

Goalkeeper distribution practice plan

Whole team, 60 minutes (including drinks breaks and instruction)

Warm up (10 minutes)

Set up: In a grid about 30 yards by 40 yards, play a 4v4 game with one condition: every time the ball goes out of play the game restarts from the goalkeeper.

Tip: Have several footballs 'parked' in each goal to speed the game up.

How it works: If, for example, the ball goes out for a throw to the red team, the red team goalkeeper takes a ball out of the net and looks for a red player to pass to.

Coaching points

Use this warm up to remind your outfield players that they must provide your goalkeeper with options.

As soon as the goalkeeper has the ball under control they should revert to the correct team shape, a diamond. This will provide the goalkeeper with the option to roll or pass the ball to a wide defender or kick the ball upfield to the player or players at the top of the diamond.

Your sweeper (or central defender) should position themselves between the goalkeeper and the closest attacker to provide cover in case the goalkeeper makes a mistake.

Drill: team possession game (20 minutes)

Objective: Improve goalkeeper distribution, passing, receiving, decision making and possession.

Set up: In the same grid as above, play a 4v4 game with the condition that X number of passes equals a goal but the ball must be passed through the goalkeeper at least once.

In addition, tell your players that if the ball is played to the keeper in the air it must be caught. If they drop the ball a goal is awarded to the opposition.

To make sure your players don't get into the habit of passing back to their keeper and expecting them to pick the ball up (an infringement of the rules that is penalised by an indirect free kick) the keeper must control and pass the ball with their feet if it is passed back on the ground.

Coaching points

Discuss the following key points with your players before you begin.

Once the ball is successfully collected and controlled, the goalkeeper must make a quick decision on the method of distribution, whether to roll, throw, pass or kick the ball back into play.

Tell your outfield players that they need to find space to receive the ball from the keeper. Defenders should take up wide positions close to the penalty box and midfielders should spread themselves across the field so that they are in a position to receive a pass direct from keeper or from a team-mate.

Most goalkeepers in the seven to twelve age range will be most accurate if they roll or pass the ball out.

Tip: Goalkeepers should be encouraged to distribute the ball to the sides of the goal and to try to switch the play to the opposite side from where the ball has just come from.

Decisions your goalkeeper needs to make

Shall I throw the ball?

There are two main throwing techniques a goalkeeper can use - the underarm throw (rolling the ball out) and the over-arm throw.

Over-arm throws are difficult for young goalkeepers to execute quickly and accurately and can be difficult for the receiving player to control. So if your keeper decides to throw in this way they must make sure they are not throwing the ball to a player who will be quickly be put under pressure.

An underarm throw is much easier, especially for very young players. Rolling the ball to a team-mate who is fairly close and does not have an opposing player nearby involves a motion very similar to ten pin bowling. The goalkeeper's feet should be moving in the direction they want the ball to go. The ball should be rolled firmly and decisively on the ground (not bounced).

Shall I pass the ball?

If the ball comes to your keeper on the ground and there is no immediate pressure on them from opposing forwards, the quickest and most accurate method of distribution is to pass the ball out.

This requires composure on the part of the goalkeeper (who needs to get their head up and take a quick 'snapshot' of the field before controlling the ball) and assistance from the outfield players who need to take up close supporting positions quickly and tell them if they have the time to pass or not.

Encourage your goalkeeper to take a few steps out of the penalty area before releasing the ball if possible.

A word of warning! If the goalkeeper is attempting to control the ball with her feet she should try to do this when the ball is not heading directly towards the goal (David James take note!)

Shall I kick the ball?

There are times when all your outfield players will have a member of the opposing team fairly close by and it is not wise to pass or roll the ball out. In these circumstances the goalkeeper needs to kick the ball.

There are three types of kick: the punt, (where the ball is dropped onto the kicking foot), the drop kick, (where the ball is dropped onto the ground and kicked just as it bounces), and a normal kick off the ground.

If your goalkeeper is also an outfield player they may be comfortable with simply rolling the ball on the ground before taking a normal kick but it can be a risky strategy.

The punt is used when maximum distance is required while the drop kick with its low trajectory is most useful when kicking into the wind.

All three types of kick require a lot of practice. Don't be concerned if your players make mistakes to begin with and emphasise that accuracy is more important than power.

A few words about goal kicks

Goalkeepers ought to take their own goal kicks if possible. This allows the defence to push out and keep attackers from lurking near the penalty area.

As with punts and drop kicks, technique is the key. Key factors in getting a good goal kick are:

- Approach the ball from a slight angle. This will allow the hip flexor to get involved more and generate more leg speed.

- The ankle of the plant foot should be just behind the ball and the body should be leaning back. This differs from shooting technique! If the plant foot is too close to the ball, it will be difficult to get any height on the kick.
- The final step into the kick should be a long, smooth stride. This also helps generate leg speed. A short, choppy run-up won't allow a proper leg swing.
- The toe needs to be pointed down and the ankle locked in order to get the foot under the ball. This is probably the most crucial point. Although a goal kick is an instep drive, you want to use the inside of the shoelaces, not the top.

If a keeper is struggling to get the ball off the ground, it can be helpful to try working off a "tee" at first: a tall tuft of grass, flat cone, etc. This will allow more space to get under the ball. Once that is working well, lower the ball.

Tip: Emphasis the importance of good technique. A keeper who tries too hard to "explode" the ball will often mis-hit it. Tell your players to relax and let good technique do the work for them.

Finish the session with a small-sided game and sit back and watch.

Have your players absorbed the key principles you have been teaching them?

Do they get into good open positions when the goalkeeper has the ball?

Does the goalkeeper make the right decisions regarding passing or kicking the ball out?

Is the technique correct?

Finally, warm down and ask them what they have learned.