

Dear Coach,

I understand that in rec soccer you have several, if not all of your team involved in playing in the goal. So what I have here is a session that many or all of your players could participate in. This will cover the most important skills for goalkeepers.

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Set up: place sets of cone goals across from each other, so each player has a goal to defend, and a partner who is defending a goal in front of him/her. The goals should be about 8 feet wide and about 6-8 yards from each other. If there are an odd number of players, they can take turns in the goal. Help the players find the goal they will defend, and get between the cones that define their goal.

Introduction: Tell the players they are going to have a lot of fun learning some important things about playing goalkeeper. Emphasize that playing goalkeeper is fun, and that it is the most important position. We want our goalkeepers to not be afraid, but to be confident and ready to have fun stopping shots and breakaways.

5 minutes The Ready Position (for stopping shots—diving). Tell players that it is very important that GKs always be alert and ready, not leaning on goalposts or getting stuck in the net. One ready position is for stopping shots.

1. Teach the position. Feet about shoulder width apart. Bend forward at the hips. Bend knees to about 90 degrees. Rock slightly forward onto balls of feet. Palms of hands facing forward, elbows down, at side. The GK is ready to dive, feeling momentum forward with forward lean. Closely check each player's position. Have them all hold it and notice how it feels.
2. Tell the players that throughout the session and in games whenever they hear you say "Ready!" they are to get into that position.
3. Have them do various activities (jumping up and down, turning in circles, doing sit ups or push ups, rolling on the ground) and as they are doing that activity, say "Ready" and they are to get into position as fast as they can, then hold the ready position for you to see it.

10 minutes Catching a rolling or low bouncing ball (below the waist).

1. Have players extend their hands downward, turn palms out, bring pinkies together to make an M shape with their hands.
2. Players will roll balls back and forth to each other. Players receiving the ball always start in ready position. They should step forward toward the ball that is coming to them, extend their arms and hands (in M shape) down to scoop up ball, and bring it into their chest, with arms wrapped around the ball. Tell the players to keep their feet in line with the ball when approaching it and picking it up. After they catch the ball, they should step backward to their line (the imaginary goal line between the cones), make sure their partner is in ready position, and then roll the ball to their partner. Watch the hands of the players to see whether or not they are keeping the M shape, behind the ball, rather than putting the hands at the outside of the ball so it could slip through the hands. Goalkeepers should always go to the ball with their hands as the first point of contact, at whatever height the ball is or whatever the situation (as long as they are in the penalty area).

3. Players now shuffle (no crossing of feet while shuffling) in ready position across their cone goal to catch a ball rolled to the side. The focus is on side to side movement by shuffling and in getting to the ball with quick movement so the ball can be caught between the feet instead of outside the feet. Have players start at cones straight across from each other. The first player rolls a ball slowly at the cone that is diagonally across to their partner's open cone (the open cone—the cone the partner is not at). The partner shuffles, catches the ball and now rolls a ball straight across to the partner's open cone in front of him/her. The partner shuffles and catches and the activity continues.

5 minutes Catching a ball from belly to head height.

1. Have players stand in their goals. Have them lift the palms of their hands in front of their chests, palms out and create a diamond by bringing the two index fingers together above and the two thumbs together below. Especially with smaller players, the diamond can be broken (index fingers and thumbs separated some) when they catch the ball—this gives them the opportunity to have more of the surface of the ball covered. The idea is to have the hands going to the ball, in the diamond shape behind the ball, so the ball cannot go through the hands.
2. Have players step out of their cone goals to face each other about 4-5 feet apart. They should be in the ready position, with hands extended in front of the chest in diamond position. They throw the ball and catch it in this position. In the beginning they should throw the ball chest high at the chest back and forth. They should be leaning forward in the ready position. This teaches the habit of going forward and gives them more strength as they catch the ball.

10 minutes Catching a ball above the head.

1. Each player has a ball and is positioned in the center of the goal. Demonstrate how the body and arms should be shaped, and where the arms should be when contacting the ball above the head. Younger player will likely feel awkward and have challenges with the technique. Keep teaching it anyway. Long term habits begin to be shaped now. When catching a ball above the head, the hands should be in the broken diamond position, the elbows should be almost straight, the arms should be at an angle forward from the body, in front of the head. One foot should be planted slightly behind the body and the other foot extended slightly forward from the body. This positioning makes the arms strong so the ball cannot go through them, it teaches catching the ball above the head level of attackers, and has the hands in position for the best possibility of a successful catch.
2. Have the players each take a ball and extend it up above and in front of the head, hands in broken diamond position, one foot back and one forward. Have them hold this position and feel it. Now have them hold the ball straight up over their head and feel the difference. This is what they don't want to feel. Have them return to the proper position. Now in proper position they should toss the ball up a few inches and catch it, all the time keeping their arms at a forward angle and elbows almost straight.
3. One player sets their ball aside. The player with the ball on his/her goal line tosses the ball up underhand about halfway between the two goals. The other keeper comes off the line and goes forward to catch the ball in the proper form. This is a good place to teach keepers to YELL "keeper" whenever they are going for the ball, whether it is on the ground or in the air. When the keeper who is going to catch the ball takes the FIRST step toward the ball, he/she should scream "keeper." Keepers need to communicate loudly and early. Rather than waiting until they are contacting the ball, they should

communicate on the first step toward the ball they are going to get. They should only say “keeper” when they are going for the ball AND they know they will get it. Pause here and explain these communication points. Then, have all the players scream “keeper” as loud as they can when you count to three. Do this two or three times. It’s fun and it gets them used to using their loud voice. Continue the activity with the keepers practicing the proper technique for catching and communicating. This could get messy with very young players. Be patient and keep teaching proper technique. The players will likely turn their arms and hands down to make “basket catches” with arms low and the hands on the side of the ball or under the ball.

15 minutes Diving progression.

1. One player sits facing partner who will roll a ball to one side. Player should sit with feet together, legs extended straight forward. Hands are in ready position. The ball is rolled out to one side far enough so player has to collapse to the side and fully extend arms to reach it. Players should use a folded diamond shape of the hands, and watch their hands both go to and contact the ball at the same time. If the ball is rolled to the right, the right hand is behind the ball and the left hand is “folded” on top of the ball. The positioning of the hands is reversed for a ball rolled to the left. As the players collapse toward the ball, they should get the feel of landing on their side and making proper contact with the hands and having the arms extended as they make contact. After one player receives several balls going each way, switch. Make sure players are close enough to roll the ball properly. Tell them to roll the ball, not bounce it, and not to roll it too hard.
2. Now the GK goes to his/her knees, sitting erect rather than resting the rear end on the heels. The partner rolls the ball to the side and the keeper extends to catch the ball with the same arm and hand shape as above. Three new things to emphasize. First, the GK should throw the knee away from the ball (the left if the ball is going to the right) toward the ball and drive off of the knee of the leg closest to the ball toward the ball. Second, the knee of the closest leg to the ball should drive the leg at slight angle forward, so the body is propelled forward at that angle. It is almost always best for keepers to dive at a forward angle. Third, the keepers should get the feel of a slight twist of their bodies as they go to the ball so they do not land on their bellies, but land first on the outside of their thigh and then hip and side. Watch out for Superman dives (landing on the belly) or over twisting dives, when the GK twists from one side all the way around to the other (so he/she would land on his/her left side when diving to the right). These errors are more likely to happen in step #3.
3. The GK begins in the squat position. To get to the squat position, begin in the ready position, but bend down toward the ground, keeping the elbows OUTSIDE of the knees and the hands outside of the feet, until the hands touch the ground. Balls need to be rolled further out from the body because the player will be able to get a lot of distance. As the ball is rolled, the GK throws the opposite knee in the direction of the ball and powers off the foot closest to the ball. The foot closest to the ball should “launch” and not simply turn onto the side of the foot and drag. After both partners have practiced diving in both directions several times, the ball can be thrown in the air 2-3 feet off the ground to get a feel for diving to a ball in the air. Optional activity: goalie wars. Each keeper throws the ball at the other goal from behind his own line. To score the ball must be head height or lower.

10 minutes Sliding on the ball.

This technique is used to catch balls that are going through the penalty area on the ground and in breakaways that are coming at angle from one side instead of straight on. It is basically a dive on the ground preceded by a run.

1. GKs get in the middle of their cone goals. Place a ball about three feet in front of the cone on the right side of the goal. The GK takes one step at an angle toward the ball, then extends arms and hands and dives/slides to ball. Hands should contact the ball first. Keeper should keep eyes on hands going into the ball. Practice on each side several times.
2. Both keepers in the center of their goals. One with a ball. The ball is rolled at about a 45 degree angle way from the center of the goal, halfway between his/her goal and his/her partner's goal. The partner then runs and slides on the ball. Players take turns rolling the ball and sliding, practicing to the left and the right. Some players have more of a challenge sliding one way than the other. Watch for over twisting on the slide—for example ending up on the left side when sliding to the right. Emphasize going into the ball at full speed instead of letting up as the ball is about to be contacted.

10-15 minutes Hand Soccer

Play with two goals with a distance apart appropriate to the number of players. Divide into two teams. Players throw the ball to teammates. They may take three steps with the ball. Players may not touch the player or the ball once the player has possession of the ball. With younger players the ball may be thrown into the goal. With players old enough to be able to safely and properly head the ball, goals are only scored by headers set up by a pass from a teammate. If a player drops the ball, misses the ball, or there is a bad pass, whoever gets it first earns possession of the ball. A ball can be blocked or intercepted once it is passed.

Play the first several minutes with the rule that passes must be rolled to teammates. This causes players to have to use catching/diving/sliding technique for rolling balls, and it gives a game feel with challenges for the ball in traffic. Then change the rule so the ball can be thrown however one chooses.

Wrap up: Gather players together. Ask them to tell you something they learned. Goalkeeper is a position that requires good understanding, good decision making and confidence. Use this time for those purposes.