either defender wins the ball from X1.
- GK2 upon receiving a back-pass or making a save must re-start play quickly with an accurate pass or throw that plays the field player into space.
- In a case where a shot is saved by the goalkeeper, the next serve should be played out to the defender nearest the ball (X1 in the diagram).

This practice can be played in a 2 v 2 v 2 format as well. Each round of play should be 60-75 seconds for a 1 v 1 v 1 game and 90-105 seconds for 2 v 2 v 2. An ample supply of soccer balls should be available for each goalkeeper to use in re-starting play.



Activity Two: 5 v 5 with Counter-Attacking Support

On a field 50 yards long x 30 yards wide, two teams play five versus five against each other (X's v O's). There are four neutral (N's) who take up positions on each side. The neutral players provide the team in attack with through balls (played diagonally) and crosses to penetrate their opponents' defensive line and create goal scoring chances.

Coaching Points:

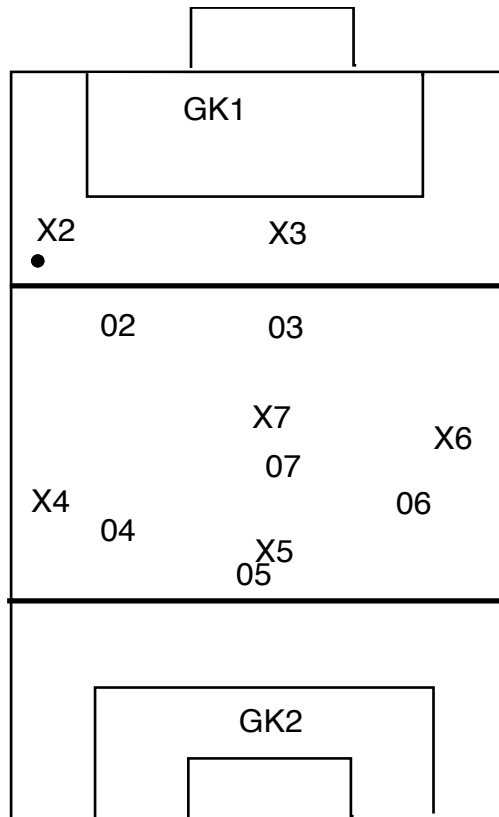
- The team in attack must be encouraged to play quickly--using teammates and Neutral players to get forward as quickly as possible.
- Neutral players should play in 1-2-3 touches (as appropriate with skill level).
- Neutral players should contribute to the counter-attack as with activity one: through balls and crosses. Players inside the game can combine with Neutral players to create realistic service.

- Service from the goalkeeper should be aimed at getting the attack going to the opposing goal; attacking momentum is critical.
- Offsides should be called (use the halfway line as a natural reference).

As before, a generous supply of soccer balls should be available for goalkeepers to restart play. Rounds should last 3-4 minutes and players should be rotated from Neutral positions to in-field playing roles.

Activity Three: 7 v 7 with a Restraining Line

On a field 70 yards long x 50 yards wide, two teams play 7 v 7 versus each other. Plastic field markings are used to illustrate penalty areas and restraining lines as shown. The restraining lines are used to designate where an offside exists for the team attacking that end of the field.



7 v 7 with Restraining Line

Coaching Points:

- Team in possession (Team X in the diagram) is encouraged to play forward quickly when winning the ball (combinations like short-short-long, wall passes, diagonal passes etc. should be used to create purposeful tactics).
- Goalkeepers must be encouraged to play off the line and deal with one-versus-one, clearances with the feet and crosses as they occur.
- The distribution of the goalkeeper is critical now, as this part of the practice replicates "the bigger game." A ball played out must speed the game up, without putting teammates into dangerous situations.

Goals scored on the counter-attack can be given more value in this game (3 points on a through ball or a "won ball, quick 1 v 1 move and a goal." The key for the goalkeeper in attack is to try to play as many opponents "out of the game" as possible with a good throw or kick. The key for the goalkeeper in defense is to read the game and organize teammates to defend and deal effectively with the on-coming situation.

Final Countdown on the Counter Attack

The three practices above can give all players on the team a chance to development the skills and decisions necessary to become good at "playing on the break." In the 1 v 1 v 1 game, the first player on the ball gets better at trying to beat the "first and second" defenders. Either defender winning the ball then can work on the immediate transition to attack and score goals. In the 5 v 5 game, players learn to work out how to play forward quickly, getting the "right" ball to penetrate the last line of defense. The 7 v 7 game is great for helping outfield players attack a restraining line, learning to play "onside" and play realistic through balls and crosses for goal scoring chances.

For the goalkeeper, the environment and multiple opportunities that can come from playing in these games help in good overall development. Drills and exercises can be beneficial, but these games can help goalkeepers "learn by doing, not by drilling." As always, the game is the best teacher.

A Good Rule for Scouting: "Be Prepared"

With State Tournament play on the horizon, coaches often find themselves having a "little peak" at their competition. Scouting a team answers questions such as 'how is an opponent playing at the moment, what changes have they made since the last time we played them, or what characteristics are being maintained from league play going into tournament play'? This type of information gathering raises the level of training and preparation for each week of the tournament.

From a goalkeeping perspective, here are several considerations that can be identified through scouting an opponent ahead of time. The scouting coach should observe something in the scouted team and then consider how his or her team might be prepared based on those observations.

Being Prepared: A Table of Questions and Considerations

Focus Area	Observations of Scouted Team	Preparation of Own Team
GK Skill (catching, diving, play with feet)	Does GK handle shots/crosses well or poorly? Does GK Play comfortably with both the right & left foot? Does the GK punt or drop-kick well (accuracy and distance) or is this technique a liability?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare for second chance opportunities via rebounds/drops. • Prepare for high pressure defending when ball is played back to GK's weak foot or when GK's first touch might be in question. • Good distribution out of the back may cause us to fall off and encourage play out of the back vs. poor distribution, which would encourage high pressure defending in their half of the field.
GK Positioning (angle play, dealing with crosses and through balls)	Does GK take up good shooting positions or is the GK vulnerable to "uncovered" near post spaces via bad positioning? Does the GK play well or weakly off the line (crossed/through ball situations)?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shooters should "have a peak" before shooting (is there an easy opening left uncovered by bad GK positioning)? • Quality service and quality running will need to be emphasized if the GK is good in one of these areas. If GK is poor on crosses or through balls, quantity with "some" quality may be what it takes to score goals.

Focus Area	Observations of Scouted Team	Preparation of Own Team
Corner Kicks	<p>What kind of organization does the team employ on corner kicks (how can we attack them on corners):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. are cover players used at near and far posts? 2. is GK bothered by a "screen" player (player standing in front of him /her)? 3. is zonal or man-to-man marking used to cover attackers? 4. which looks more dangerous, "in swinging or out swinging" service? 5. are short or quick corners taken? 6. how do they organize "holding" players (left to defend)? 	<p>What "trends" does the scouted team employ when taking corners (considerations for preparing to defend their corners)?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the quality of their service (driven, spinning balls are hard to assess)? • How does opposition attack the goal (run from "stacks" or from stationary starting positions)? • What "match-ups" do we need to consider (strength vs. strength)? • Are screen players used that need to be marked or can our GK deal with them alone? • Which players are assigned to deal with short corners (make them 2 v 2)? • What kind of counter-attacking options open up if our GK collects the cross and can play forward (as first attacker)?
Set Plays	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Who takes their free kick(s)? Is there strength or weakness in the player's service? 2. What does their team do "on the ball" to trick opposition? 3. What is the strategy off the ball-- how do players attack space off the ball to create goal-scoring opportunities? 4. Does their team have a plan for taking free kick quickly? If so, what's the execution? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It must be clear who is in the wall, how to set it up, and who is marking. Does the wall need extra player(s) to deter a swerved ball around wall? • Who can serve as "bullet" player(s) to come from the side of the wall (at angles) to pressurize "on the ball" behavior? • Can the restraining line be adjusted to disrupt "off the ball" behavior of opposition? Can offside come into play to stop penetrating runs into space behind wall and towards the goal? • Can we slow up the taking of kicks by getting the ball for them, getting behind ball quickly, and not losing sight of ball?
Long Throw-In	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Do they have a player(s) who can take a long attacking throw in? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who can we position in key near and mid-goal spaces to defend the

Focus Area	Observations of Scouted Team	Preparation of Own Team
Long Throw-In (continued)	<p>Do they have play(s) who can take a long throw?</p> <p>2. Do they place players in front of the goalkeeper to screen him/her from the throw?</p> <p>3. Should we put a tall player in front of the thrower to make the throw harder to complete?</p> <p>Note: Field size (width) is a big consideration to the long throw: there is a big difference between the long throw on a field 65 yards versus 80. Where will your game be played?</p>	<p>long throw?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How effective is our keeper at dealing with the driven serve from the throw? • Does our goalkeeper deal with the screen player him or herself or do we bring in a marking player to deal with the situation? • Can this player be afforded in that position is he/she needed deeper in the defense?

These questions and considerations are not all inclusive. However, these ideas should be a good guide in preparing players for the strengths and weaknesses of an opposing team. Many players on the team can have their confidence boosted (or adjusted) based on information gleaned from scouting. In taking a look at goalkeeping performance, the scouting coach might find a key idea that might help on game day. As always, skillful performance and execution will carry the day, but good preparation can help push a team away from defeat and towards victory.

Suggestions for Practice

- On a one-half field, divide squad into two teams and designate with colored scrimmage vests.
- Have one team defend a goal (which should be centered on its end line and have typical markings (goal area, penalty area) as in any game.
- A second goal can be positioned at the half-way line, so each team can defend and attack a goal.
- Teams play a normal game. For the first 5 minutes, every time one team wins the ball, they play back to the goalkeeper; the opposing team pressurizes the back-pass and attempts to create pressure on the goalkeeper playing the ball forward.

- For a second 5 minute period, teams change roles so that a second goalkeeper can work on dealing with the back-pass and being put under pressure.
- For 20 minutes a free kick / corner kick game is played (for every five consecutive passes a team completes, they earn a free-kick (can be direct or indirect as dictated by the “Referee” (coach)).
- Following each free kick, each team takes a corner kick (“Referee” makes decision as to which side the kick is taken from.
- Depending on how much set piece practice a team has had, it is good practice to allow 15 minutes of free kick practice prior to starting the game.

Teams should endeavor to “read the game” and play to what is “on” in the game. Some free kicks should be taken quickly; others should be played to a teammate instead of being shot on goal directly. Some corner kicks should be taken “short, some corners should go to the near post and so on. The coach should point out possibilities, but it is critical that the players read these decisions so they can make them on gameday.

From a goalkeeping perspective, the goalkeeper has a critical piece in the defending of most free kicks taken in this game (due to the proximity of the ball to the goalkeeper’s goal). It is important that the goalkeeper organizes and communicates clearly, decisively and intelligently. A free kick game can help all players prepare for “what the opposition does” but also strengthen weaknesses and accentuate positives in the team as well.

The Goalkeeper and College: Getting the Knowledge Right

Many goalkeepers begin to look at playing opportunities in college as a logical “next step” in their playing careers and begin looking at playing possibilities well ahead of their senior year in high school. Goalkeepers are needed to fill out college rosters at the community / junior college and four year (NAIA, NCAA Division I, II and III) levels, so there is a need to put capable goalkeepers together with college programs across the country. Like all prospective athletes, a goalkeeper with college playing interest needs to do their homework in getting the most out of the college search process. Following a few “basics” can be helpful in going from the youth to the college game.

Do Some Research

At some point during the first two years of high school, the goalkeeper should research schools based on location, academic interest, distance from home and soccer opportunity. First and foremost, the prospective student athlete should find a school that can cater to the academic side of the player. Some high school students “know” what they want to major in and some are un-sure, but know they want to go to college after high school. Having a look at the Internet and a wide variety of college guides can help bring the youth player closer to what college and universities offer academically. When the research is done, a list of up to 20-40 schools is a good place to start.

When looking at “the list,” the goalkeeper should begin to look at the soccer program of the schools on the list. This is where the list goes from “big to little.” As soccer programs are examined, many prospective students look at: the coaching staff, scholarship and financial aid availability, roster slots that might be available for the year the player enters school, practice and game facilities, conference record and the non-conference schedule (travel away from the conference). If soccer is going to be a driving force in a goalkeeper’s college selection, these factors weigh heavily in the process. For the goalkeeper, the “specialist” coaching access to good facilities and opportunity to play might stand out as key components in narrowing the “big list” down to a top-10 or top-5.

Write a Good Letter

When “the list” gets whittled down, the goalkeeper should write letters (to be e-mailed) to each school’s coach. In the letter it is a good idea to highlight what interests the player in the school (academically—what is the goalkeeper wishing to study) and what interests the goalkeeper in the soccer program. Being specific and personal in this approach is helpful. Most college programs get “tons of mail” containing letters of interest, resumes and player profiles. Having a personalized letter that is not a virtual “cut and paste” of letters sent out

to other schools can go a long way in creating interest between a member of the coaching staff and the prospective goalkeeper.

Develop a Resume

Along with a letter of interest, a brief resume with playing background (teams and coach(s) played for by year), team and individual achievement, major tournaments and record, high school information (league, record, coach) academic “vitals” (grade point average, information on upper level courses taken, and college entrance exam scores). A final piece to the resume should be 3 solid references that an interested coach can contact for an opinion on the goalkeeper’s suitability for collegiate play. If the goalkeeper can, have 2-3 letters of recommendations available ahead of time that can be very helpful. Letters from the team coach or club director, specialist coach, ODP coach or well-known camp instructor can be helpful in bringing the college coach and the goalkeeper together.

Follow Up and Follow Up

Once the letter of interest and the resume are sent, it is a good idea to send a follow up message or phone call to the schools that are on “the list.” There are different “rules” that schools at different playing levels follow. As a general rule, coaches can e-mail and take phone calls from recruits on an unlimited basis. Making a call to a player or having direct contact with a player is dependent upon the classification of the school. So, it is the goalkeeper’s responsibility to carry the communication forward.

Getting Into College Takes Work

Over the course of a goalkeeper’s formative years in youth soccer (say from U-14 and up) it is important to get training and experience. Building up the “ability side” is the best way to move onward into college. The culture of youth soccer takes players to “showcase” tournaments and regional / national tournaments. Along with the Olympic Development Program, club soccer has some pretty distinctive opportunities for players to gain the experience they will need to play in college. As goalkeeper’s age up in the youth game, some prosper by “going outside the lines” and play with senior men’s and women’s teams to get experience as well (there are certain steps to go through to get “permission” to play as a youth player at the senior level, but it is possible).

Don't Wait, Get Started Today

Not every youth goalkeeper will be able to play at the collegiate level. But with some time spent early on doing the work on the field and off the field, the college search process can go well for the goalkeeper looking for an opportunity to go to school and play soccer. Colleges and universities offer a wide variety of playing experiences to complement their degree programs. The key is to find the schools that can utilize a goalkeeper's talent and help them reach important academic goals and that leads to a degree. A little searching out for resources can serve the goalkeeper and his or her parents in this process. Many schools have compliance directors or athletic administrators that can answer questions along the way.