

# Principles of Goalkeeping

Use these basic principles of goalkeeping as building blocks to develop goalkeepers at every age level.

The goalkeeper as well as the coach needs to be able to understand the content and breakdown of these principles and where they apply in the game.

These principles are used as an evaluator of the goalkeeper's performance in training and games. If the goalkeeper trains in all principles it will allow for more consistent performances.

As the goalkeeper gains experience, they must continue to work on these principals during every training session, paying special attention to each and every detail.

1. Hands
2. Shape
3. Stay on your Feet
4. Recovery
5. Secondary Cover
6. Decision Making
7. Ever Ready
8. Getting Feet Set
9. Reaction
10. Near Post Consideration
11. Goalkeeper as First Attacker



## 1. HANDS

It is the feet that get the hands to the ball most of the time. The hands are the leaders that go to the ball. The Goalkeeper must have both hands pointed to the ball. Anatomically this means the body position will have to be adjusted to ensure that both palms and not just one can be in position to do just that. The object is to present the maximum amount of palm and fingers to the ball.

- The fingers should always be turned outwards towards the ball. So, the hands can go up and downwards quickly
- Safe, reliable hands are the one of the greatest assets a goalkeeper can have.
- The goalkeeper can develop the ability to catch the ball consistently with repetition in practice...the more the better!
- Relaxed hands are in most cases a reason the goalkeeper can absorb a shot and not give up rebounds.
- Sometimes the goalkeeper can only parry or deflect the ball with one hand. When this happens, the hands are the leaders to make the second save.
- The hands become a very important asset in dealing with high balls.
- The goalkeeper should practice the correct technique for punching/boxing the ball.



## **2. SHAPE**

The shape or posture of the goalkeeper serves as a fundamental base for all principles of goalkeeping. Correct and consistent body shape is key.

All goalkeepers are different in their size and make-up and every goalkeeper will have their own unique shape. The basic requirements of good shape start with a rounded or concave upper body that is slightly bent and flexed at the waist and knees, staying on the toes with the body weight forward. The body is flexed and ready to move, relaxed and poised no matter what the situation is.

The shape of the goalkeeper is critical to allow a good overall center of balance and gravity. This will enable them to be mobile and responsive to shot stopping, diving and dealing with air balls and virtually all movements the goalkeeper will make.



### **3. STAY ON YOUR FEET** (as long as possible)

“It is the feet that get the hands to the ball most of the time.” This phrase is more important than ever in the modern game.

Goalkeepers resort to diving for balls in which if they used their feet and took another step or two, they would collect the ball standing up! Diving with limited use of footwork decreases the goalkeeper’s ability to cover the entire goal area. Diving early by anticipating shots is a bad habit built into youth keepers’ psyche and is difficult to break in older more advanced goalkeepers where the speed of play and shots are harder and better placed.

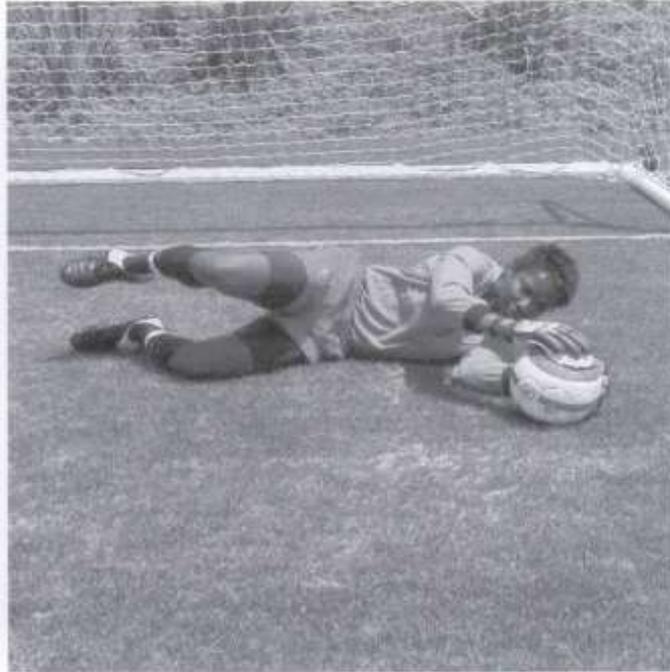
All too often goalkeepers commit to the ground too soon in a 1v1 breakaway situation. Goalkeepers “Staying on their feet as long as possible” in a breakaway situation forces the forward to execute feints and moves whilst under pressure. If the goalkeeper “buys” a simple feint and commits to the ground, often all the forward has to do is pass the ball in to an empty net! Goalkeepers who maintain their feet and forcing them to accomplish skillful moves at speed and under pressure, the goalkeeper increases their opportunities for success. Slowing the forward down and whenever possible forcing the opponent wide, will give the defenders time and the chance to recover and support the goalkeeper.



#### **4. RECOVERY (down to up)**

It is very difficult to expect the goalkeeper to catch every shot cleanly. Important as it is to make the save on the initial shot, it is the goalkeeper's responsibility to get back to their feet as quickly as possible and make the second save on balls that rebound from their hands or body. If the reaction to the shot is a diving save that is parried or deflected, the goalkeeper then has to "reload" to try to make the second save. A goalkeeper's ability to recover back to their feet as quickly as possible after deflecting a shot is that much more crucial because of the speed of play at the senior level.

"Recovery" is always worked on in detail as often as possible in practice because of the impact it has on how well a goalkeeper can defend their goal. This principal can be addressed in most shot stopping activities. There should be some emphasis placed on "paying attention to detail" with this principal during pre-season stages and the regular maintenance training during the week as the season continues.



## 5. SECONDARY COVER

There are two parts to Secondary Cover:

A.) The first part of the principle deals with absorbing the ball in to the body. The ball is handled and then absorbed in to the body – where it belongs. Secondary cover is vital when the goalkeeper is diving (is the ball best held with the hands only or brought into the chest?). Another situation that comes in to play is when the goalkeeper is coming for a cross in traffic and a collision with an opponent seems inevitable. The ball is then best pulled in to the body so that the goalkeeper can protect themselves and the ball.

B.) The second part of the principle is when the hands cannot serve as the first receiving surface of the ball. The goalkeeper should use the body to present as big a second barrier to the goal as possible. A well-placed foot, leg, chest, shoulder or facial area may serve as the “back up” to the hands. If the hands can’t get the job done then perhaps a body part can!

## **6. DECISION MAKING** (communication & organization)

The positioning of the goalkeeper in the game allows for the goalkeeper to be in the best position to see the entire field and the players on the field.

Because of this, the goalkeeper has the inherent responsibility of being a vocal leader on the field. The goalkeeper must learn to communicate effectively with the other players. They must use this communication to organize the team. In doing this, the goalkeeper will make play predictable in order to simplify his or her decision-making. Communication, Organization and Decision-Making are principles, which, make the goalkeeper's primary job of keeping the ball out of the net much easier so the goalkeeper minimizes the number of saves he or she is forced to make.

These principles all deal with the psychological side of goalkeeping. If used effectively, they lessen the need for the goalkeeper to rely on the physical side of goalkeeping. In order to be effective, one must be able to communicate effectively and have a good understanding of the defensive tactics of the team. By utilizing both communication and organization, one is able to make easier decisions. In order for communication to be effective, it must be loud, intimidating to opponents, clear, concise and early. It must give a name to a job and be specific. It must be directive. Effective communication must direct a player to something so that player does not have to think. Even if a goalkeeper is not tactically astute, simple communication can be effective. Through effective communication, goalkeepers are able to organize the team. The organization of the team promotes preventative goalkeeping.

If the goalkeeper is able to organize the team, situations become much more predictable and decision-making is made easier. As goalkeepers mature, decision-making becomes easier based on the experiences of learning through the different situations the goalkeeper has encountered. The goalkeeper learns how to "play the percentages" and does not "anticipate" or guess what is going to happen. The goalkeeper is able to read the game. In order to be given the chance to make good decisions, the goalkeeper must always be "Alert and Alive." Always being connected to the team and "ebbing and flowing," goalkeepers put themselves in the best position to make a good, assertive decision. Being "ready and set" for when a ball can be played by the opponent will also allow the goalkeeper to make a good, aggressive decision.



## **7. EVER READY (alert & alive)**

An alert goalkeeper is constantly moving and adjusting their positioning throughout the entire game; even when the ball is at the opposition's goalmouth. When you step back and look at the goalkeeper during the game they should give the appearance of dancing about the field. In this "dance" the ball is the leader. Even as the ball moves vertically and horizontally in the attacking third, the goalkeeper must mirror its movement. This is done for two reasons:

- 1.) Physically Attached – by making small adjustments early rather than large ones late, the goalkeeper is in a more relaxed and better position to deal with the play/ball.
- 2.) Mentally Attached – by continually moving in relation to the ball the goalkeeper is better able to concentrate and follow the rhythm of the game. This keeps them mentally attached to the game and strengthens the goalkeeper's level of focus.



## 8. GETTING FEET SET

As goalkeepers are taught the principles of how to play and be successful in goal, one of the first topics is getting set. This is the basis for being able to move and make saves. For a goalkeeper's technique to be correct, they must first have their feet under them and their body in a shape that allows them to get to the ball quickly and correctly. The basics for getting set are as follows:

- Get in position and set early
- Weight forward, feet shoulder width apart
- Head out front, with shoulders in front of knees
- Body (shoulders) always facing the ball

At the advanced level we must teach our goalkeepers to be set quickly and early and they must be able to find their set position at any moment. A general rule of thumb is that the farther away the ball is from the goal, the higher the goalkeepers set position. There are factors that affect this rule, such as whether the ball is in the air or bouncing. These factors change how the ball can be played, and the top goalkeeper must react to these changes.



Many times, when we watch developing goalkeepers play they take a big step forward or jump to get set. These methods take up valuable time needed to save and can cause the goalkeeper to be in the air, or for the feet to be too wide or not square with the shoulders to the ball when the shot is taken. Also, when goalkeepers try to step forward to get set, it is difficult not only to execute in a game, but it can easily get a goalkeeper out of position as well as put their weight backwards as they stop their forward momentum. This inevitably will lead to poor positioning, an inability to adjust to multiple touches and fakes on the shot, and poor technique. All of these factors will limit their ability to make saves. The game moves so quickly that we must teach them to get set at any moment without the need to rely on preconceived rhythms or steps.

We teach our goalkeepers to make the small adjustments and movements with the ball. It is against that idea to have them set with big steps or jumps. Top level goalkeepers should simply be able to square their feet quickly to get set for a shot. This is a quick and efficient way to get ready to make a save or adjust to the next touch. The simple motion also allows the goalkeeper to get set quickly and repeatedly with very little preparation. By keeping the set position simple and sound the goalkeeper gives themselves the best chance to react to any ball or situation and handle it cleanly.



## 9. REACTION

When coaching young goalkeepers, we must teach them the reaction factor principle which is “do not anticipate.... react.” Young experienced goalkeepers sometimes guess where they think the ball is going, only to find out that they “guessed” wrong! A young goalkeeper should wait for the play to develop and react to the ball.

When a goalkeeper matures and becomes more experienced they may say that they do anticipate, however what they are in fact doing is using that experience to “read the game.” By reading the game it will in most cases give them a good starting position. Even so, when “reading the game” a goalkeeper occasionally gets it wrong.



## **10. NEAR POST (consideration)**

The near post consideration is a principal that has become more and more important in today's game. The near post or "black hole" as it is known, is the most dangerous area to deal with by the goalkeeper and defenders. With the development of the soccer ball and technique of opposing players to whip or drive balls in to the "hole", the goalkeeper has now got to give the near post a special consideration. The goalkeeper is responsible for three areas of the goal, the near post, the center of the goal, and the back of the goal so they must be able to "play the percentages" to cover all three areas... Remember, goalkeepers should not get beaten at the near post!

## 11. GOALKEEPER AS FIRST ATTACKER

At the high levels most goalkeepers can make saves they are supposed to make and can even make that special save at a critical time during the game. One of the key factors that separate goalkeepers at the higher levels is what they do with the ball once they have it in their possession. The ability to transition from defense to attack through the goalkeeper is a great asset for any team. The goalkeeper's ability to distribute the ball with their hands or feet is a vital component of the team's success. Not only does the goalkeeper have to be accurate with their distribution but they must be able to read the situation on the field and decide whether to launch a counter attack and what method of distribution to use. The most common methods of distribution have often been a long punt or drop kick. In today's game the goalkeeper must develop a more extensive arsenal. One of the more recent methods of starting the attack is the side volley. The side volley as a low trajectory is extremely accurate. It is a method that we must develop in goalkeepers. A well-placed kick or throw into space can often provide players with good angles to attack the opposition and create goal-scoring opportunities. A penetrating throw into an open midfielder or into a forward's feet can be dangerous and sometimes more effective than a long punt or kick.

Two of the most common times for a goalkeeper to start a counter attack are when they win the ball in a crossing situation or from a defensive set-piece. Depending on the team's organization, there may be one or two forwards who remain up front as potential targets.

Once winning the ball, the goalkeeper has to assess whether they can play the ball to their target players quickly and accurately to give them the best opportunity to go to goal. The goalkeeper must be able to analyze the game as it is occurring and be able to recognize opportunities to exploit space left exposed by the opposition. Coaches must educate our goalkeepers with the use of video, match analysis and game-realistic practice sessions if we expect them to become the first attacker and respond spontaneously to different situations in games – pre-determined plays (tactics) between goalkeeper and attacker must be worked on and practiced during training.