



U.S. WNT Goalkeeping Network

There is a line of field players on the top of the box taking it in turns to try and beat the goalkeeper. The goalkeeper is trying to make one or two saves and the coach is asking the keeper to make more of an effort. For many goalkeepers, this is their pre-game warm up. To positively affect a goalkeeper's game performance we must make sure that they have an appropriate warm up.

This article makes some suggestions as to how a keeper should warm up prior to playing a game. The following information comes to us from **Trevor Holbrook**, Region IV's Girls Goalkeeping Coach.

The Goalkeeper's Warm Up

An area that is of vital importance to the goalkeeper at any age is the "warm up". At the younger age groups it can be utilized as a training session as well as a warm up process. Technical details can be worked on and the mental aspect of a goalkeeper can certainly be a main area of focus.

At the older age groups, the warm up is more of a psychological warm up as well as a physical warm up. Goalkeepers at the older level may not see much action within the game itself, so they must utilize the warm up to prepare themselves for the "one moment" they will have to make a game winning save. This is a matter of mental concentration that will begin within the warm up session.

There is a very fine line between making sure the keeper is preparing themselves technically for the game and not letting the keeper focus too much on being technically perfect, because ultimately you need the keeper ready to make a save and not thinking about how to make the save. The main focus should be getting the keeper ready to make the save no matter how it is accomplished. This is the mental frame of mind. We want our keeper's to be technical whenever possible, sometimes though, technique must be sacrificed to make an unorthodox save.

In order to prepare themselves physically and psychologically it is important to cover as many of the different areas of the game that the keeper could face. For example, close range shot stopping, long range shot stopping, crosses and various angles of shots. However, it is also important to make sure that the keeper's confidence is being built up, so there are some areas that may not necessarily be covered in the warm up such as breakaways. An area that has to be watched carefully also is the amount of actual shots taken from the players themselves. They are warming themselves up to score and so we have to watch that fine line of the starting keeper taking quality shots and getting beaten by quality shots too often. It is obviously a good idea for the starting keeper to take a few to get their "eye in" on the pace of a well driven shot but not too many so they start to second guess themselves. Let the back up keeper take those shots more frequently.

There are many different ways to warm up keepers, but a good philosophy to have is to try and get service from the feet as soon as possible. This allows the keeper to get in rhythm with the striker as opposed to service coming from the hands of the coach. Service at the older age groups and higher levels needs to be from the foot with accuracy and pace. With the younger groups, service from the hands is appropriate for technical purposes but once again the sooner a keeper can see the ball coming off the foot, the better prepared your keeper will be.

Coaches must make the warm up as game like as possible with the service. For example, when preparing the keeper to handle a high ball, it is unrealistic for the keeper to see a ball that is served with both hands going straight up and down. It is more realistic, when serving with hands, to be on the edge of the six yard box to the side and serving a lower trajectory ball. This will allow for the keeper to handle the ball well. When serving for the older age groups it is important for the keepers to see service with the foot from an appropriate distance and serve the ball so the keeper can handle the ball high and build the confidence level.

A simple but effective progression for the level of youth play is to start off with simply hitting a ball on the volley directly to the keeper's hands and receiving the ball at head height or slightly above. This may be done 10 – 15 times. The ball is then served from the ground into the keeper's waist for the ball to be handled. Then progress to the ball being served towards the feet. These can also be served 10-15 times. Then the keeper can stretch. After stretching, the keeper must alert the body to hitting the ground, so starting with 6-8 forward smother saves is good. Then progress to side to side movement and diving with a focus on good technique but also making sure the keeper is picking up the work rate to get warm. At this point it is a good idea for the keeper to take some shots from various angles and distances and have the coach strike the ball with more pace in order for the keeper to adjust to more of a game pace shot.

Taking crosses is a very important aspect of warming up the keeper and too often we see coaches only warm up the keeper with shots. However, there are also various types of crosses that the keeper must deal with. Examples are the low driven ball that is pulled back from the goal line and the keeper must stop the ball from going across the face of the goal. Corner kicks are an obvious serve but we do not necessarily strike balls from that area in warm ups. Let the keeper get a feel for the distance and angle the ball will travel from the corner kick. Then there are crosses from a deeper angle close to the touchline. There are many variations of crosses that the keeper must deal with. As coaches we must prepare our keepers in as many different aspects to build their confidence for game time. Now the keeper may take some shots from the forward to be ready for the game pace shot, but do not allow them to get beaten up mentally or physically by too many balls flying past them. We want confidence going into the game and not having keepers second guessing their ability to save the shot.

The last aspect of the warm up would be to strike some balls as goal kicks, punts and balls that maybe dealt with as a back pass. Once again the keeper must feel comfortable and confident in striking the ball cleanly. This is a very basic fundamental warm up, but can be very crucial in how the keeper prepares for the game. Always remember that when looking to finish any part of the warm up that the coach finish on a positive aspect, such as taking the ball cleanly from a serve or striking the ball for a punt off the "sweet" spot. This gives the keeper a good feeling about their ability to get the job done.

As the level of keeper increases, the warm up can be more complex, but don't forget, we must prepare the keeper for kickoff and not get them "thinking" too much about how they are preparing. We need the keeper to stop the ball from crossing the line into the goal. As coaches we must make sure that they are physically and mentally prepared for the task at hand and that is to keep a clean sheet.

Trevor Holbrook.
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As always your feedback and comments are welcomed. We understand that there are many ways to develop our goalkeepers and many differing opinions. However, we are all trying to achieve the same goal – no goals!