

Pre-Game Warm-Up: The Goalkeeper

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I would be remiss if I did not mention that as the game of soccer evolves, so does the position of the goalkeeper. Since the position is so specialized, the ideas and philosophies on coaching and training the goalkeeper are as varied as the number of goalkeeper specific coaches that are becoming more and more prevalent. With that being said, I offer my philosophy on how I feel the goalkeeper should be warmed up before competition. This is my own philosophy that I found to be successful from when I played and continue to find successful as I train high-level goalkeepers.

Gone should be the days when the coach stands 15 yards away from his goalkeeper and fires shots in at him as he awaits the rest of the team to be prepared for line shooting. However I see this all too often on pitches all over the country. My warm-up involves a progression of preparing the goalkeeper to be ready to use the most important body parts to any goalkeeper: their hands and their feet.

After the GK is stretched and ready to go, I start with the GK on his knees on the goal line. His (I will refer to the GK in the masculine for simplicity sake, knowing that females also excel at the position) hands should be touching behind his back. I then toss balls right at his face. The GK must bring his hands together from being behind his back to save the shot. Then he must return his hands behind his back and touch them in preparation for the next shot. This should be in quick succession for 12 repetitions as to start warming up the hands. The next step in the progression continues with the GK on his knees. Now his hands are touching behind his head. The toss from me now is a little higher so the GK must extend his arms to make the save. Again, after the save the hands must return behind the head. Do this for quickly for 12 repetitions. The last step in this progression is to keep the GK on his knees and volley shots at him. The hands now are in front of the GK in his normal ready position. Do this quickly for 12 repetitions.

From here I will move the GK to his feet. However, the main focus is still on warming up the hands. I start with the GK on his line and I am 10 yards away with the ball at my feet. The GK extends his arms straight up over his head as far as he can reach. I then play a ball at the feet of the GK so he must bring his hands all the way down and bend down to make the save. This is repeated in quick succession for 12 repetitions. For the next step in the progression, I go to the opposite extreme from the previous step. I have the GK in a crouching position with his hands touching behind his ankles. I then toss the ball up over the head of the GK so they must explode to save a high shot. The first couple the GK should be able to easily save without leaving the ground. However, by the end the GK should be in the air in order to make the save. Again, do this for 12 quick repetitions. Now I will have the GK stand with his hands touching behind his back, similar to what I had him do when he was on his knees. I will then toss the ball at his face causing him to quickly get his hands in front of his body to make the save. The final phase in the progression again has the GK with his hands touching behind his head. Similar to when he was on his knees. I will toss the ball above his head so that the GK

must fully extend his arms to make the save. Every time the GK must return his hands to touch behind his head.

Now we are ready to start warming up the feet. I have the GK in the middle of the goal and play him a ball slightly to his left, he one touches the ball back to me and I immediately play him a ball slightly to his right and he one touches back. This is done for 8 repetitions (4 with the right foot and 4 with the left). Progressively make your services wider and wider so that the final balls played are at the post or even a little bit beyond. This is repeated 3 more times in a progression. The next phase would be to again keep the ball on the ground for the services, but have the GK scoop the ball up with their hands. Stress the importance of coming to the ball and attacking it with each save as not to stay parallel with the goal line. This means that the GK will have to back pedal to the middle of the goal before attacking the next ball in an almost arc like motion. The next phase of this progression is to have the GK make save at chest and head height, again stretching the services out so they are at or beyond the post by the end. The final stage is to play high balls so the keeper must leave the ground to catch the ball over his head. Again, stress the importance of attacking the high ball and catching it at it highest possible point.

Now we are ready to hit the ground. I do not do a lot of hitting the ground during the warm-up because, quite frankly, the GK spends most of the game on his feet. However, for the emergency situations where he must dive, it is good to have the body prepared to do so. I have the GK stand at the right post (right from my perspective looking at the goal) and touch the post with his right arm extended. I then play 8 balls that GK must save with a dive to his left. After each dive the GK must get back up to a standing position and touch the post before I serve the next ball. Having the GK touch the post forces him to bring his hands back together quickly in order to make the save, as it is imperative the GK attempts gets two hands to the ball for every save. The first 4 balls I play will be on the ground, each one increasingly further out. The next four will be in the air, again increasing the distance with each service. The services should be such that the GK is making the save at a 45-degree angle relative to the post. They should not be parallel with or on the goal line. After the 8 services, GK them immediately swings around to the inside of the post. Now he will be touching the inside of the post with his left hand and we can work on dives to his right. Repeat the 8 services to this side; 4 on the ground and 4 in the air.

Now we are ready to incorporate a more dynamic exercise to bring everything together. I have the GK stand directly to the outside of a post with 8 balls. I stand in the middle of the goal approximately 12-15 yards away. The goalkeeper rolls me a ball (emphasize good distribution) and then must shuffle to get in line with me in preparation for a one-time shot. If you have the luxury of having help (maybe you can take two of your outside backs or midfielders), have them serve a cross in (one at a time from each side) after the GK has made the initial save. Do this for 8 repetitions from one post. For the first 3 or 4 saves, play the ball directly at the GK. Stress the importance of quickly getting in line for the shot as well as being set when the shot is taken. For the remaining 4 or 5 saves, you can test the GK by making him have to extend in order to keep the ball out of the net.

Repeat this exercise from the opposite post for another 8 repetitions, again incorporating the crosses after each shot.

Now the GK is ready for shooting exercises that incorporate the rest of the team. This may be line shooting or patterns to goal. Now the GK is seeing shots at more of a game pace. Also try to have some crosses and/or corner kicks in these exercises as well. The GK should not be in these exercises for too long. You do not want to tire the GK or shake his confidence with too many shots going in. Still make sure he sees a lot different shots from different angles in varying situations.

Finally, a couple of minutes before you bring the team together make sure the GK is out of the shooting drills. Use this time to further work on distribution. Have the GK take some longer throws, goal kicks and punts/drop kicks. By now, the GK should be well prepared both physically and mentally for the competition since he has been properly warmed up.