



U.S. WNT Goalkeeping Network

One aspect of goalkeeping that can be neglected, but is vital in this age of soccer is being able to deal with crosses and serves. A goalkeeper who is strong in this area helps spread confidence throughout their team. It can also change an opposing team's strategy when attacking.

The following information comes to us from **Steve Quinones**, Region I's Girls Goalkeeping Coach.

Dealing with Crosses

Before discussing the technical points of handling crosses, we should first mention the characteristics that a goalkeeper should have. First, they should be a good communicator. He/she needs to be able to verbally command their area. Short, clear commands such as: "keeper," "away" and "out" should suffice. Another characteristic is bravery. A goalkeeper has to be able to jump in a crowded box and either catch or box a ball away under pressure and while exposing their body. Lastly, a goalkeeper needs to be composed and confident. While players are running in all directions in the box, a goalkeeper has to remain poised when deciding whether or not to come for a ball. While these characteristics can come naturally, they can also be ingrained with proper training.

In training, specific attention should be placed on footwork, handling, starting position and timing. Timing is very important, as even a small goalkeeper can be good at handling crosses if her timing is good. One of the most common mistakes goalkeepers make is stepping towards the ball just as the ball is struck. This causes the ball to go over the head of the goalkeeper on most occasions. They usually have a minimum of five yards after the ball is struck to access the flight and pace of the ball. Patience is key.

The quality of services during training is vital. Serves should come from all angles and distances. Balls should be driven, lofted, bent in, bent out, near post, far post, dead balls and balls served off the dribble. Repetition is important to help improve all areas including confidence. A session should start with no pressure on the goalkeeper. This allows the goalkeeper to concentrate and make adjustments on timing, handling, starting position and range. Starting position will depend on the area from which the ball is being served and to some extent, the size of the goalkeeper. A smaller goalkeeper may have to take a deeper starting position so as to allow a better chance at catching balls lofted to the far post. Also, the body language of the server can help determine starting position. Once a goalkeeper has called for the ball, they must be committed to attacking it. Even if the goalkeeper realizes that she may not get it, she should still commit to attacking the ball, as her defenders will be covering the goal once they hear the shout of "keeper."

Technically, a goalkeeper should try to catch the ball at the highest point of their jump. Short, quick steps are more effective than long strides for preparing to jump. Hands should be slightly behind the ball to keep it from slipping through and catch the ball in front of the head as opposed to right above or even behind the head. The inside leg should be up to help protect the body. The path to the ball needs to be as straight as possible. A bending run towards the ball may allow an attacker to slip inside of the goalkeeper.

Before adding attackers in training, it may be a good idea to start by adding a central defender. This way the goalkeeper and defender can coordinate communication and movements. If a goalkeeper comes for the cross, then the defender must decide to either cover the goal or help shield the goalkeeper. After a number of repetitions, attackers can enter the session. You can then continue to add defenders and attackers until you move to a crossing activity.

A simple team activity for training crosses is: 6 v 6 with four wide servers in channels. The size of the area is half a field and using the full width. The channel areas are designated by cones and are two yards wider than the box. Two servers for each team cannot enter the field of play. Teams must play wide and then make runs for a serve. Channel players have a two/three touch restriction to help vary the area from which the ball is served. If the attacking team keeps possession after the serve, they do not have to go wide again. They can try to combine to score. Once the defending team or goalkeeper gains possession, then the ball must go wide to start their attack. Off sides is in effect. You can adapt the size of the field to accommodate the age and experience of your team.

Goalkeepers need to train on a regular basis in taking crosses. It should be a part of their daily training routine. A goalkeeper who is confident and capable in coming for crosses can make a huge difference in deciding the outcome of a match.

Steve Quinones

*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!***