

Goalkeeping in field hockey

*training, techniques,
coaching and
materials*

by OBO

Rachel Durdin and
Jon O'Haire

OBO
GOAL KEEPING

Second Edition 2005

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Preface

Greetings Amazing Person

If you are reading this you are almost certainly a goal keeper, or are involved in coaching goalkeepers. Goalkeepers are an amazing bunch. While they appear to play hockey, they play almost another game with complex and different rules, different gear, and extraordinary performance requirements. Unfairly they are often misunderstood and not valued to their true worth. Over the years, we at OBO have tried to do something about this.

Since 1996, when we made our first wobbly steps on the WWW, we have tried to provide information of real value to goal keepers. René Verbeek, a player, goalkeeper, and person hot on hockey, has recognized that this information is useful, and in an act of great dedication and service to goalkeepers of the planet, assembled all the information posted on the OBO web site, grouped it, and referenced it. That means you can access the info more easily, and more cohesively.

Special thanks to Simon Lusk, Rachel Durdin, Mike Lewis, Jon O'Haire and heaps of talented and thoughtful players who have provided info and feedback and their ideas on the OBO gear. This information also helps us make OBO products work even better.

Rachel Durdin and Jon O'Haire deserve special mention for their contributions.

Thankyou Thankyou. Hope you find something in here useful and you continue to be an AMAZING PERSON

Simon Barnett
OBO Team
Captain

Contents

Preface.....	3
Greetings Amazing Person	3
Contents.....	4
TECHNIQUES.....	5
Basic Postions: A Ready Postion	6
Basic Positions: Angles	9
Kicking	13
When to Use Your Stick	16
Aerial Balls.....	18
Aerial Saves	21
Slide Tackling	23
Interceptions & Tackling	28
One on Ones	31
Attacking Clearances.....	34
Penalty Corner Defense: Logging	38
Penalty Corners.....	42
Penalty Strokes	45
Penalty Strokes	50
TRAINING	52
Training Drills.....	53
Reflex Training	57
Young Goalies	62
Off Season Training.....	64
Off Season Training.....	69
Goalies at Practice	72
Training on your own	74
COACHING.....	77
The Mental Game.....	78
Big Game Preparation	80
Decision-Making and Team Defense	82
Setting Your Defence	84
Team Dynamics.....	87
What Makes a Good Keeper?	89
Goalkeeping Books & Other Resources.....	90
MATERIAL	93
Kickers.....	94
Getting the best out of your Kit.....	96
Equipment: Part 1	97
Equipment: Part 2.....	104
Q&A.....	114
Techniques.....	114
Training.....	133
Coaching	141
Materials.....	152
Rules	163

TECHNIQUES

Basic Postions: A Ready Postion

By Jon O'haire

Before a keeper can make a save, he's got to be in a place where he can even attempt to make a save. That is the crux of basic positioning. A goalkeeper's primary responsibility revolves around keeping a ball out of the goal. Take a good look at that goal, the one that is seven foot by twelve foot, 84 square feet. Throw in the fact that object to be stopped is a little more than seven inches in circumference and weighs about eight ounces and that the object in question can travel more than 100 miles an hour... a quick show of hands... who thinks this is going to be an easy position? Nobody ever said it was going to be easy, but good basic positioning can make goalkeeping an easier position.

Logic and experience have taught me that if a keeper goes into the net without a plan, goals will happen with alarming frequency. Throw in a plan that allows the keeper to make a play on a shot from a place where he's not having to desperately dive across the goal to make every save and that frequency starts to go down. In talking about a goalkeeper's attributes, we talked about things like size, strength, speed and flexibility. These are the ingredients each keeper brings to his game and are unique to him. Successful goalkeeping means taking stock of your attributes and from those strengths, formulating a plan or philosophy as to how and from where you want to defend the goal and the circle. Solid, basic positioning should allow the keeper to make the most of his strengths.

We've already discussed the practical problems a keeper is going to have defending the goal. Big net, small, hard, fast ball, you remember. Difficult, right? That doesn't mean that a keeper's job has to be impossible. Great shots will go in, but not every shot in a hockey game is decided by a great shot. The longer you watch hockey, the more you realise a lot of games aren't decided by a great goal at all, rather they're won or lost on the basis of the "ugly" goal. "Ugly" goals are the ones that leave a keeper shaking his head in disgust immediately after they happen and can keep him awake at night long afterwards. They're the ones you say to yourself, "Could've, should've, would've, didn't" and then to the world at large, a big, fat "Sorry."

Essentially, basic positioning means never having to say you're sorry. It revolves around three principles:

How the keeper stands as balls are played around and to him;
Where he moves or positions himself as the ball moves around him; and
How he moves to get himself to those in-between positions.
How a keeper stands in goal will depend on where the ball is on the field. Essentially we're talking about what's commonly referred to as a "ready" position. Ready is a fairly vague term. Ready for what? Goalkeeping requires several different types and level of readiness. Typically the term is used to describe a keeper's stance immediately before a shot comes at him. How ready and what he's ready for will depend on the distance between the keeper and the shot and the amount of ground he has to cover before he can make a play on the ball.

First off, playing the ball is critical. Playing the ball and being played by the ball are two entirely different things. When a keeper plays the ball, he is active and acting, he makes the save and is able to clear the ball. When the ball plays the keeper, he is

acted upon, he is a passenger. Typically in these situations, he makes the save by either getting hit with the ball or desperately lunging to reach it. The clear is secondary, if at all, and the rebounds are dangerous. Sometimes a keeper has no choice but to make this type of save, but often keepers make this type of save because they weren't "ready" when the shot is taken.

There's no one perfect ready position for every keeper. Every keeper is different and as such, has their own strengths. Having said that, there are common things that keepers are looking to do as they play a shot. They're looking to make the save, first off. They're looking to clear the ball to safety as quickly as possible. They're looking to get into a position to play any rebound should they be unable to clear the ball. Save, clear, recover, when you start to think about a stance that allows you to do those things, you start to build the framework for a ready position.

In evaluating the ready position of successful keepers, several common characteristics emerge. Starting from bottom to top, the first thing you notice is that the keeper's weight is up on the balls of his feet, about shoulder-width apart. If you watch or play good tennis, the stance is very much like a player getting set to return serve. A keeper who wants to play the ball on a save, wants a good base to push off from with his feet. To do this he needs to be able to push off from his non-kicking/saving leg for low balls to the sides. If he can do this, he leads with his head when he extends to the side. Typically, when he pushes off to the side, he's also coming slightly forward. He wants to play the ball in front of his shoulders from where he's started in his ready position. When he does this, he cuts off angle at the same time as he extends out. We'll talk much more about angles in a bit.

There are some things you want to avoid in setting up with your feet. If a keeper's weight is back on his heels, the keeper will usually lead with his foot out in front of the rest of his body. When a keeper gets his foot out in front of his head and body, the ball either pops up because of the angle of contact on his kicker or goes nowhere because he's basically making the save with the bottom of his foot. Neither are good results.

When a keeper gets too wide with his feet in his ready position, he also has a hard time pushing off explosively on his non-kicking leg. The result is he's not able to fully extend with his kicking/saving leg and isn't able to reach balls that are wide of his body. When his feet are too close together, a keeper can usually push off from his non-kicking leg, but will often get "stuck" picking his saving leg up to make a save. His weight becomes very forward, and he's almost falling to the side when he makes the save. Because his weight is so forward, this falling causes his foot to get stuck and not fully extend.

As you go up, the knees and the waist are the next significant areas in the ready position. The knees and waist are bent so that the keeper's chest and head are over, or slightly forward, of his knees. When his head and shoulders are forward, he's more able to lead with his head to make the save. If he can lead with his head, he gets more extension and can more effectively save/clear the shot (we'll discuss this concept in much greater detail later).

If a keeper is too upright at his knees and waist, he can still have his weight on the balls of his feet, but he's unable to keep his weight forward and attack the ball when he goes to play it. A keeper who plays too deep in a crouch can also have problems. The keeper has too much bend at his knees and his waist, expends a lot of wasted

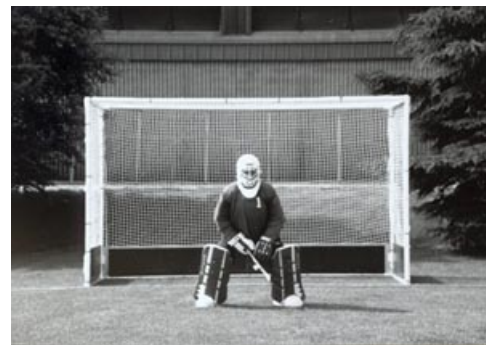
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energy just maintaining a ready position. Forget about being explosive to make the save, by the time the shot comes, the keeper who has too much bend either ends up falling forward as he goes to make a play on the ball or is dropping back on his heels from fatigue.

Chest and arms are next as we move up and probably the area where there is the most variation in the ready position. The keeper wants to keep his chest above, or in front of his knees. This allows him to keep his weight forward. By also keeping his hands and arms in front of him, the keeper further reinforces keeping his weight forward while maintaining balance. Some coaches prefer keepers to play with their hands out to the side. This allows the keeper to take up more space, but the ready position isn't completely about taking up space. With his hands out to his side, as opposed to in front of him, the keeper has a harder time moving forward to the shot and maintaining balance. As a result, he might make the save, but often is off-balance if there is a rebound. The keeper who holds his hands out in front of him, also has an easier time opening his shoulders to his side when making a save/clear (once again, more about this later).



A good example of the ready position from the side, weight is on the balls of the feet, with knees, chest and head forward.



Examples of the ready position head on. Note that with hands in front (see previous tip on aerial balls) that the feet are a little wider. With hands out to the side, a keeper's shoulders can get pinned back leaving him prone to having his weight back.



What a good ready position can let you do. Actively playing the ball, the keeper has a good base to cross over and clear the ball using his right foot with power and accuracy.

Having said all that, there is room for variation in the ready position. The bottom line is keepers should be judged by their effectiveness and not their appearance. Going back to the things we want a keeper to be able to do out of his ready position, save, clear, recover, if a keeper can do all this with an unorthodox stance, it may be best to leave him be. If those things aren't happening, then it's time to tinker.

We've talked about how to stand when a ball is played towards him, part two is where to stand. This second part to basic positioning revolves around the concept of angles.

Basic Positions: Angles

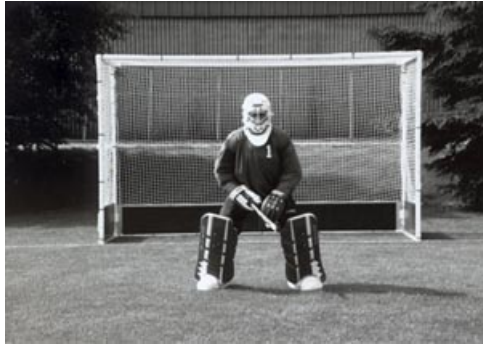
By Jon O'haire

The concept of angles builds on most effectively using your ready stance to position yourself between the shooter and the goal. In the one ball, one shooter world that can be a pretty simple concept. Throw in variables like your size, your reaction time, passing options and players in the way, and things get complicated. Complicated doesn't mean impossible, a keeper just needs to take these things into consideration and put them to use.

Starting with basics, a standing keeper should be able to cover a yard to either side of his center (at least that's what we hope a good ready stance will allow). Building on that premise, the keeper covers two yards. If a keeper stands on the goal line in the middle of the goal, that leaves two yards of open goal (the goal being four yards wide). If the keeper steps off the goal line on a line from the middle of the goal towards the shooter, that area outside the two yards the keeper takes up by standing gets smaller. When the shooter is at the middle of the goal, the most goal area is open. As the ball goes to the sides, the scoring area gets smaller if the keeper maintains the distance he is off the goal line.



A keeper two yards off his line



A keeper four yards off his line

Angles are geometry and the principle builds on the keeper always being on a line from the middle of the goal to where the shot is coming from. Shots can happen from the front stick and the reverse stick. A keeper can't just line themselves up from the middle of the goal to the player taking the shot, it's got to be on a line from where the shot is coming from.

When first introducing the concept of angles to young keepers, make the concept concrete. You can do it with ropes. Put a ball at a spot in the circle, get a long rope, tie it to the goal posts and pull the middle of the rope to the ball. When the keeper is centered between the rope, he's on goal. Let the keeper see it from the shooter's perspective and from behind the goal. Move the ball and shift the keeper. Angles start with being on line and can be an abstract concept for keepers, young and old.

Depth is the second part of angles. Going back to variables, how far a keeper plays up on the line of the shot will depend on his strengths and weaknesses in relation to where the ball is in the circle, as well as the keeper's own size, flexibility and reactions. With a simple shot from the top of the circle, a small keeper is going to have to play further out than a big keeper does to cover the same area. Physical abilities (or limitations) require it.

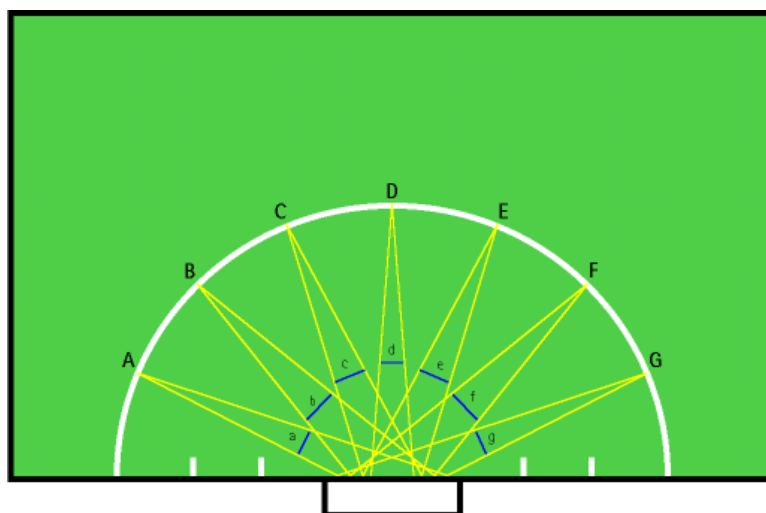
Effectively playing angles means building on your experiences and strengths. To find out what the best distance for a keeper to play off his line is requires patience, discipline and players willing to work with the keeper, especially with beginning and younger players. There is no substitute for experience/practice, but experience has to be structured. It does no good for a keeper to stand in goal for a hundred shots if they're coming from everywhere and going anywhere.

By putting a keeper in a situation where they take 20 balls from the direct top of the circle and gradually adjusting the distance the keeper plays off their line, the keeper can get a sense of where he's most effective saving the ball and clearing it to a space. It's important that you not lose the focus on clearing the ball. Too many times the emphasis of angle work becomes lots of shots, some saves, no consequences (i.e. feedback or second shots). Angles are awareness and a keeper needs to know where they are making their most effective plays of the ball. Set up sets of 20 shots from different positions around the circle, one spot at a time. Give feedback, set up clearing targets, put rebounders in the drill, whatever is appropriate for the level and abilities of your keepers.

Going back to guidelines, there are no set/carved in stone rules for angles for every keeper. Generally, with a set shot at the top of the circle from the center, the keeper will be the farthest off his line. As the set shot shifts to the sides, he can cover the same goal area with similar results by being closer to goal and not as far off his line.

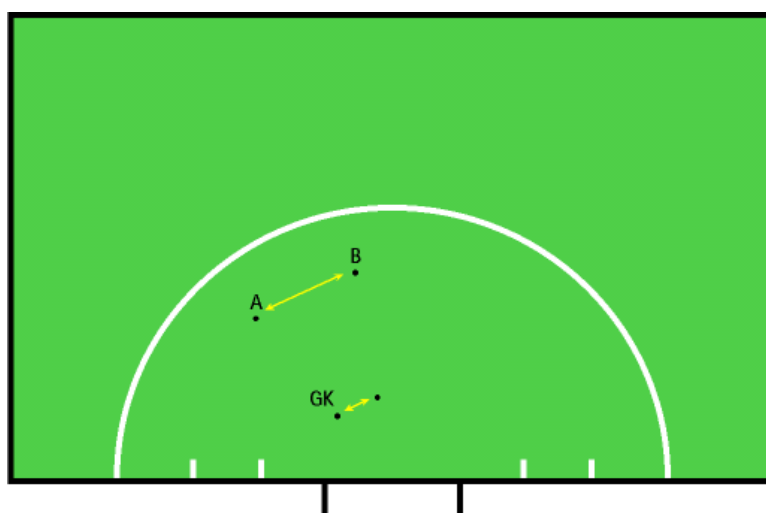
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My own experience has been that with a shot from just inside the D in the center, I'm most effective playing three yards off my line. As the ball goes to the sides from the edge of the D, that distance goes down to two yards, then one until the ball goes baseline and I go to my post. A lot of people talk about playing angles as an arc, or an extended arc. I've used the analogy of the arc being shaped like the top half of an egg, but that also applies to my individual abilities and limitations. Some keepers can play a round arc, I couldn't.



Angles simplified: an overhead diagram. Each letter represents a shooting position and what a keeper covers simply by being in a ready position on the proper angle.

There are philosophies and principles that can be built on and most of them apply as the ball moves around the circle. When a ball is passed to the left or right from the top of the circle, a keeper can't move to their left or right simply in the line of the ball, they need to move in relation to the ball and the goal. Their movement is not going to be flat, it's going to be arced, rounding back to the post. This is an especially critical concept for beginners.



Repositioning on a small pass, shuffle steps.

It's important that as the keeper moves, he stays square to the ball and the goal as the ball travels. We talked about this in the last tip, The Ready Position. A goalkeeper can most easily make a positive play of the ball if he's square to the shooter. I like to try to keep things easy. Easy for me is using short, quick, shuffle steps (never crossover steps). By doing this, I stay in my ready position (or reasonably close) as I move. The result is I maintain the ability to make a positive play on a shot while moving.

When there are big changes of angle from left to right or right to left, a keeper may have to drop back to center and realign himself when taking on a forward or shot to get on an angle from goal. The OBO goalkeeping video does an excellent job of illustrating this concept. If a keeper goes from one angle to the next on a pass without realigning himself, he's never in the goal when the shot happens and he ends up going out at where the ball was as opposed to where it's going, i.e. at goal from the new angle.



Repositioning on large pass, realign.

You can incorporate movement (big and small) in to simple drills that start with a pass to the side and result in a shot. Once again, make sure these drills are structured. If a keeper is off on his angle, stop the drill, show him where he is and make the correction. An important correction is not only showing the keeper where he needs to be, but also how he needs to get there. If you don't have the players to do this drill with a pass, have the keeper start from a cone at a fixed point and on the coach's call take a shot from a different angle. As keepers become more proficient, you can add a couple of different angles and call them by number, or allow forwards to make passes within the circle to change the angle. The key is proficiency. If a keeper can't consistently save and clear a shot with one change of angle, do not expect him to play shots where there are three changes of angle.

We've talked about the distance a keeper plays off the line with a shot from a set spot. That all changes with a little thing called a pass. A shot from the endline isn't necessarily dangerous, but a pass to a player at the penalty spot from the endline is. Similarly, an opponent with the ball and a defender on him is not likely to be as dangerous as the opponent's open teammate. Modern hockey has shown that a keeper can't just be a goalkeeper, he needs to be a circle defender. Sometimes a keeper can stay back and be set for a shot, other times he might need to step up and

intercept a pass, some times he might have to step up to pressure/smother a shot. Angles incorporate all of that.



Playing the situation: A keeper angled to play the pass and the shot from the side.

Angles build on knowing where you are in the circle. We've talked a lot about keepers being a circle defender and not just making plays of the ball on the goal line. There's not a whole lot of advantage to a keeper coming off his line, if the result is that he's going to concede a goal on the pass because he doesn't know where he is. It's important to know where you are in the goal from landmarks around the field. Use landmarks like the opposite goal, the arcs of the circle, the 25 at the sideline and long hit marks to find your bearings. Too many times a keeper uses a marker like the penalty spot to find center. That's fine if all your plays are two yards from the goal. As soon as you get farther than seven yards off your line, you have to look back to find where you are. A keeper never wants to look back to find where he is.

There are extremes to everything. The further out a keeper plays, the more net he or she covers, but at the price of less reaction time to save the shot. At the same time, the further out a keeper plays, the easier he or she is to pass around. Effectively playing angles means finding a balance between extremes and incorporating your strengths in to your positioning.

Kicking

By Jon O'haire

There is no more essential skill to a keeper in the game of hockey, than kicking. Just as a field player must have stick skills, a keeper must have kicking skills. The importance of this most basic of skills is often overlooked. People tend to think all a keeper need do is worry about saving the ball. A keeper can make all the saves in the world in a game, but if he can't clear the ball, he almost assures himself of allowing goals.

Typically most practices for a keeper centre around stopping shots on goal. He is presented with some forwards, about thirty balls and faced with various exercises designed to do nothing more than test his reflexes. Stop one shot; move on to the next. It is essential that keepers get in his mind set that a save is not completed until the ball is safely cleared to a defender or out over the side line. Think about the situations in a game that can require a keeper to play a ball with his feet. Loose balls in the circle, passes in the goal area,

shots in the circle and back passes from his defenders are all opportunities for keepers to create positive ball possession for his team-mates.

Kicking is an active skill that incorporates many techniques. Note the word active. Kicking is not simply allowing the ball to hit your foot and redirect. It can be, especially on hard shots, but in most cases, it involves a keeper stepping up to interject himself into a situation and playing the ball.

Kicking is controlling the ball. For the sake of this piece, we're only going to discuss one type of kicker, high-density foam. On high-density foam kickers, the area of greatest control is located on the instep, between the ankle and the round of the foot. If a keeper is looking to play the ball with his foot for maximum control, instep is the way to go. The type of ball you're dealing with, obviously impacts the technique a keeper has available to him to kick the ball with his instep.

For shots that are basically straight at a keeper (surprisingly they constitute a large percentage of the balls a keeper faces), he is stepping in to play the ball, rather than waiting for the ball to come to him. The kick starts from a good ready position, with the keeper up on the balls of his feet. The mechanic starts with the keeper opening the foot/instep of his kicking leg up to the angle that he wants to clear to. He is pushing off from his non-kicking leg. As he goes forward, he leads with his head, then his chest. If a keeper does this, the knee of his kicking leg should be in a straight line up from his foot when he makes contact with the ball. As he contacts the ball, the follow through of his kick should carry on to the line of the clear. Assuming he does all this, the results should be a low, hard, clear to target.

Common problems for keepers with kicking seem to come from relatively few areas. They range from kicks rising, to inaccuracies, to little or no power. One at a time, these are the things to look for:

Rising balls - start on the balls of your feet. Get on to the line of the ball early. Open up the instep of your kicking foot. Push forward off your non-kicking leg. Get your head out in front of your body. Kick through with your kicking foot towards your target.

If you don't push off with your non-kicking leg, your head goes back, which results in a keeper making contact with ball with his foot in an angle in front of his knee. Think about your foot as a golf club, and in this position your foot is a 9 iron.

Inaccuracies - When a keeper has problems with accuracy, they usually stem from him not getting on to the line of the ball early enough. There is a lot of footwork in getting your body in to a position where you can kick to your desired target. It's a lot of short quick steps, very similar to how a tennis player moves. A keeper will also have trouble kicking to his target if he doesn't open up his body to change the angle. If a keeper doesn't change the angle of his

body with a straight on shot, an instep clear will go directly back to the shooter. That's a bad thing.

A keeper needs to open up his stance to change the angle of the ball. It starts with him opening up his shoulder, then his hip, then his instep on his kicking side. Opening up will give him a slight back swing as he steps for his last "prep step" before performing the kick (we'll call the steps you take to set up performing a skill as "prep steps"). The downswing on the kick should be in as direct a line as possible, along the line of where you want the ball to go (i.e. towards your target).

Keepers also have problems with accuracy when they don't open up their instep up early enough to the ball, or take it on their foot between the ankle and the round of the foot. When a keeper doesn't open up early enough he ends up twisting his foot as he is kicking. He can't get any follow through. Unless you take the ball on the sweet spot of the kicker, you're making contact with a rounded surface at either your heel or your toe.

No Power - problems with power often come from the plant. If your plant leg is too far away when you kick the ball, you have to reach with your kicking foot getting out in front of the knee at contact. This causes you to basically kick with the bottom of your foot, as opposed to your kicker. Unless you have high-density foam on the bottom of your shoes, you're going to have a problem getting power. Follow through adds power to kicks and the only way to get is to be able push off with your plant leg and kick through the ball.



The keeper is about to kick the ball with his right foot. Notice how the knee is out in front of the foot before making contact with the ball. As contact is made the knee will be straight up from the foot.



Kicking through the ball. The keeper has pushed off his left leg, to be able to kick through the ball with his right leg. Note how the head and chest are forw



How not to kick, the keeper has his foot out in front of his body, with his weight back. The ball will rise off the kicker.

In the tips to come, we'll cover other kicking techniques and give you drill ideas designed to improve your kicking.

When to Use Your Stick

By Rachel Durdin

There are certain situations in a game where it is both appropriate and inappropriate to use your stick. In this tips section I will be highlighting four major issues you need to consider in relation to stick use:

- Why use your stick?
- Why not to use your stick?
- When to use your stick
- How to use your stick

Firstly "Why use your Stick?" well it is simple, why not utilise every part of your equipment to maximise saving ability.

When wouldn't you use your stick? Again this is simple, when you can save the ball with your feet, body or hands. Too often young and inexperienced keepers use a stick like a field player to stop a ball. With all the keeping gear on, this is nearly impossible, when a player smashes a ball at you. It is important to keep in mind that a stick is only about 1 ½ inches wide so we should not use it as a major factor in saving the ball when we have gear that is much larger.

Players should use their sticks in a variety of situations including:

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slide tackling



interceptions

making aerial saves to the right hand side of the body



When using your stick you should see it as an extension to your equipment. People hold the stick differently in separate situations. When in the ready position (on the balls of my feet, body weight forward and hands up) I hold my stick in a comfortable position about mid way down the handle nearing where the grip stops. This allows me to have good control of the stick and stops the stick hitting me in the rib cage when I move it.



When intercepting a ball or taking on attacker one on one I extend my stick to allow me to utilise the whole length of it. This is especially important when you are wanting to cover as much ground as possible during the intercept.



Keepers also use their sticks for assisting to clear the ball where kicking isn't appropriate at all. Situations like this sometimes occur when the ball has rebounded off of your gear right in front of you and the quickest and most effective thing to do is push it out. This requires very good wrist strength if you are to do it with one hand. Please note that this skill is becoming more difficult with the introduction of foam gloves (I still wouldn't change my foam gloves for anything in the world.)

It is important to remember that with anything you need to practice all skills. Some are easier to practice than others. Two important skills that keepers need to practice to make use of the stick easier is, firstly, getting from holding the stick in the middle to the extension position with ease and pushing the ball. You can do both of these skills at home or at hockey, all you need is a ball, your stick and gloves.

Aerial Balls

By Jon O'hair

As goalkeeping continues to be reinvented, the most recent changes have come in the aerial ball. Today's keeper sees more hard, lifted shots from different angles than ever before. Fortunately, he is better equipped and has new tools and skills for meeting the task. No offsides, drag flicks and reverse stick chips have increased the number of chances above the waist that a keeper has to defend. Upper body pads and hand protectors now give him effective protection to make those plays. A couple of notes about equipment, I'm for it, especially upper body pads. A lot of times today's keeper is getting hit by a hard ball when making a save. That's not a whole lot of fun if you don't have protection. Yeah, you do have to figure in mobility, but I prefer protection over mobility. I wear an ice hockey body pad. Some people like ice hockey body pads less. There are a wide variety of makes and models. I think you have to look at how you play and where you're getting hit and make your decision accordingly.

The days of gloves are coming to an end. Hand protectors are much more protective than gloves and offer you a new range of skills to defend. High density foam and functional engineering have opened up doors for the keeper to clear with his hands, much the same way that foam kickers allowed the keeper to use his feet. He can use the rebounding and protective qualities of foam to play a ball, rather than be played by it.

What you can do with your hands is profoundly effected by how you hold your hands in your ready and moving positions around the goal. Ready and moving positions or stances are distinct. When a keeper has to move big distance, he's running and arms are pumping. When he needs to cover three yards on a side shuffle while a forward pulls right, he's trying to make himself big while covering the ball and moving, all at the same time. He does that by keeping his hands outside his shoulders and slightly forward from his sides. He does that by being balanced, quick footed, with his weight forward. If a forward shoots as you're moving, getting hit with the ball is a success.

Total ready position is when you have a forward striking from the top of the circle and you're able to react and save/clear. I don't think hand protectors have radically changed the way I am in my basic ready position/attack stance. I keep my hands in front of me, stick held about two/fifths down the length. I want to position myself at a distance from where I can react and position myself to clear the ball. For me, that's probably 11 yards or 10 meters from the shooter. That distance is really going to vary

because it depends on where each individual keeper is most comfortable and effective playing the ball.

I will change how I hold my stick according to the situation. My needs are going to be different when taking on a forward running the baseline with passing options, than say, the forward alone at the penalty spot with a bouncing ball in front of him and time and space to tee off. If somebody has the time to hit/chip a shot, I don't want the ball to carom off of me because I was too long on my stick, hence two/fifths.



While not exactly textbook, this is where I like to take the ball on my stick. The ball has hit the stick mid-shaft and is headed around the post. As evidenced by the legs in the foreground, this is a chip shot from close range.

I don't think we've reached the limits of what can be done with hand protectors, but among the skills and changes that have developed are the keeper being able to deflect a shot with his hands. On the stick side, the facing surface is a deflection surface. I think that's one of the great design features of the Robo RHP, you have a big, flat, deflecting surface. Some of the more flashy, round, right hand protectors are functionally difficult. With the Robo RHP you're protected comfortably and effectively taking the smashing hit straight on the hand or making a reverse stick tackle and being able to get your stick down.

On balls to my stick side, I like to play them close to my hand. That means for me figuring early on whether the ball is going to be one that I will play with my right hand. If the ball is reachable, I prefer to cross over and take it with my left hand and that still depends on where's going to be a safe space for me to save/clear to. How my shoulders are set effects how I can play a ball and to where. Just as I need to open my hips kicking the ball, I need to open my shoulders when I play the ball with my hands.

If the ball is to my stick side and far enough that I can't reach it with my left hand, I try to take the ball on my hand protector. With the big, flat surface and the rebounding qualities of foam, I can deflect the ball into space. If I have to use my stick to make a save, I like to take the ball mid shaft. I don't wave at the ball when making the save. Because I play with my hands in front in my ready position, I have to open up automatically. On my stick side, that really allows me to angle my body back to put balls to the side as well as giving me a little more time to see the ball. Whatever way you play, the tiptoe of your stick should never be considered a primary stopping surface.

Going back to the ball hit to my right hand that I can cross over and play with my left. If I drop my right shoulder, come forward with my left shoulder, angling my left hand while I bring it back, I can deflect a shot with pace, wide right to safety. In the old days, you had to stop the shot dead, drop it and hope someone wouldn't kill you

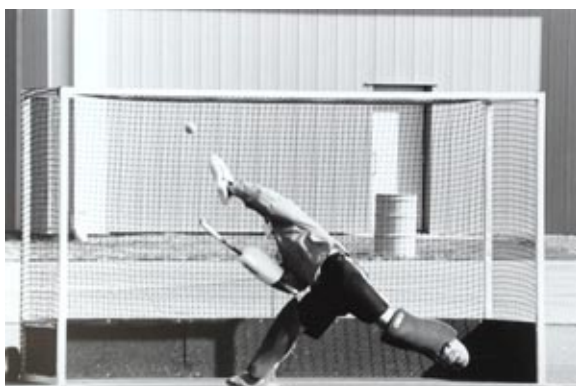
while you tried to clear it. If you didn't do those things in just the right order you could bet it was going to be at least a corner.

Your left hand becomes your primary aerial deflecting surface. We talked about bringing your left hand across for saves to the right, obviously it's pretty much the only option on shots to the keeper's left. You can use the pace of the ball to deflect it to space and safety and that's something you couldn't do with gloves. There are a couple of things I like about the Robo LHP, it's big, bulky and functional. There's a nice sweet spot.



Taking the ball to his right, low; notice hand angle, shoulder and leg position. There's a lot of preparation to making a clear

One of the things that's happened since hand protectors came on the scene is that keepers have been allowed a fair bit of freedom in deflecting/parrying the ball. Obviously a keeper still can't bat the ball, but if you've got to bring your left hand across your body while reaching/falling/jumping, that ball has got some zip as it comes off your hand. We can use zip to our advantage. We do that when we move our whole body to the ball when we use our hands, rather than just reach. When you reach and deflect a ball, it often appears that the keeper is batting the ball. When you get your body to the ball, you keep your hand and forearm set up early so that you can deflect and then get your body there to make the skill. I think your legs are really important when you make hand saves. Footwork is still critical because it dictates body position. There's no point in worrying about the skill to use at point A if you can't get there. When you get your body to the ball, you need to get your hand and forearm set up early so that you can deflect the ball, as opposed to batting it. You want to "sell" your deflection to the umpire with body movement rather than arm movement.



Taking the ball to his right, high; notice again the hand angle, shoulder and leg position.

With hand protectors, hard shots have become easy. Too often a ball without pace is more difficult for the keeper. In such cases a keeper still needs to be able to execute the basics-stopping the ball and controlling it into a safe space-than quickly clearing

it. You need to know where the ball is going off of your hands. Slower paced shots require the keeper to execute a multi-part skill with power and precision. That skill requires co-ordination which comes with repetition. I like to take my left hand back if I'm trying to control/cushion a shot to keep it close to me. I need to stay up on the balls of my feet as I'm taking the ball so I can come forward when making my clear. If I don't, I have no power, no extension, I'm flat footed and typically reacting to the ball hitting me.



*Controlling the ball down to clear.
Notice the hand and head position.
The keeper is over the ball, legs ready
to take it to space.*

The ball will not deflect itself to safety by itself with hand protectors. Learning how the ball rebounds off your hands is part of the process. The process comes through training and repetition. Tennis balls are good. Get someone to help you out with a tennis racquet and balls. Have them set up around the top of the circle and whack tennis balls to your hands. You don't need to be in full kit, get your helmet, hand protectors, stick and pelvic protector and just take balls. Whether it be a hockey ball in full kit, or tennis ball in light gear, a keeper needs to learn through experience where balls will rebound to. That means taking a lot of balls. Notice how the keepers body and hands are set up when he is able to play the ball safely in to space. You can do the same with a Jugs machine, or a couple of shooters and work chips and flicks. Take note of how ball speed and rebound are related. Try to deflect balls to places.

Hand protectors have really opened up the doors for what a keeper can do with aerial balls. Tools without skills are useless. If we don't use hand protectors properly we're back to being the wall, put anything above our waist and we'll give it right back to you. That didn't work so well. We have a better way, we just need to master it.

Aerial Saves

By Rachel Durdin

For many goalkeepers saves with the hand or stick seem more satisfying than any others. Whether this is because the crowd likes it more, or just the simple fact that they seem more spectacular or harder to execute...who knows? In this tips section I will endeavour to give you some simple advice and suggestions of how to make those saves being simple or tremendously difficult.

Firstly, I will address what the basic requirements of making an aerial save. Points to consider when making hand saves include:

- Start in the attacking position (on balls of the feet, body weight slightly forward and hands up).
- Watch the ball all the way from the stick to your own glove or stick.
- It is easier to save a ball in the air if your hands are already in the air. This decreases the time needed to travel to the ball (it really gives you a head start).
- When making a save with the left hand it may help to rotate the wrist slightly to get the ball moving in a direction away from the play. This movement is only minimal but it can be very effective and should only be used with balls that are coming straight towards you.



- When making a stick save it is best to only move the stick in a vertical direction. If you start to move the stick horizontally you then increase the chance of making mistakes.



When making saves with the stick it is a good idea to try and get your left hand across to try and cover as much territory as possible. If you start this technique at an early stage in your goalkeeping it will become second nature.

Making those Marvellous Saves

You need to practice diving. Diving is one of the hardest things to practice as you can cause serious injury to yourself if it is not done correctly with the right equipment. As many of you would know in a game when you make a brilliant save it doesn't matter how you land you simply don't feel a thing especially if you win, however during practice you feel every little thing even if it doesn't really hurt.

There are a number of ways that you can do this:

- Get some training mats or a mattress.
- Use a gymnastics foam pit.
- Add extra protection to your equipment.
- Diving into a swimming pool.
- Practice with soccer goalkeepers (good ones).

All of these suggestions will help you in gaining full stretch for those really hard high and wide balls.

As with other drills it is important to remember to watch the ball from when it has left the stick all the way to your hand, stick, leg or body. This may sound easy, however it is hard and does require a lot of self discipline and constant reminding of yourself to make it happen all the time.

Belief in yourself and that you can save anything is equally important in achieving great saves. If you are having trouble making these saves or believing in yourself then you may want to mentally go over the saves in your own head and see yourself making the saves over and over. This does actually work, if you break the save up into sections and work through how you will make the save.

Making Really High Saves

To make those extra special saves you need explosive power in your legs. If you don't have any power then it is almost impossible for you to jump and make the save. You can do this through a strength program which will incorporate both strength and power. If this is not available you may want to practice jumping in the air with your gear on. Or even jumping on a box up to 10 times in a row with a reasonable break in-between for 3 sets (make sure it is not a cardboard box).

Again, even with explosive power you need to make sure that you are watching the ball and making the right decision. If the ball is going out why would you want to try and save it and risk it going in the back of the net. It is good to cover everything, however, just make sure that you are not making spectacular looking saves just for the sake of it and that it is the best option for making that particular save.

Slide Tackling

By Jon O'haire

There have been a lot of questions about what to do in situations where a keeper is faced with a forward bearing down on him or her alone. Most centre around what the keeper should do. There isn't a text book answer that says, "If the forward enters the circle with a five yard gap between him and his defender, at a 45' angle to the goal and the ball on his front stick, the keeper extends his body in a prone position to his strong stick side at a rate of speed of 15 mph, bisecting the path of the ball at his midsection." That's certainly one way of handling the situation, but the fact of the matter is there isn't any one way to play any one situation, especially one on ones with the keeper and a forward.

When a keeper is faced with an unmarked forward breaking to goal, he has seconds to assess the situation and come up with a plan that will allow his team to succeed. First off, we need to qualify what success is. Success is not allowing your opponent to score, pure and simple. Having said that, how does a keeper go about succeeding? He does that by not allowing his opponent to make the play he wants. That comes by making a forward beat you in a path he doesn't want to take, by making him take a shot he doesn't want to take from a place he doesn't want to take it from, early or later than he wants to take it. Now, how do you do that?

A forward with the ball alone at the 25 can be a pretty intimidating site for a keeper. By the same token, a keeper poised and ready at the top of the circle can be equally intimidating. This takes us back to our plan. Before a forward can score, he's got to get into the circle. As a keeper, that gives me a boundary that if successfully defended, never allows a shot to happen. As the forward enters the circle, elements that give him the advantage are time, vision, control of the ball and speed. Those elements can also work against him. It's hard for a forward to have vision and control of the ball. When he's got vision, typically that's when the ball is off his stick. When he's got speed, the ball is either on his stick and his head is down, or the ball's off his stick. Those are the times when a keeper can win the situation.

One of the skills I can use to win the situation is a slide tackle. What are the elements of a slide tackle? The two big ones are timing and execution. As far as timing my tackle and positioning myself, I want to time my tackle so that the forward is just entering the circle. That means that I want to start my tackle two to three yards inside the circle. When taking a forward on top of the circle, I'm not just going out and dropping. Slide tackle means forward slide tackle. There is a lead up, and a follow through to the tackle. Timing is key and I've got to wait until the forward has committed to a direction. If the forward is going from my left to right, I have an ideal opportunity to tackle him strong stick side. As he goes from my right to left, I'll usually have to take him on my reverse stick.



A strong stick tackle from the baseline.

Footwork is key in setting up the slide tackle. If I get too close to the forward on a slide, I miss the ball and take out the forward. If I'm too far away, the

forward can pull the ball around me. By the same token, if I get wrong footed, I'm not going to be able to slide to the side I want. If I want to make a strong stick tackle, my last step is going to be off my left foot. As I push off my left foot, my right leg is out in front of my body as I go down. My goal is to make my body a big, sliding, horizontal block. To do that, I need to get down and horizontal quickly. I try to get my right leg out and get down on my right hip as quickly as possible while extending my torso out at the same time. I use my hip and elbow to brace myself as I go down. When I make my slide, my hips and shoulders are in a line perpendicular to the ground so that my block is as tall as it can be. If my hips and shoulders are angled back, the forward can throw the ball over or I risk having the ball deflect off and over me.

I like to line the ball up on my chest when sliding for a couple of reasons. If I line the ball up on my hands, the forward can beat me by pulling a yard to his left. If he does that on my chest, I can still tackle with my stick. I'll also adjust the grip on my stick in a one on one situation so that I use the full length of my stick. It's critical that if you do go tackle with your stick, you tackle through the line of the forward's pull. A common mistake is for the keeper to make his tackle parallel to the line of the pull and as a result, the forward runs around his tackle. Also, my upper body is a more substantial obstacle for a forward to run through.

Obviously a keeper should be well equipped if slide tackling is going to be a safe, productive part of his game. The skill requires courage. The thing we alluded to before was intimidation, and I'll go out on a limb and say the thought of a keeper coming after a forward at the top of the circle can be fairly unnerving. If you've never performed a slide tackle before, the thought of a forward running in to you can be pretty scary. The reality is that one on ones are a lot like the game of chicken. If you wait long enough most forwards bail. No forward likes to get hit by a flying speed bump and that's what a well-executed slide tackle is like. When you stop the ball on your chest, the forward usually ends up jumping over you and you now have the ball with time and space to clear it.

Tackling to the reverse stick is basically the same except to the other side. I'm setting up the tackle by pushing off my right foot and throwing my left leg and hip out. I'm trying to get my hip down and torso extended as quickly as possible. If there is a difference between tackling on the front and reverse stick, it's that I can't extend as far on my upper body side with my reverse stick. As a result, I may have to turn on to my stomach to get full extension if I'm pulled wide.



A slide tackle to the reverse stick side, from the baseline.

Whether, I'm slide tackling to my reverse or strong stick, I've got to be aware that a forward with vision may try to throw the ball over me as I'm sliding. It's important that I stay focused on the ball and the angle of the forward's stick as he comes in. While I'm definitely looking to get down and wide in a hurry, I still have to be able to deal with a flick over me.



The tackle executed, fully extended.

If a forward has vision and control of the ball, a slide tackle isn't going to be in his best interests. A keeper has to try to stay with the forward until he's got the forward in a position where the keeper has the advantage. Going back to our initial criteria for success, that's taking a forward to a place he doesn't want to be. If I want a forward to take the ball to his reverse stick, I might want to overplay to my left, to bait him to go to my right where I can make a strong stick tackle. It might mean that I go out and stay up and force the forward to go around me. If I've got help coming back in the form of a defender, time may be all I need to win the situation.

If I'm trying to take on a forward upright away from the goal, it's important that I keep my steps small and quick. If I take big, long steps, it may seem that I cover more ground, but I also leave a lot of gaps as I move. I'm vulnerable between my legs and to any shot that's put on the leg that I have weight on. I want to keep my hips square to the forward so I can move in either direction. So I don't get wrong-footed, I try to keep my shoulders in a line inside straight up from the balls of my feet with my weight slightly forward. Ultimately, a

forward should be able to outrun a fully padded keeper and a keeper will be forced to put on a skill. At that point the skill is a dive.

A dive is different than a slide. As we talked about before, a slide has forward momentum to it. A dive typically comes from movement to the side. If I'm taking a forward on upright, my dive will come about the time that my shoulders start to get outside the line of my feet as I move. That's about the time that my movement stops being controlled. A dive isn't just falling in the direction of the ball. A dive is an explosive movement where I'm pushing off both legs to get extension.

Once I've successfully stopped the ball, composure is important. If I've been able to clear the ball out of circle, then I'm up quickly and recover back to the goal. If I've only stopped the ball, it's important to take in the situation. Do I have help? If I do, I can just leave the ball for a team-mate. If I don't have help, I need to assess where and how to clear the ball, depending on the amount of time I have available. If I'm tackling on my strong stick side, sweeping the ball with my stick to the nearest sideline is the easiest, quickest method. If the forward has run past me, I may have the time to get to my feet and clear the ball with my kicker. If the forward is still right on top of me, I may not be in the position to get up. If getting up is going to allow the forward to put the ball under me, then I need to stay down. That doesn't mean I don't try to move to the ball, it just means that I'm moving from a prone position.

We've talked a lot about the technique aspects of one on ones; now, a few notes about the tactical aspects. One on ones can happen at the top of the circle or along the baseline. They can occur when there is one forward in the circle, or six forwards and several defenders. For me, a one on one situation is any situation where there is not a defender available to play the forward with the ball and the likely, resulting scenario is going to result in a scoring opportunity that doesn't favour my team.

If I'm going to take a forward on, I must communicate that to my defence so they can work with me, either to cover the goal or mark passing lanes that open as a result of my leaving the goal. When I leave the goal, I can't go out for the sake of going out. I've got to go out to get ball. There will be some situations where a forward has support. I must be aware of where that support is, as well as know where my help is coming from. I've got to be able to anticipate the shot as well as the pass. Sometimes that might mean that I've got to cheat a little trying to play both the pass and the shot.

If there is a recurring theme in many of these tips, it's that there are a lot of ways to play situations, especially one on ones. Several things help you be successful: know your strengths, work on your weaknesses and learn from your experiences. If I've been beaten in a one on one, write down what you did in the situation. The same holds true for when you're successful, write it down. There is nothing random about success. Do what works; work on what doesn't. It may take time, but if you work on situations methodically, consistent success is usually the payoff.



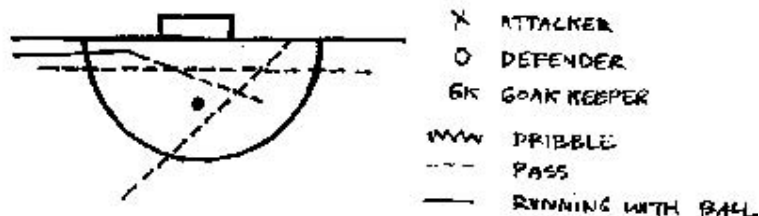
Making the tackle at the top of the circle (ignore that man in the undershirt, he's not helping!).

Interceptions & Tackling

By Rachel Durdin

With hockey now being in a transition period with experimental rule changes, we as goalkeepers must also make the transition back to being very attacking in certain circumstances. As the years have passed and goalkeeping gear has dramatically improved, some goalkeepers have lent away from being attacking and preferred to stay back on their line to try and make the save. With the elimination of the offside rule, there will still be the need to remain back on the line to make saves that we would normally, however there will be the need to play higher and smarter. From my limited experience with forwards having free reign over the field keepers have had to take a much more involved role that has included interceptions, tackling and closing down of the play. I am going to address two skills in this tips section. Each will be broken down into two sections:

- 1) Describing how the skill should be executed, and
- 2) How to incorporate this into a training session.



Interceptions

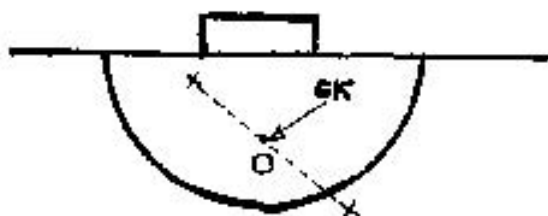
When a field player intercepts the ball they are usually in front of their opponent. For goalkeepers this is generally not possible. The intercepts that a keeper should look to make include around the back plays (along the backline), crosses and loose balls.

When intercepting any ball, the stick should be extended to a comfortable position (extend as much as individually possible). This allows the keeper to cover as much ground as humanly possible. When the ball is on the right hand side of the field, some goalkeepers put their stick across in front of them with the hook pointing down.



Intercepts on the left hand Intercepts on the right side of the goal hand side of the goal

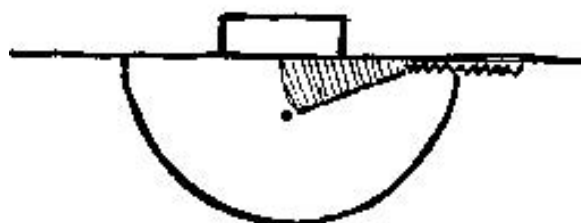
If you make the decision to intercept the ball you must commit yourself the ball 100%, anything less than this is not acceptable in good goalkeeping!! Interceptions not only come from the backline, they also come from general play. With great movement around the circle becoming the norm, a ball could be passed from the top of the circle, to a player leading from the backline. It is then the keepers responsibility to intercept this ball if the player is not marked.



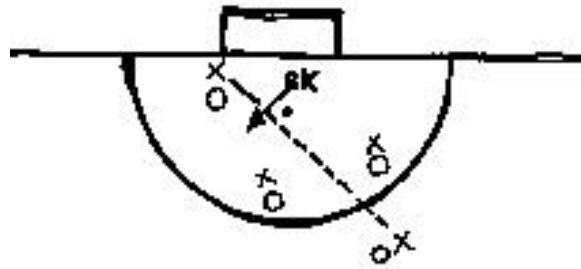
Drills for Interceptions

Around the back play:

Have your coach get a number of balls and hit them across the field. Anything that is beyond the 6 yard mark should be left and movement to the player or retreating to get into line. (Refer to the shaded part of the diagram to see the actual area that intercept should be made in.) It is important that you do not try to predict what the player is going to do, if you dive too early to make the interception the attacker is likely to slip the ball past you into the goal.

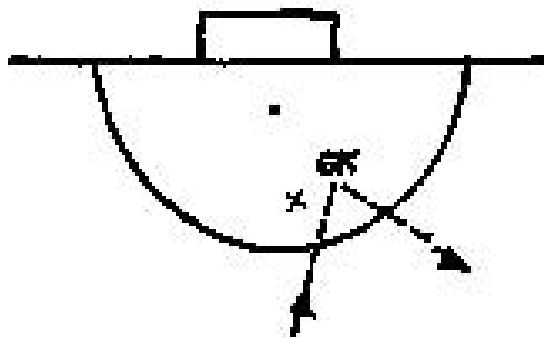


To get used to saving the through ball, it is a good idea to simulate the actual game situation.

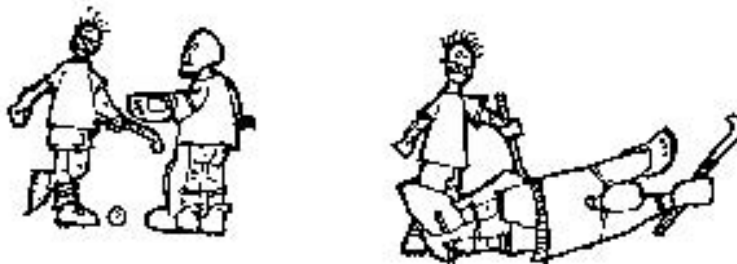


Tackling (Meeting the player early)

The key to making a good tackle in any section of the field is to get into early position. Goalkeepers are no exception to this, in fact I think that it is vitally important. If a keeper does not meet the player before or as they receive the ball then it is too late as most players will be able to drag the ball around you. The best possible scenario is for you to actually get to the ball before the player and clear it to one of your players.

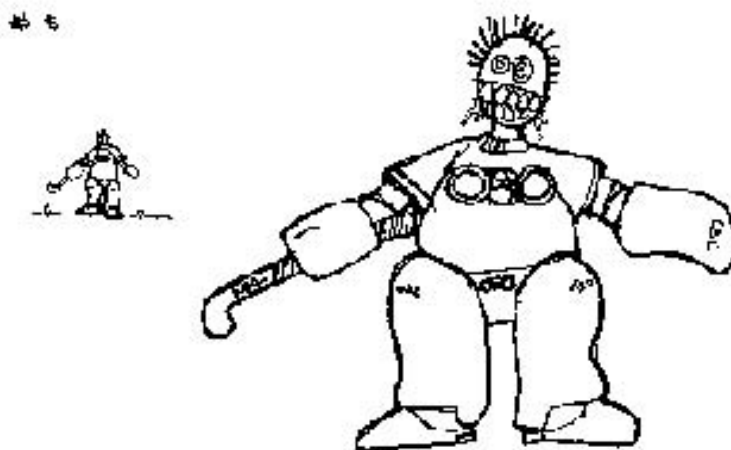


This is not always possible due to the fact that we are forced to make split second decisions. If we meet the player as they receive the ball then this should reduce the chance of a goal being scored significantly.



If you get close to the player they can not get the ball past you, whether you are standing or on the ground

Unlike years ago, tackling is not only slide tackling. Today if you get to the player early enough it is just as effective to stand, making your presence felt and at the same time trying to be as big as possible.

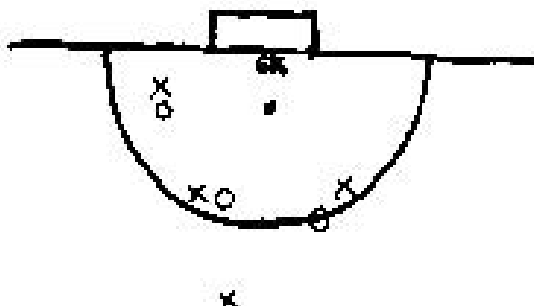


Stand tall & create the impression of a large physical presence

Drills for Tackling & Meeting the Players Early

The best way to practice this is in a game like situation. I find this to be the best way and if you can spend time to analyse what you should have done differently that is a great way to learn. (I am only talking about a few seconds for this to happen.) Any analysis that you want to agonise over should be done off of the field so that you can concentrate on what you are actually out there for - **TO STOP THE BALL GOING IN THE NET!!!!**

Please refer to the following diagram for some suggestions of suitable drills.



Please remember that all of the above is only my personal view (highly likely to be correct) and as I have always done take bits or all of it and try it. If it doesn't work for you make adjustments for yourself as nothing is ever the same for any one person.

One on Ones

By Rachel Durdin

The skill of taking on an attacker one on one is not an easy skill to master. There are a number of things that a goalkeeper can do to make this easier for them to be successful in these contests.



A goalkeeper needs to be attacking the ball and only the ball. If you attack the player it may result in a penalty stroke being called or at worst the goalkeeper receiving a yellow card. None of us like being sent off so we must be smart with what we are doing when taking on attackers.

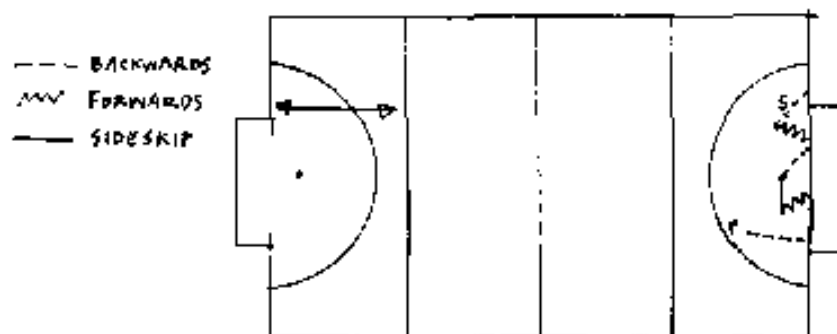
If a player is about to be tackled by one of your defenders this is not when you should be taking them on one on one. The time that you need to do this is when there is a break away situation with the attacker coming into the attacking 25 area unattended. This may also happen in the circle, and the area that you have to play in may only be 2 or 3 yards (this becomes a desperation save).

The main skills involved in taking on a player one on one are:

- Speed
- Tracking
- Having presence
- Sliding
- Decision making

Speed is essential in any movement towards a player. The most important factor in this is speed over the first few steps that you make. Ways that you can improve this is by doing short sprint work.

Tracking is another essential element in getting the player to go where you want them to. This allows you to get the player to go in the direction that you want them to and also to put them in a vulnerable position that you can make the most of. Tracking can also assist in getting the player into a position in which it is harder to get a good shot away and at the same time giving your defenders time to get back into position. For those of you who don't know what tracking is, it is a sideways movement similar to side stepping. It is important that you move with intensity, keeping your legs together to stop the ball going through the legs during movement.



Having presence is vitally important. As I have mentioned in earlier tips it is about making yourself big rather than like a mouse. If you have presence players are going to be likely to be thinking more about how to get the ball around you rather than getting the ball into the back of the net (this is a good thing).

Sliding is not a terribly hard skill. You need to come at the ball with speed and total commitment to what you are going to do. The first thing you are required to do is extend your stick to ensure that you will have maximum coverage when you are on the ground. When you are approaching the ball and player you need to start lowering yourself to the ground. This is a very quick skill and needs to be done with speed and control at the same time.



I think it is best to practice the skill and develop your own style.

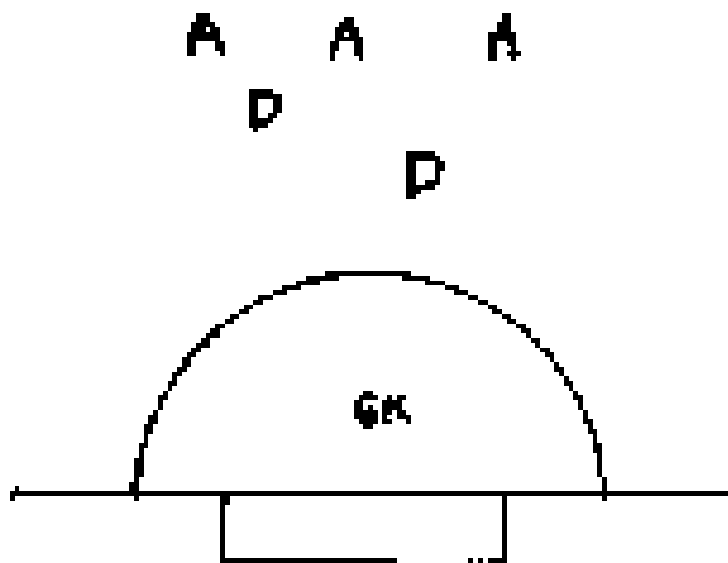
It is good to slide at a player when you are close to them and are sure that you are going to get the ball. Being close to the player and the ball is crucial. If you are not close enough to the player then you will be in danger of getting the ball dragged around you. I find it best to position yourself inline with the ball in the mid region of the body.

Finally you need to get up quickly after making the save ready for the next save to be made. You may need to get back nearer the goal line so speed is again an issue.

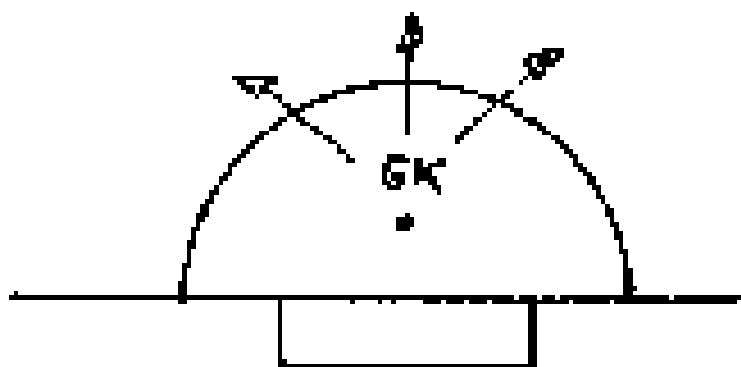
Decision making is crucial in this whole process. As I have previously said you must be totally committed to making the decision to take on the attacker. Another important tip is to remember you do not always have to take on the player. Sometimes it may not be the right decision to come a long way off of your line to take someone on if they are about to be tackled by one of your defenders.

How to practice this:

Set up 2 on 1, 3 on 2 (etc.) situations so that you are continually made to make decisions. It is important that this is not too close to the circle so that a breakaway situation can occur.



It is also a good idea to practice this starting from the penalty spot or just above it so that you can meet the player at the top of the circle to cut down the chance of them having a shot.

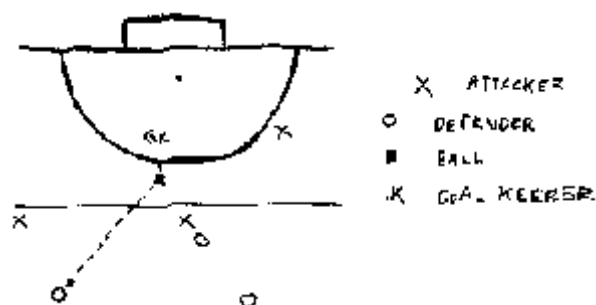


All the best with your quest for excellence.

Attacking Clearances

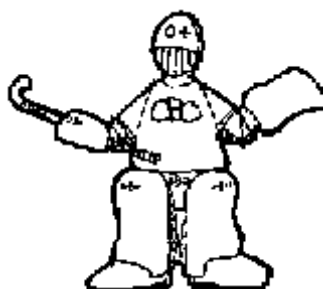
By Rachel Durdin

Playing goalkeeper should not mean standing on the goal line and hoping to save the ball that is fired at you. I believe that you really have to go out and get the ball. The role of the goalkeeper is not only to save the ball, but to set up the play for your team in an attacking manner. With no offside you will find that loose balls into the circle occur more often in a game, thus giving the goalkeeper greater opportunities to be involved in the play.

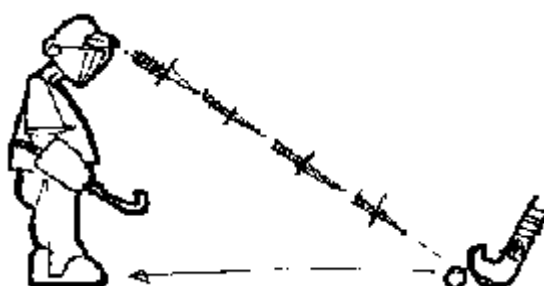


The main way to do this is by using the safe and reliable method of using the instep save. It is important to have the correct technique to do this. Here are some important general points that may help you to perfect this technique.

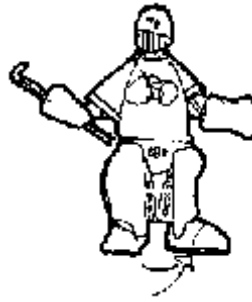
1. Begin in the attacking stance:
 - Weight slightly forward on the balls of your toes
 - Knees slightly bent to assist with weight forward
 - Hands up in a comfortable position ready to make the high save



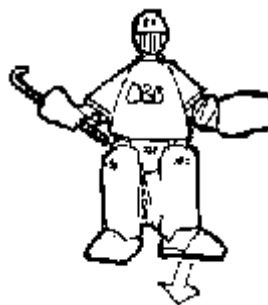
2. Watch the ball from the time that it leaves the stick all the way to your foot.



3. Rotate the ankle so that the foot is pointing outwards.



4. Contact with the ball should be made slightly forward of the original attacking stance, with the foot rotated to get the ball wide.



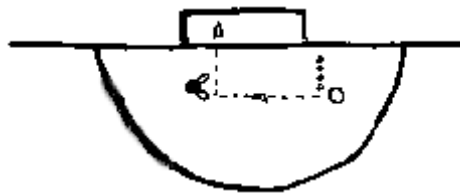
Similar to a putter swing, it is important that the kick has a back swing as well as a follow through of about equal distance.



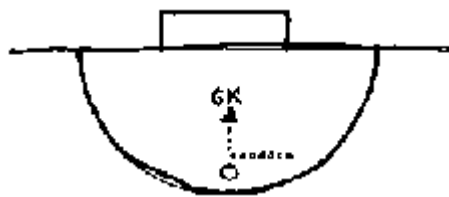
5. Keep your head over the ball to ensure that a flat clearance occurs.
6. If you are having trouble getting the ball, wide rotate the ankle and the hip (you may like to over exaggerate this).

Two good ways to practice accuracy for the instep kick are:

1. Line the balls up to the side of the goal on a right angle to the goal line. The ball must be delivered to the foot closest to the goal line ensuring that the instep kick is used.



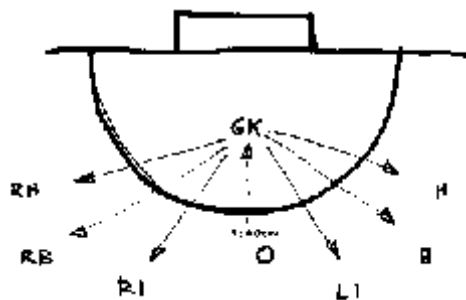
2. Have your coach or player stand with a few balls straight out in front of the goal with you in the goal. The object of this is to use the instep kick to direct the ball back to the person pushing the ball at you. This ensures that you will get good consistent accuracy, thus enabling you to control rebounds in a direction that you can set up attacking play for your team.



A good way to practice this with your coach is too have her/him roll the balls into the circle, with you clearing the balls to specific areas. During this drill it is important that you meet the ball and vary the direction and speed of the ball.

It can help to call out which position you are passing the ball to, i.e. Right Half, Fullback, Centre Half and so on. This will make sure that you have the direction that you require to create attacking opportunities for your team.

Alternatively you can set out cones so that you have something to aim at.



An important thing to remember when imagining doing this is to try to think of yourself as a soccer player passing to ball to your team members.

Good luck with this attacking goal keeping. As you read this OBO is developing gear that will make being an attacking goalkeeper easier. I am currently using the new third generation Robo Hi-Rebound kickers, which has allowed me to get even stronger clearances. When you use the Hi-Rebound technology it is important that you concentrate hard on your basic skills to get the most benefit. After all, we all hate getting penalty corners called against us for lifted rebounds that aren't even dangerous.

Penalty Corner Defense: Logging

By Jon O'hair

We get a lot of questions about penalty corners, especially lying down on corners. Laying down, or logging, is only one technique that a keeper can apply in the context of his, or her, team's penalty corner defence. No one technique, or type of defence, will be successful against every corner attack. This month's tip focuses on some concepts of penalty corner defence and specifically one technique for logging. Logging builds on the fact that the first struck shot on goal in a penalty corner must be below 18 inches when it crosses the goal line to be a legal goal. Notice that word "struck," flicks or deflections do not need to be below 18 inches. Continuing on the struck concept, some people can hit the ball hard, very hard in fact. So hard, that when the shot is taken from fifteen yards at the top of the circle, a keeper doesn't have time to react. Somebody got to thinking and reasoned that if you can't react to a hit ball from that distance and it has to be below 18 inches, why not have the keeper lie down and not have to react? In theory this sounds quite simple, but in application it can be quite a different matter.

There are a number of variables that need to be taken into consideration when a team decides how they want to defend corners and whether logging is right for you as a keeper. The equipment you use, the surface you play on, the quality of your opposition's attack (first shot and options), and the strengths of your defence, all need to be factored in when making a decision.

Equipment is the most important factor in even deciding whether logging is an option for you. In my mind, it's kind of like deciding whether a parachute is a good option for skydiving. As insane as it sounds, I've seen keepers lay down with kickers, leg pads, gloves, helmet, small chest pad, and cotton shorts. In logging, a keeper is using his whole body to take away the bottom of the goal, which means your whole body should be protected. Well padded pants, pelvic protection, upper body pads that cover the arms and chest, as well as a throat protector are all highly recommended in addition to standard kit before a keeper even starts to think about logging. Next comes playing surface. Logging is primarily a turf skill. Given the somewhat unpredictable nature of grass, it doesn't make a lot of sense to go down on grass. The 18-inch rule on struck shots only applies to raised shots. If a shot is raised because of the ground/grass, the goal counts. In addition, it's usually harder to stop the ball dead to set up the shot on grass so defences are usually more effective breaking corners up before the shot.

It's extremely useful to have an idea of what your opponents are capable of doing on a corner. You need to have a pretty good idea that the other team is capable of scoring off a straight shot with a keeper playing upright before logging. You also need to know what other options an opponent has for their corners. Drag flicks, passing options and deflections all can make the logging keeper look silly. Finally, logging needs to fit in with how your team is defending corners. If your team is breaking up corners at the top of the circle, there is no straight shot to defend. The keeper needs to be able to react to the broken play and the different gaps that open up as a result and is better served by staying up.

Having said all that, logging can be an effective technique when properly implemented. As we talked about before, logging is based on taking away a scoring

area that is effectively 18 inches by four yards. The keeper doesn't have to do that alone; he should have a post player working with him.

The size of the keeper and the reactions of the post player will determine where the two should best position themselves. Going back to the four yard by 18-inch goal, on hits from penalty corners, the post player is responsible for one yard, the keeper three. The post player is positioned to the keeper's left facing out from the goal. When the keeper goes down, he's going down to his right (strong stick side). How far the keeper is off his line will depend on his size, speed and the speed of the push out and stop. Generally, a keeper wants to get to a spot between two to four yards off the goal line.

Movement on a corner is all about efficiency. Extra time spent getting set up is time taken away from being set for the shot. This starts with the goalkeeper's positioning as the corner is being pushed out. Many keepers turn their body to face the player pushing out. They then turn their body to face the shooter. It is simpler for the keeper to face the shooter from the start and just turn his head to see the push out. Continuing with efficiency, a keeper needs to know exactly how many steps he needs to get set to go down. He needs to know the angle he needs to be on for where the shot is coming from. He needs to know how much space he needs to allow for the other players on the corner defence. This knowledge only comes through repetition with the entire defence involved.

On virtually all corner defences, one player comes out from the left of the keeper between the post player and the keeper. This means the keeper won't be starting from the middle of the goal when the corner is pushed out. The line the keeper takes out of the goal will depend on where the shot is being taken. With the shot taken from the centre of the circle, the keeper will step out lining his right leg up at the centre of the goal if he's logging. This typically means that he's stepping out to his left as he goes towards the shooter. If a keeper centres his body on the shot and the goal instead of his right leg he'll end up covering from the middle of the goal to the right when he lays out, leaving his post player the whole left side of the goal. Once again, you'll need to work out where you need to go down from through repetition with your post player as you figure out how to most effectively cover the goal.

A couple of things about post players: first and foremost, they are a goalkeeper's best friends. When a keeper logs on corners, he's counting on the post player to cover his back. Be consistent and clear with each of your responsibilities and expectations. Once again, this comes through repetition in practice. Penalty corner practice can be dangerous. A post player has to be fearless. There is no blame in short corner defence. There are mistakes, but no one points the finger. Like a keeper, the post player's positioning on corners will depend on his speed coming off the line, getting set and reaction time. A post player needs to play where he will make saves. Remembering that he's responsible for saving shots at an area of the goal one-yard by 18 inches; the post player's job starts there. I'll leave specifics of post player technique to the experts, but generally the post player wants to step up even with the keeper as the keeper is set to go down. If the post player sets up behind the keeper he's vulnerable to deflections off the keeper, deflections by attackers in front of him and will have a long way to go if he's to help clear rebounds off the keeper's pads. Helping clear rebounds off the logging keeper's lower body is an essential part of his responsibilities. A post player makes his job easy by knowing where his goal is and this starts with positioning and playing shots on his front stick. As he steps out, he wants to line his left leg up on the left post. By doing this, shots outside his left leg should be wide of the goal (I won't guarantee for irregularities in pitches). This is only

a start for the post player, depending on the style of defence your team plays and the variations your team encounters the job changes.

Finally we get to logging. There are two primary techniques for laying down on corners. The first starts from a leaning position, the second from a kneeling one. Other people may have different names for the techniques, but for our purposes we'll simply call them the lean and the kneel (we'll deal with the kneel and other logging techniques in our next tip).

In the lean technique, a keeper is looking to be set in a leaning position ready to drop when the ball is struck. To recap, his movement will be slightly diagonal left to account for the player coming out from his left as he centres himself on the shot. The distance he comes off his line will depend on his size and speed coming off his line. His set position will be in a crouching lean, with his left shoulder above his right foot. His left hand is at his chest and right hand is down and stick held out to the side.



The keeper set up in the lean position, stick out, left hand in front of the chest, left shoulder over right foot. Note the position of the right leg at the middle of the goal.

As the ball is about to be struck, the keeper collapses his right leg straight out (towards the left post), looking to get his right hip down. At the same time the keeper extends his stick out for maximum width and height. Fully extended means being able to cover the height of the backboards. When laid out, your left hand should cover the right side above your stick. Your stick should cover an area slightly wide of the goal.



Going down on the hit, the keeper collapses the right leg. As the hip comes down and the right leg straightens, the keeper's body extends to the left.

When a keeper is laid out, make sure your body is vertically angled forward with your left hip and shoulder slightly in front of your right as you're down. Many keepers set up in the lean with their right foot slightly behind their left to ensure that their body won't be angled back as they go down. The last thing you want to be is a human ramp, deflecting the ball into the goal. The same applies to your stick. Make sure the toe of your stick is slightly forward so the shot doesn't deflect in. That may mean adjusting your grip as you set up for corners.



Once down and extended out, the keeper and post player effectively cover the bottom part of the goal.

Some keepers almost brace themselves with their stick in the lean position. This helps them get down more smoothly. You want to get your right hip and arm down and out as quickly as possible when dropping for the hit. By bracing yourself with the stick, you ease your drop as you go down. It's important not to get stuck on your right elbow. If you do, there will be a gap under your armpit. A keeper doesn't want to flop. Flopping usually happens when a keeper doesn't collapse his right leg, but pushes off of it as he goes down. If he does this, he ends up going up before he goes down. He'll have a hard time getting his legs extended and is usually still coming down when the shot is coming to goal.

Now that he's down, how does the keeper make a save in the logging position? Saving shots below the waist in a prone position is a fairly straightforward proposition for the keeper. Basically he is just letting the ball hit him. As we mentioned before, the keeper must have his left (top) hip slightly of his right (bottom) or the shot will deflect off of him, up and into the goal. The keeper needs to be consistent with what he does with his feet while down. If the keeper is pointing his toes down for extra length, he needs to do that all the time, otherwise he creates confusion (and deflections) for the post player. In almost all defences where a keeper is down, the post player is responsible for clearing saves off of the keeper's lower body. Shots above the prone keeper's waist present a different set of issues. As the keeper is down waiting for the shot at goal, he wants to keep his left hand at his chest. If the shot is between his waist and chest, the keeper wants to keep the ball as close to his body as possible. The easiest way to do that is to trap the shot, almost patting the ball palm down with his left hand. Depending on the defence a team plays, the keeper may be responsible for clearing these shots. If clearing for himself, the keeper is using his stick, taking his left hand off the ball and sweeping the ball to his left with his stick. If a keeper is clearing for himself, he needs to call it, otherwise he risks hitting the post player with his clear, or just as bad, the two going for the same ball. As for shots that are above the keeper's chest in a prone position, much will depend on the height of the shot. Shots on the ground are easier as they can be saved with the stick. The important thing with stick saves is the angle of your stick. Not only is it important that your stick isn't angled toe back, angling your stick back towards the end line can be most beneficial. You don't want to deflect the shot into the goal, but if you can put it out of play you're looking at a long hit, not a fat, juicy rebound.



Taken from an angle, this photo illustrates angling the stick back to save the shot over the endline.

Two areas present a problem: the area under the keeper's right arm and balls above the stick. Don't think that because you're stretched out with your side flat, a ball hit at your right armpit will stop when it hits you. Unless you can dislocate your right arm, there's always going to be a gap there when you go down. The other bit of nastiness is that there is no padding under your arm. Use your left hand to cover the gap. You also want to use your left hand to make saves above your stick. Just as you want to angle your stick back when making save on the ground to that side, you make your job easier by angling your palm towards the side/end line when making a save with your left hand. Once again, there is a bonus to setting up with your right foot slightly behind your left when setting up in the lean, your body is already angled back towards the end line when you're stretched out for the save. A keeper is going to need help with rebounds off shots above his chest when he's down. Many defences keep a player low off to the keeper's right specifically for that reason. Like rebounds off the keeper's lower body, there has to be a clear understanding of who is clearing rebounds off the keeper's hands. In penalty corner defence, confusion equals goals. We've talked about a lot of concepts and mechanics within the skill in this tip. All of them need to be mastered if logging is going to be effective. Footwork needs to be practiced. Set up, positioning, the lean, getting down, the save and clear all need to be done in synch before you can expect to successfully log in games. As mentioned before, success comes with repetition. Make sure your penalty corner defence practice allows you an environment to learn and master the technique.



Practicing logging. Going down on the strike.

Penalty Corners

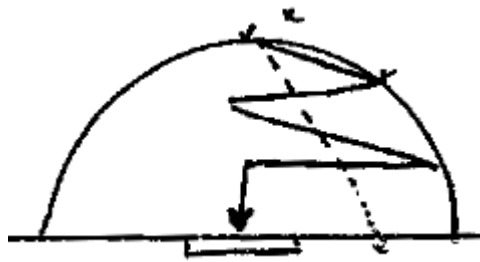
By Rachel Durdin

The defence of a Penalty Corner can never be taken too seriously. The focus that a Goal Keeper (and every defending player) must have during a Penalty Corner is extremely great.

Being calm and keeping your defence calm is vitally important. If the tension level of one player is too high, you can almost be sure that your opponents will score. Some

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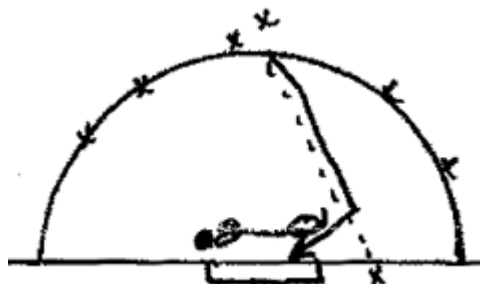
Goal Keepers prefer to get hyped up, perhaps trying to focus, however I personally find that being calm and focused is the best way to successfully defend a Penalty Corner.



With no offside it is especially crucial that you are focused on everything that is going on around you. Players may come in behind you for the tip in and the movement of the ball around the circle will be made easier for attacking players. Thus leading to an increase of difficulty for all of the defence (not just the Goal Keeper).

General Points to be Conscious of During Penalty Corners:

- Be calm and focused
- Be aware of the attackers movements
- Be quick and agile (able to change direction quickly)
- Be strong (able to get up quickly after going to ground)
- Be decisive (follow through on your decisions)



How to Defend a Penalty Corner

There are two main ways to defend an Penalty Corner:

- Laying Down
- Standing Up

I personally lie down on Penalty Corners for the direct hit. What ever you do on a Penalty Corner is extremely personal. This the information that I am about to give you is only a guideline to lying down on a Penalty Corner. I have included five basic steps to help you get an understanding of how to lie down on a Penalty Corner.

Step 1:

Move quickly (i.e. sprint/power) off the line 2-4 steps when the ball is hit in.

Step 2:

Set yourself lowering one leg (bending one knee). I keep my knee above the ground

to allow easier push off to save the high ball. Thus I am not set in a grounded position.

Step 3:

When the ball is hit shoot the legs and arms out moving towards the ground. It is important to keep the pelvic region in line with the penalty spot.

Step 4:

Lie flat on the ground keeping all body parts as close to the surface as possible and parallel to the goal line.

Note the arrows pointing to two trouble spots. Make sure these areas are on the ground and there is no gap.



Step 5:

Get up the easiest and quickest way possible. It is vitally important that once you have returned to your feet that you are stable and ready to react quickly to the next shot.

Penalty Strokes

By Jon O'hair

I am often asked questions like the following: Can you please send me information on strokes. I am a goal keeper and had a stroke against me on Wednesday and I missed it. I think it was probably because I didn't dive but rather reached out for it with my leg. How do I know when to dive or how, and how do I read them so that I can at least dive in the right direction. Can you also tell me how to build up my confidence on diving so that I can dive correctly.

Penalty strokes, mention the words and depending on your experiences, you either love them or hate them. You either won the game or lost it, all on the whim of an umpire and the push of the ball. It's never that simple, and neither are strokes. Penalty strokes are a part of the game and a keeper has to deal with them. The problem is how. For most questions there are absolute answers. Penalty strokes are one of the least absolute parts of the game, especially when it comes to how to deal with them. For every absolute, I can think of a dozen exceptions.

First off, there is no one way to deal with strokes and the more information you can assemble, the more tools you have for dealing with them. Rachel has a tip on penalty strokes and it has a lot of relevant information. In our tips, we share experiences as players and coaches. You have your own experiences and the opportunity to learn from the keepers you play against and the stokers you've faced. Take advantage of them all to develop the best plan for you.

These are some of the tools I've used to try to be successful with penalty strokes. Note the word "try." A penalty stroke is a severe penalty awarded for an intentional foul inside the circle or a foul that prevents a certain goal. The penalty is not designed to give the fouled team a good chance to score. It's designed to give them an excellent chance to score. A well taken penalty stroke should go in. Having said that, not every penalty stroke is well taken and even the well taken stroke can be saved.

Knowledge is a tool and dealing with penalty strokes starts with knowing the rules and procedures for the taking of a stroke. The penalty stroke is a flick or push taken from seven yards away from the goal. The stoker is allowed one step to take the stroke. The stoker must start with both feet behind the stroke mark when setting up to take the stroke. The player may not hit, slap or drag-flick the ball. The drag flick modification is a recent change in response to players slinging the ball in closer than seven yards when they release the ball off their stick. The stoker may only touch the ball once while taking their stroke.

Proper procedure calls for the umpire to "confirm" that stoker and keeper are ready. The check can be verbal or simple visual contact. If for some reason, you're not "ready" when the stroke is about to be taken, make sure the umpire knows it by saying "no," or raising your hand. Umpires are not sympathetic to time-wasting, but there are legitimate reasons to step off the line. Once it's established both keeper and stoker are ready, the umpire will blow the whistle for the stroke to be taken. The stoker does not have to take the stroke as soon as the whistle is blown, but there can not be an excessive delay between the whistle and the stroke.

Rules that pertain to the keeper are that the keeper must stand on the goal line until the stroke is taken. Standing on the goal line is interpreted as the keeper having a

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portion of his or her foot on or above the plane of the goal line. That means a keeper doesn't need to stand with their toes on the goal line, he can stand with his weight on the balls of his feet slightly in front of the goal line as long as his heels are along the plane of the goal line. That's an important distinction because it allows the keeper to cut down some angle as he extends to the sides to make a save. The keeper may not move his feet, but he doesn't have to be motionless when the stroke is taken. The keeper can rock, shift his weight or move his hands while waiting for the stroke to be taken, as long as he doesn't move his feet.

If the stroker violates any part of the procedure for a stroke, a 16-yard hit is awarded. Typical violations for the stroker are taking two steps on the stroke, making two touches while taking the stroke or taking the stroke before the whistle is blown. If a keeper commits a violation, a goal is awarded. The biggest violation for keepers is moving before the stroke is taken. If you have any questions about the procedures for how a stroke is to be taken, make sure you ask the umpire before getting in the goal before the stroke is taken.

While you don't want to get in the routine of giving up strokes, having a routine for strokes is a good idea. Once a stroke is called, as a keeper it's important to detach yourself from what's just happened and get ready for what's coming next. Mentally, that may be something as simple as stepping out of the goal for a second while the stroke is being set up and focusing your thoughts. Time is stopped for a penalty stroke so there's no need to race into the goal.

In years past some keepers used the time stoppage for the stroke to put pressure on the stroker. They took their helmet off, removed their hand protectors and loosened and tightened a strap that was already fine, all in the name of "icing" a stroker. The rules don't allow this anymore and the penalty can be a goal or a card. A keeper doesn't want to take a stroke if he's got a loose strap, and if you've got sweat in your eyes, by all means wipe your brow, but these shouldn't be a part of your routine. My routine took maybe ten seconds and it was done while the stroke was being set up. I stepped out of the goal, took a couple of seconds to stretch and to mentally focus on the job at hand and got back in the goal ready to save the stroke.

There is a mental component to saving strokes and a lot of it comes from having confidence in your ability to save a push or flick from seven yards from goal. If you don't believe you will save a stroke, you won't. That's not to say that you'll save every stroke, but you need to believe in your ability to save the shot. A stroker knows when a keeper believes in himself. He sees it in your stance, he sees it in your eyes and he sees it in how you step up for the stroke. A keeper's routine and approach to the stroke have to be natural. You have to believe in what you're doing. A stroker can tell the difference between a keeper standing in goal and a keeper set to save a stroke.

We've talked a little about where to stand on the goal line when setting up for the stroke (heels above the goal line), but once you get past that there are different philosophies on stances for saving a stroke. The best stance for you will depend on the level you play at, your size and your reaction time. There is a big difference between the strokes taken in an Olympic final stroke off and what you might see at an under-12 game. How you stand is influenced by what you're expecting.

As a keeper, while I believed that I could save any stroke, my primary goal was to save the savable. As I mentioned before, well taken strokes should go in. The stroke I don't want to allow is the poorly taken one. Saving the savable should keep a

keeper in a stance fairly close to his normal ready position. Typically, that's with your feet shoulder width apart so you can explode to either side, with your weight on the balls of your feet, knees and waist slightly bent. You want to be in a position that allows you the best opportunity to react to any shot at goal.



A stance for strokes, weight and hands forward, the keeper is ready to explode to the ball.

Stance will effect how a keeper can save a ball and going back to philosophies, it's a matter of what you're trying to save. Many keepers ask whether it is better to dive or go with their legs to make saves on low shots to the corners. How you set up in your stance will dictate the save you can make. I found I was most effective saving strokes by playing in a compact, explosive stance. The stance allowed me to dive down and out to get to shots to the low corners. I had the size and reactions to be able to get to the high corners.

I play with my hands very forward in my ready position. I find that having my hands forward and somewhat close together helps me with diving because my weight is forward. I'm looking to go to the ball with my hands, even shots to the low corners. My goal is to attack the ball and get out to the stroke. By trying to make the save as early as possible, I take away angle as I extend to the side. That means I don't have to get as wide and lessens the chance of the stroke hitting me and deflecting in (particularly with my stick).

The distance between your feet in your stance will also dictate how you can react to the ball. Keepers with their feet close together often fall to the ball as they don't have a base to push off to the ball. Keepers with their feet very wide usually end up flopping to the ball. Either way, these keepers usually end up diving to balls in the corners. If they're successful saving, there's nothing wrong with the stance.

Another school of thought has that the keeper should look to make himself big. He'll carry his arms out in a fairly upright stance trying to fill as much of the goal as he can. At higher levels of play, particularly with strokers who can stroke hard and high, this can be an effective tactic. In this stance, the keeper is looking to reduce the distance he has to react to the shot because he's made himself big. The keeper is basically looking to drop to get to shots to the low corners and stepping to reach shots to the high corners.



The keeper making themselves big, hands are outside the body.

A big part of saving strokes is knowing how you can save a shot when it's taken to a particular spot on goal. That comes from repetition. Strokes low to a keeper's right can be saved with a foot or a stick, low to the left can be saved with a hand or a foot, high right with a stick or a hand, etc. For younger keepers, it's often useful to train by having them save strokes where they know where the ball is going. They need to learn the mechanics of saving, whether that's by reaching with their legs or diving. Until a keeper makes a save on a stroke, they don't know which way is best for them. By training with strokes taken to a known spot, the keeper is provided with that opportunity and is allowed to train the reaction.



A diving save to the keeper's left



A stick save, low to the keeper's right



A stick save, high to the keeper's right

As I mentioned, what stance is best for you will depend on the stokers you face, your size and speed. A smaller keeper physically can't get to low shots to the corners with his legs, he's going to dive which is going to require an explosive stance. A slower keeper won't have the reactions to be as explosive and will have to make himself big. There is room for variation within the stance. It isn't one or the other. A keeper develops the stance that works for them based on experience and experience means trying different things.

Prepare for frustration when you're trying new things with stance on strokes. For many keepers, strokes are uncomfortable to start off with. I can't count the number of times I've seen a keeper go back to their old ways after trying a new stance for a whopping three strokes in practice. Be prepared to try something for a month, for a hundred strokes, for as long as it takes to get comfortable with it and then make an evaluation based on fact, not feel.

As a coach, there are a number of things to consider when training for strokes. Is the training for the keeper, or the stoker? When training a keeper for strokes, part of the training is building confidence. Confidence comes with saves and success, something most stokers don't want to give a keeper. Fatigue and frustration can also affect a keeper's confidence. Have a plan for what you want and how you're going to get it. Also be prepared to have a back up plan if practice becomes negative.

Finally, a note on "guessing" on strokes; a keeper should avoid guessing on strokes. I might anticipate where a stoker is going, but I need to base that anticipation on prior knowledge. At higher levels of play, scouting is an important part of game preparation. It entails having knowledge of who an opponent's stokers are, how they set up and where they shoot. I may set up differently if I know where a stoker goes. I may anticipate where they shoot, but I still need to react to the ball. Just as you might have information on a stoker, he's just as likely to have information on your tendencies.

I hear keeper's say that if a stoker looks one way, or sets their feet up a certain way, he'll shoot to this spot. For every one of these certain cues, I've seen a stoker go a completely different place. Nothing is more disheartening to a team than to have a stoker push the ball in the middle of the goal as you're diving to the corner. My experience has been that when I focused on the ball and not the stoker, I had the most success saving the stroke.

Like any goal shot, great strokes will go in, average strokes shouldn't. As keepers we don't like to concede anything, but if we take the approach that we're going to save the savable we go a long way to making strokes more manageable. Penalty strokes are nothing more than a push from seven yards. Practice them, get comfortable with them and deal with them.

Penalty Strokes

By Rachel Durdin

When the umpires whistle blows and their arms go in different directions most goal keepers cringe with the thought of having to save a penalty stroke. Usually because we all know the umpire is wrong. But no matter how much we complain it is a fact of life that the umpire always thinks they are right and will not reverse their decision. "Bring on the third umpire" are thoughts that often go through my head.

Defending a Penalty Stroke can be a very daunting thing. Generally everyone is sure that the ball is going to go into the back of the net, except for the keeper. There are a number of things that a keeper can do to prepare for a stroke:

- Research
- Reflex work
- Practice
- Mental rehearsal

- Relax and set
- Focus on the ball
- Save the ball

Research:

To make ourselves better prepared to save a penalty stroke it is important that all that can be done before the game is done. Researching players who take strokes can never be done enough. Kath Partridge (one of the worlds greatest goal keepers, dual Australian Olympian, now coach) introduced me to a very easy way of keeping a journal of players taking strokes. All it includes in it is a picture of a goal and the position that the player flicks the ball. Following this you are to note the number and name of the player taking the stroke.

Reflex work:

Reflex training is an exceptional way to improve our ability to save a penalty stroke, seeing the majority of penalty strokes are saved by our reflexes. This is easily done by having balls lined up at the 7 yard spot in groups of about 10. The next step is to get someone to continually flick the balls at you, not giving you enough time to see the action of the flicker but only the movement of the next ball. This is designed to get you moving in all different directions and not thinking too much about where the ball is going. This can also be done very effectively with a bucket of tennis balls.

Practice:

If you never practice penalty strokes how can you be expected to save any. I myself hate practising penalty strokes and sometimes do anything to get out of it. You need to make it fun and challenging for yourself, (or the keeper you are coaching) to feel positive about it. Sometimes I get the stroke takers to tell me where they are going to put the ball. This helps getting the keeper used to moving and diving at the ball. It always makes it a more positive experience for the keeper. Another good idea is too play minor games and when an infringement occurs in the circle award a stroke. The more you practice the better you will get.

Mental rehearsal:

Before each stroke I mentally rehearse making up to 10 saves. This process takes around 3-4 seconds to complete. The saves that I rehearse include 3 on the right side, 3 on the left side and 3 in the middle of the goal. On each side I am seeing myself saving a high ball, a low ball and a ball in the middle region. I believe that this is invaluable for me.

Relax and set:

Similar to my personal golfing strategy, I like to relax before each stroke. For me this is a simple breathing exercise. I fill my lungs with fresh air and then exhale slowly. This relaxes my shoulders and clears my head of thoughts that might be clouding my ability to save strokes. This helps me set in a position that I can easily explode to make saves. For you this position may be different, for me I am set slightly on my toes with my body weight forward, hands up and not tense at all.

Focus on the ball:

Focusing on the ball is an essential element in saving a stroke. Players today can do all sorts of things with their sticks, thus making it very hard to read where the ball is going. I focus on the ball and not on the stick thus bringing into effect all the work I have done on my reflexes. Focusing on the ball does not mean looking at the ball but actually focusing on the dimples in the ball so that it is the only thing that you see and your mind is not wandering from the task at hand — *saving the ball*.

Save the ball:

Hmmm.....This should be easy. Let me know how you go.

Please use these tips as a guide only and use what works for you. Many people have said things to me over the last 12 years, I have taken some on board and others have been disregarded.

TRAINING

Training Drills

By Rachel Durdin

After numerous questions over the last month I have decided to do a section on training drills. Training a goalkeeper or being a goalkeeper can sometimes be challenging to think of new drills to do at training so I am going to try to assist you.

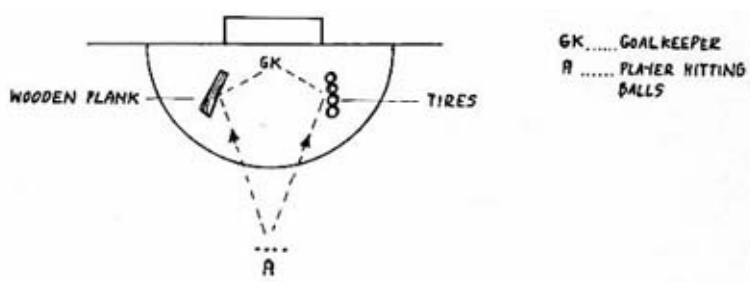
One of the most important things that you need to do to keep variety is to make sure that you are creative and if you have a mental block for new ideas, you need to ask other coaches and players for some of their ideas.

The following drills are to be done with goalkeepers in individual session or small group sessions. This often helps when you need to watch what a player is doing or just need a help with drills that involve more than one person to get the best out of the goalkeeper.

Drill 1: Reflex Work

The balls need to be at the top of the circle, have a hitter hitting the balls at the tyres or wooden boards on an angle so that the ball comes off in a different direction.

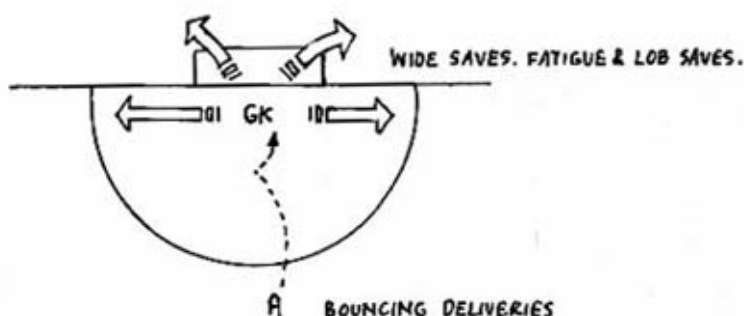
Objectives of this drill are: Make the save. Try to clear the 1st save wide. Clear the ball wide if not on 1st save.



Drill 2: Wide Clearances, Fatigue and High Lobs

Coach or player is at the top of the circle with a heap of balls. The balls are thrown in bouncing no higher than knee height. Balls should be at the goalkeeper and slightly wider.

The objective is for the goalkeeper to become fatigued and make quality hard saves clearing the ball wide.



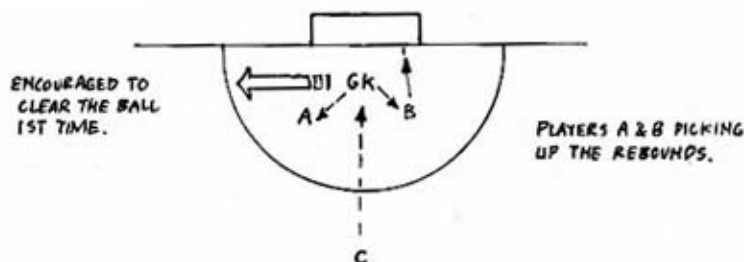
Setting up in the same way you can also practice saving high balls that have been flicked on corners or in general play.

Objective: Keeper needs to get back as quick as possible and when making the save if the ball is high enough get it back over the net.

Drill 3: Rebounding

The balls are hit in towards the goalkeeper. Two players are set near the keeper picking up any rebounds, playing the ball out until it is out of play. The coach / hitter may also lob balls in slowly so that the keeper is forced to make a save or meet the ball before the player does.

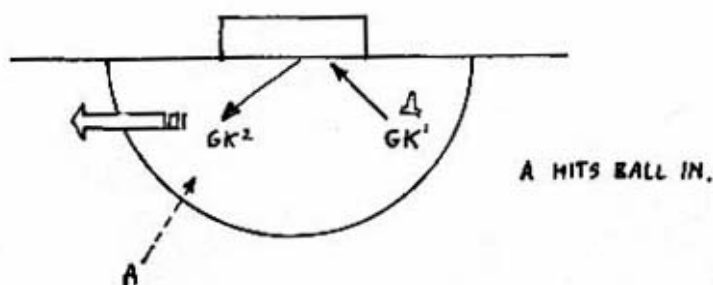
This drill will help making the second and third save if necessary. Players are encouraged to clear the ball wide and strong on the first save.



Drill 4: Making a Hard Shot Save after Quick Movement

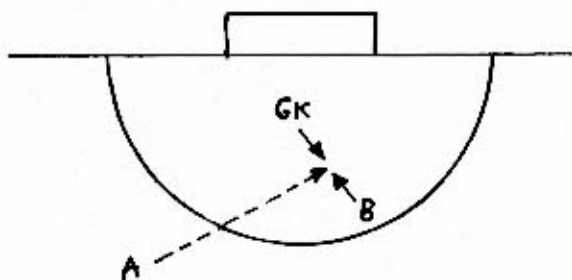
The coach / player calls "go" and the keeper leaves the cone to sprint across, set and make the save. This drill needs to be done with a walk back recovery.

Objective: To get across the goal as quick as possible and make a good quality save with a wide clearance.



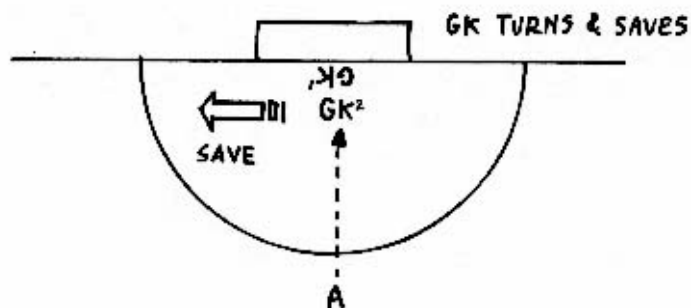
Drill 5: Interceptions

The coach / player passes the ball into the circle in-between the keeper and the player. The goalkeeper is required to try and beat the player to the ball and clear it, or meet the player as they are receiving the ball. This is directly related to being an attacking keeper and making life difficult for your opponents. Again a walk back recovery.



Drill 6 : Turn and Save

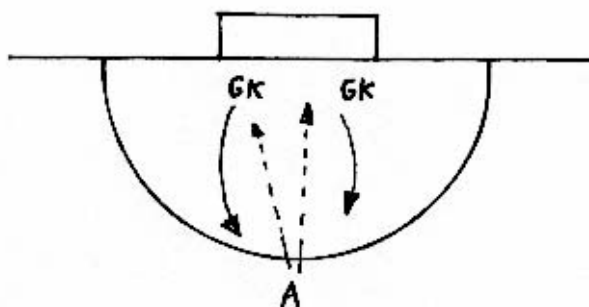
This drill is very straight forward. The keeper stands facing the net with their back to the top of the circle. When the coach / player calls "go" the keeper turns quickly and makes a reflex save. Balls can be pushed, flicked or hit.



Drill 7: Warming up two Keepers

To many times coaches are faced with warming up more than one keeper. As a keeper I appreciate how boring it is to kick balls at each other, so I thought I would share an idea of one of my coaches, Kath Partridge.

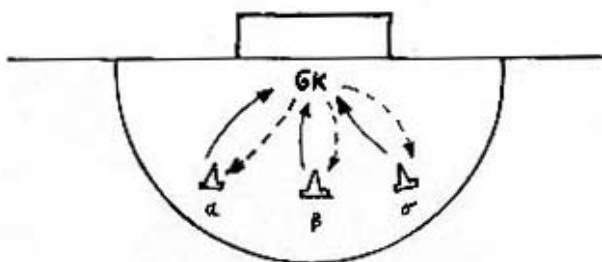
Both keepers stand in the goal, closer to the post than the penalty spot. When the keepers receive the ball they put it back to the hitter. Communication is vital during this drill, as you don't want to have keepers going for the same ball. After a few minutes you may suggest to the keepers that they swap sides.



Drill 8: Repetition Sliding

The keepers starts in the middle of the goal and sprints and slides into A, gets up quickly and sprints backwards to goal line, this is then repeated to B and C. This is very taxing and it is a good idea to give generous recovery time so that the maximum benefit can be achieved.

If the keeper is having trouble sliding at cones, get a player to be moving to the spot of the cone so it is a little more realistic.



Good luck with the drills and remember that you need to be creative when thinking about drills. I hope that you get some ideas from these and share them with other keepers and coaches. If you have a good drill that is a little different please let me know as I am always after new drills.

Kicking Drills

By Jon O'haire

When you're working on skills, it's important that you isolate them so that you can evaluate technique and success. Skill work is different than situation work. When I work with keepers in situation drills, there are a number of skills they can use in a situation and be successful. When we work on skills, we're focusing on specific form and results. Any time you work on skills, there are a couple of things to keep in mind. You refine skills with consistent, quality, repetition. Consistent means that you're giving a



Practising kicking without a ball machine.

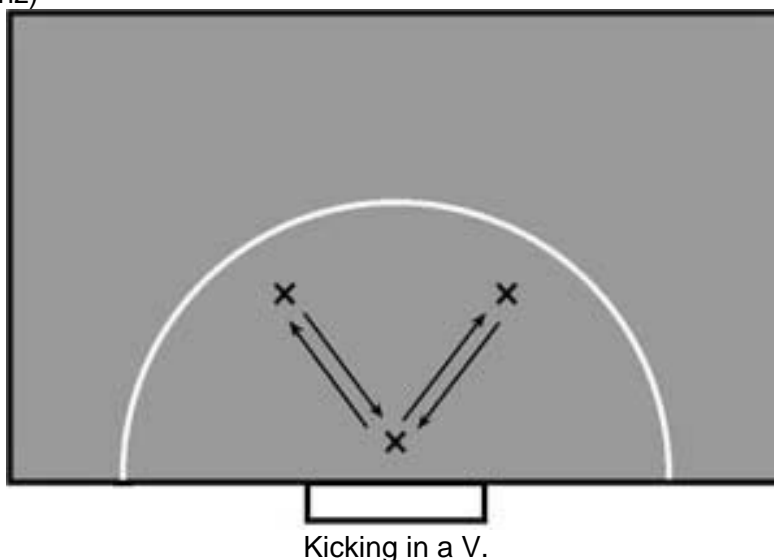
keeper the opportunity to play the same type of ball more than once. Ball machines are the best way for a keeper to be exposed to the same type of ball, but they're not something that is available to every coach or keeper. If you don't have a ball machine, you need the next best thing, human simulation. When you're working on kicking skills, the next best thing is someone who can hit a level ball on the ground to a location over and over again. If you can't find someone who can hit with accuracy, a push will have to do. Quality infers a lot of things. First is the quality of the surface that you're training on. It makes no sense to worry about the consistency of the type of ball serviced to the keeper to play when the surface you're training on makes every ball along the ground an adventure. Obviously, we're talking about grass here. If you must train on grass, make sure the area you're working on is as level as you can find. This is essential for kicking. This may mean that you work on kicking outside of the goal area (usually the most worn spot on a grass pitch). If your grass field is particularly rural, tennis courts or indoor gyms are excellent alternatives. To ensure quality in repetitions, limit the number of repetitions in a set of the drill. In addition, allow the keeper time to recover into a ready position and allow sufficient rest time between sets. When you plan your practice drills, take in to consideration the fitness level of your keepers. If your keepers can't do ten repetitions of a skill to a set without the skill breaking down, adjust the number of reps to your sets until his or her fitness improves. Fitness drills are different then skill drills. Now for the drills... One of the most basic kicking drills for keepers is kicking in pairs. Typically, this is the way I like to warm up for games and practice. Once I've warmed up, stretched and padded up, I'll take another keeper and work on instep kicking over ten yards. As we start to warm up, I'll focus on moving to the ball so that I'm pushing off my plant leg and leading with my head when I make contact with my kicking leg. I focus on opening up and following through to my target. I'm specific with my target. I'm not just kicking at a keeper;



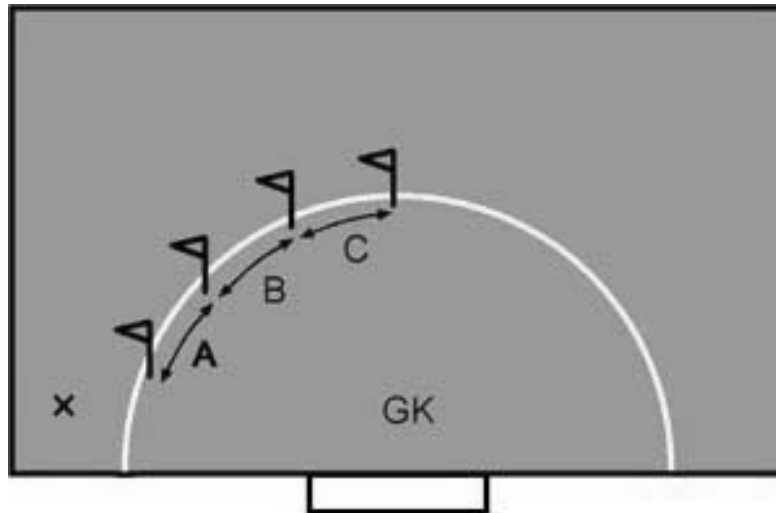
Note how the keeper is pushing off with his plant leg and leading with his head.

I'm kicking to his left or right foot. I don't want to have him move to get my kick, this is a warm up. How do I turn this into a drill? Exercises become drills when you can quantify skills. For beginning keepers, give them five minutes to see how many consecutive kicks they can put together. As keepers become more advanced, have the keeper who kicks call the foot the next keeper has to kick with. You can also modify the drill, where the keeper is calling the foot the other keeper has to kick to. Once keepers have warmed up, the next extension is to extend the distance they're kicking to 25 yards. Once again, the same variations can apply, calling a foot to kick with or to. Kicking in pairs is good for instep kicking back to where a ball came from. In game situations, that can be problematic as you want to change the direction the ball came from. An easy way of remedying that situation is to add a third keeper to the kicking pair. With a third keeper, keepers now have to change the angle of their clear as they kick. This way they can work on crossover clears as well as instep kicks to change the angle of the ball. Usually, I'll have keepers working in threes, kick in a V shape as opposed to a triangle. Keepers kicking in triangles can have a hard time keeping the ball in play long enough to get the number of repetitions needed for the drill to be productive. Having said that, it is physically possible for more skilled keepers to kick in a triangle and that way they all have to work on changing the angle of the ball.

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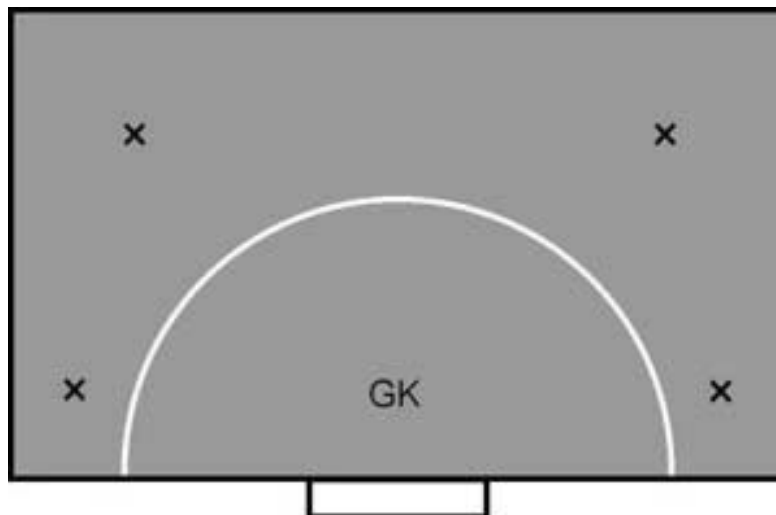


It's important that you have keepers practice kicking balls from where they'll come in a game. If you want a keeper to work on coming up to clear crosses from the sides, start the ball from the wing, not at the edge of the circle. If you have a ball machine, set it up out that wide, if not have a player hitting crosses from about five yards in from the sideline. Footwork is key in kicking. If I set balls up too close to a keeper, I don't reproduce the situation I want to incorporate in their game. I want my keeper to step up to the ball and clear accurately.



The gate set-up with the ball on the left, flip for right.

I like to give a keeper targets to clear to. We'll set up cones four yards apart so that there are two or three gates they can clear through around the edge of the circle. I emphasise clear through. If a ball doesn't leave the circle, it's likely to come back even faster. There are a number of ways to reinforce that point. As a positive reinforcer (good for beginning keepers), we keep score for a set of ten balls, with keeper's getting points for putting the ball through designated gates. To simulate game conditions, we'll put forwards in the gates that are the most dangerous rebound areas and let them play those clears back to goal (a somewhat more negative reinforcer). Angles that I like to focus on for clearing from are marked below.



Places to cross from.

There are a million variations of these types of drills as keepers become more competent. I can put a keeper under pressure by having a player come on to deflect cross balls or simply stand by the keeper. It's important to identify the skill you're trying to get out of a drill.



The gate set-up.

I can consider the drills I've explained kicking drills because they are designed for the skill I want from the keeper. When you put field players into these drills, you add variables, and it becomes harder to reinforce through consistent repetition the skill you'll get from the keeper. There's nothing wrong with that as long as you're dealing with a situation and a skill.

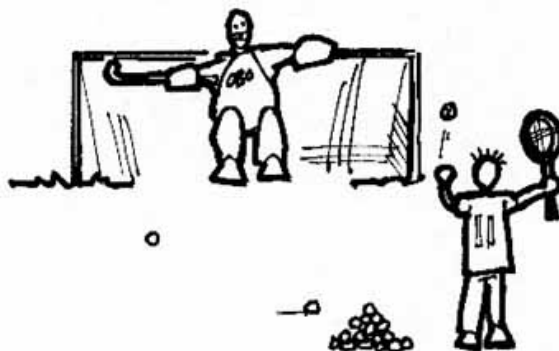
Reflex Training

By Rachel Durdin

One of the most important aspects of goal keeping is using your reflexes. Many great match winning saves are made simply using your reflexes. There are many different ways that you can improve on your reflexes which are included below.

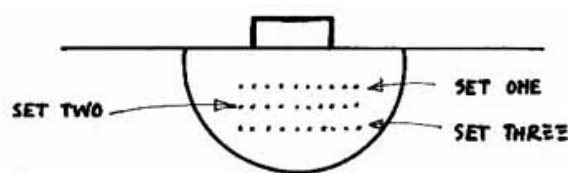
Tennis Balls

Tennis balls are a great way to get quicker reflexes. If you get someone to hit a bucket of balls at you with little time in-between each ball this will make your reaction time shorter. Tennis balls serve two purposes: firstly, if hit with a tennis racquet they fly faster than most hit balls; and secondly, if you get hit they don't hurt as much. (You may like to note that you can also do this with only your upper-body protection on.)



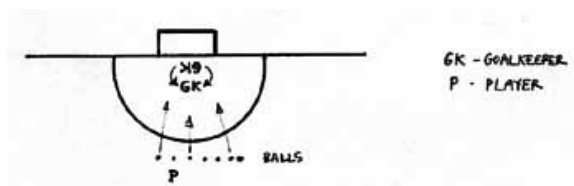
Hockey Balls

Lining up hockey balls and having them fired rapidly at you can work just as good as anything else. If you have sets of 10-12 balls this is usually enough to get the repetition that is required for improvement. Start with the balls around the 10 yard mark (flicking them) then gradually move them closer to the player.



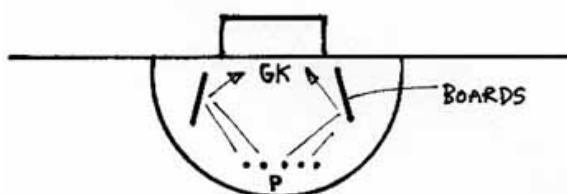
Turn and Save

Start with your back to the ball (hitter) when he/she says "turn", turn around and save the ball. They are to hit/push/flick/throw the ball as they say turn. Make sure that you turn different ways to get a balance of movement.



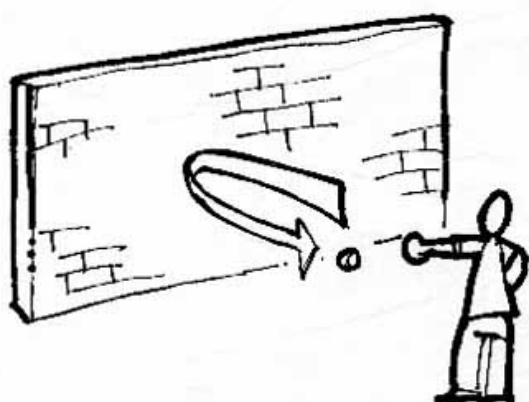
Hitting to Boards

If you can get some big wooden boards all you have to do is get someone to hit the ball to the board on an angle, making sure that the ball goes towards the net ensuring the keeper has to make a save. By doing this you are changing the angle that the ball is travelling thus once again improving your reaction time.



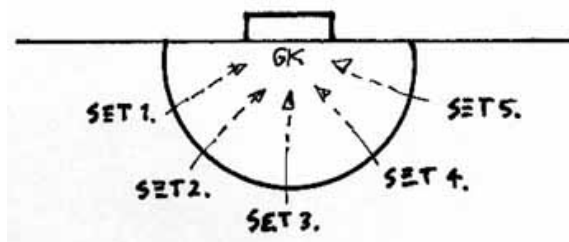
Golf Balls

Although I haven't done much of this you can use a golf ball by throwing it up against a wall and trying to catch it. This can be done by directly throwing the ball to the wall or doing a bounce throw. (Make sure there aren't any windows that you can break!)



On Angles

Don't forget to vary what you are doing with your reflex work. Many saves that need to be made during a game are on angles so don't forget to vary the angle that you are making the save on.



High and Low

When the balls are hit or flicked at you, remember to make sure that you are being made to save a variety of balls including high, low, wide and straight at you.

It is important to remember that you can be as creative as you like with all of your training. If you think it through and it is safe then give it a go and see if it works for you.

Young Goalies

By Jon O'haire

One of the most important factors in the development of a goalkeeper is getting good, basic instruction early. Too many times, the first specialised instruction a keeper receives is after he/she has been identified as an elite keeper.

Good, basic instruction isn't difficult. It requires a coach to have an understanding of the skills required of the position, a concept of what he wants the position played like and the ability to reinforce them. A keeper coach doesn't need to have been a keeper, they don't even need to be a keeper coach, he/she has to be an advocate for the position and is responsible for making sure that keepers have the opportunity to learn through supervised repetition.

Supervised repetition is the setting for what works best for your needs. Whether it be making 15 extra minutes to go to goal in a team training session or pulling eight local keepers together for a regional training weekend, it's the time you're working with keepers to work on specific situations or skills.

For the purposes of this tip, I just want to focus on coaching beginning keepers. I think it's important to identify as a team, and in some ways as a league/region how you want to develop keepers. In the ideal world, every team has a qualified keeper coach. Reality says it can be anyone including the team's one and only coach. Some leagues have been creative and arranged for a keeper coach to be shared among the league's teams. Whatever your scenario, my experience has been that you get the most success working with keepers by having a specific coach work with a group in controlled settings.

By controlled settings I mean drills where you can focus on specific skills, giving keepers the opportunity to practice and master skills. It all sounds rather dry, but it shouldn't. It's practice; and practice is games; and games are fun. Mastering skills should be fun. It takes a lot to create an environment where keepers are constantly motivated, but if you do that you win half the battle.

Going back to the fun/motivating stuff, I'll start with something not fun, but important. Make a list of all the skills that you want your keepers to have. That will be the foundation of getting what you want out of the experience as a coach. Turning the list in to drills isn't hard. Get a feeder, put balls repetitively in a place,

and give the keepers the opportunity to play those balls and voila, you have drills. Still doesn't quite sound like fun, though.

It's all in the presentation when it comes to drills. Footwork has to be fun, left footed instep clearing has to be fun, stick-side aerals have to be fun. Fun is greatly influenced by what and how actions are reinforced. By that, I mean a coach praising a desired quality/effort/execution in a natural, enthusiastic way, a la "great skill!"

Going back to beginning keepers, recognise that there are a variety of qualities to the position: flexibility, strength, agility and co-ordination are all required to execute skills. You have to coach them. You can do that with games and relays easily enough. Think of the footwork required as a ball travels around the circle and lay a course for the keepers to go through. You can turn it into a race by having the keepers run it for time, while still concentrating on form. You don't want to reinforce bad form. I have the hand/toss game that I have in one of the earlier tips. Make it a situation appropriate to keepers age/level. I think for beginning keepers it's important to make it a game.

As far as basic skills, I think it's crucial to emphasise from the first time a keeper puts pads on, the ball has to go some place; that the save is a save/clear. A good way of developing a skills inventory is to think of shots that can happen in a game, where they go in goal and where a keeper has to be able to clear them. Right-side balls with pace at hands and feet, left-side, balls with medium pace and all have to be cleared to left and right.

With a little imagination, that's the next phase for developing your curriculum. Put a feeder in with a bunch of balls, they have to put it at a spot, the keeper has to play it to a target. The target could be another keeper, it could be two cones, it could be a keeper defending two cones, it could be a field player, it could be anything, just reinforce the concept that the ball has to go somewhere. Getting there could take two skills. Make sure that keepers have the time and opportunity to finish a ball. Count how many times a keeper is able to hit the target. Move the targets, have them worth different points, there are a ton of extensions you can add on to a drill. Put rebounders in that the keeper has to clear through.

Quality and quantity are important when teaching skills. You don't want to have a keeper in a drill so long that they're tired and can't do anything but get hit. Groups of three or four work well as far as getting good repetitions and staying fresh. You can have them take five to ten balls and switch out, or recycle them so that they go one after the other.

Movement is important. Keepers need to be able to play shots from a static position and shots as they're moving. Footwork is critical in determining how a keeper can play a ball. How a keeper plays a ball is going to dictate what he can do next, i.e. recovery. A keeper needs to be able to play the second shot. When you think of all of these elements, there's a lot to reinforce.

It's important to use the resources available to you when working with beginning keepers. We might not have a ton of hockey balls, but we probably have a tennis racquet and a ton of balls, we probably have a soccer ball. Use these things. I like to use a size three soccer ball and just have keepers play the ball first time with their feet with just a stick in their hand. Have the keepers kick in a group and see how many kicks they can put together. Have them call the keeper they want to kick to.

Use your imagination. I think there are a million fun drills out there for the taking if we just use our minds. On a co-operative note, I think it's important to share ideas.

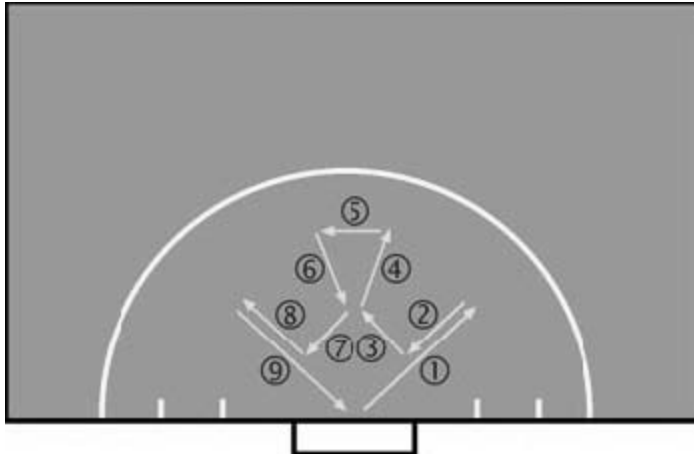
An important part of coaching keepers is identifying what motivates them. This is especially true with younger keepers. Some times it might be silly, but if it gets them to do what you want them to do, who's to argue.

I think coaching beginning keepers can be a very rewarding experience. You see them grow so quickly with structured attention. Hopefully that's something that's happening in your area and if not, maybe you could get it going!

Training Programs

By Jon O'haire

Last tip we talked a little about off-season conditioning and training. Since that time, I've gotten a lot of questions about specifics for a training program. They range from sprint workouts, to length of program to types of agility drills. First off, there is no perfect one size fits all training program for every keeper. The best program for you is the one that addresses your weaknesses and builds strengths. That will depend on each individual's athleticism. Having said that, there are general things you should look to build into your program at some level. In this tip, we'll plot out a sample program, and highlight some drill areas, especially agilities. Big time note here, this training program is hardly MY training program. It is a program I've compiled with lots of sources, thank you to all those who've shared ideas about training. It usually takes eight to ten weeks for a training period to be effective. You've got to be diligent if you expect any pay off. Get a journal and keep your training times. Monitor what you eat and how you feel before and after workouts. It's also good to keep track of your sleep time. A journal is a good way to build diligence in. I like to have phases to my training, phase one will be aerobic; longer runs, fitness, probably three weeks. Phase two will be interval type work, lots of agilities, another three weeks. Phase three is all short sharp stuff, lots of sprints and agilities, three weeks. In phase one, I'll look to keep my runs to about 30-35 minutes constant. I like to run every day (therapeutically), but while training, you should run every other day to allow for recovery. I have three types of run, I mix in. One is a timed 5k, with a proper warm up and warm down (five minutes each side). The other is a 35 minute fartlek where I'm really concentrating on discernible changes of pace and how long I can maintain them. The third type is a hill repeater, usually a 1km loop with a hill built in. Something where you'll have a consistent incline thrown in. In phase two, my running is over 800m, 400m and 200m. If I use three workouts again, I mix them from a group. In the beginning, I like 800s. They're not fun, but they're effective. I try not to do more than 3,200m total in making a workout and I've got to build in proper recovery time. Workout 1: 2 x 800m, 80%, 3 minute recovery, 2 x 400m, 100% 90 second recovery. Workout 2: 6 x 400m, 80%, 90 second recovery, 4 x 200m, 100%, 30 second recovery. Workout 3: 2 x 400m, 90%, 90 second recovery, 8 x 200m, 100%, 45 second recovery. Phase three is nothing more than a 100m at one time. I try to keep my workouts to no more than 2500m total. I'll build longer recovery time in between sets of a distance. Workout 1: 4 x 100, 80%, 15 second recovery, one minute recovery, 8 x 50m, 100%, 20 second recovery, two minute recovery, 10 x 25m, 100%, ten second recovery. Workout 2: 2 x 100, 80%, 15 second recovery, one minute recovery, 12 x 50m, 20 second recovery, two minute recovery, 12 x 25m, 100%, 10 second recovery. Workout 3: Use agility drills. And now on to agility drills. I talked a little bit about them in the last tip in terms of distances and guidelines for making your own drills. Here are a couple, I've begged/borrowed/made/fell into along the way. I like to build my agilities along lines I would move in the circle in sequences that sort of make sense as to what might happen in a game. I try to mix changes in direction in while trying to reinforce angles by moving around the circle. Below are diagrammed out two patterns I like to use (#7 and #5). I'll try to work the yardage out and build in proper recovery time. If I've got another keeper to run with, a good guideline is one second work, one second rest, so if an agility takes you 36 seconds, your rest is 36 seconds. You should have balance to your agilities, don't always go in the same direction.

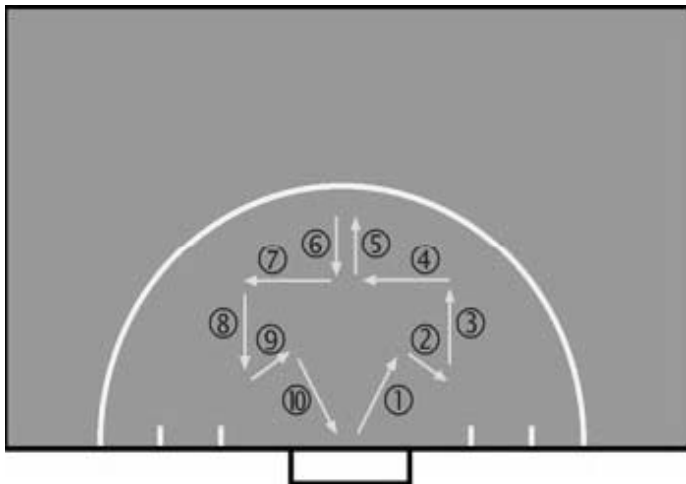


Forwards:

1. sprint forward (5 yards)
2. side shuffle (3 yards)
3. sprint forward (5 yards)
4. side shuffle (5 yards)
5. sprint forward (3 yards)
6. back pedal (3 yards)
7. side shuffle (5 yards)
8. back pedal (5 yards)
9. side shuffle (3 yards)
10. back pedal (5 yards)

Reverse:

10. sprint forwards (5 yards)
9. side shuffle (3 yards)
8. sprint forwards (5 yards)
7. side shuffle (5 yards)
6. sprint forwards (3 yards)
5. back pedal (3 yards)
4. side shuffle (5 yards)
3. back pedal (5 yards)
2. side shuffle (3 yards)
1. back pedal (5 yards)



Forwards:

1. sprint forward (8 yards)
2. back pedal (4 yards)
3. side shuffle (4 yards)
4. sprint forward (3 yards)
5. side shuffle (3 yards)
6. back pedal (3 yards)
7. side shuffle (4 yards)
8. sprint forward (4 yards)
9. back pedal (8 yards)

Reverse:

9. sprint forwards (3 yards)
8. back pedal (5 yards)
7. side shuffle (5 yards)
6. sprint forwards (3 yards)
5. side shuffle (3 yards)
4. back pedal (5 yards)
3. side shuffle (5 yards)
2. sprint forward (3 yards)
1. back pedal (5 yards)

I have a fun agility drill that I'll do with a partner. It takes a goal and a ball. I start on the goal line at the center of the goal, I start to side shuffle to a post, once I get near the post, my partner who is three yards off the line, tosses a ball towards that post. I catch with the hand closest to the post, toss it back immediately to the partner, and start to shuffle to the opposite post. As soon as I get to the post, the feeder tosses, I catch, toss and immediately shuffle back to the other post. I repeat the process. I'm focusing on a couple of things. Keeping in my ready position as I move, I try to keep my body stable (not bobbing up and down as I move), watching the ball all the way in to my hand, pushing off my opposite leg to change direction when I make a catch, these are all things I want to do. I'll do anywhere between 25 and 30 catches to a set. If I'm a feeder, I can mix up the level I'm throwing to so the catcher may have to jump to reach a ball. I can also do this drill so that the catcher has to come forward, catch, then back pedal, instead of going side to side.



Rachel also has a bunch of good agility drills in her tip. No one drill is the perfect drill for everyone. Create your own drills. The thing is, think about what you want to work on and find a way to do it. That's the shortest path to improvement.

Off Season Training

By Jon O'haire

To borrow a line from Shakespeare, "Now is the Winter of our discontent." For keepers in the Northern Hemisphere, Winter means snow, sleet and a break from outdoor hockey. For those in Southern Hemisphere, Summer and the heat provide the break. Wherever you are and whatever the time of year, at some point you're going to have a break in your hockey season (my source of discontent). As the holidays approach, I've received a lot of questions about off-season training programs and activities.

The longer you play and the higher the level, the more you'll find that what you do during that time will impact what your next playing experience is going to be like. Hockey has become a year-round sport and not all of that preparation comes in your

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playing season. At the international level, months and sometimes years are spent as a build-up to peaking for a two-week period. While your off-season preparation may not make the difference between Olympic Gold or also-ran, it can be the difference to in-season success.

What's appropriate as your off-season training program depends on a number of things; age, playing experience, fitness, athleticism, skill-level, weather, facilities, dreams and goals are all factors in determining what's the best off-season program for you. First off, please check Rachel's Tip on Off-Season Training. There's a lot of good information there. Second, there is no one right off-season training program for everyone. The best program for you, depends on you.

I want to reinforce a couple of things Rachel mentions. A training diary is critical if you're serious about improving your game. I've heard it said many times, if it's worth doing, it's worth writing about. Putting things down on paper reinforces accountability. It can make dreams real. I don't keep a diary, as much as I keep a journal. During the season I'll write down what we're working on in training, practice and games. I'll track my strengths and weaknesses, things like how I feel and what I'm doing. At the end of the season, I'll look back at the journal and use it to plan my off-season program.

It's a good idea to work with your coach when you plan your off-season program. By working with your coach, you gain a couple of things. You find out what your coach thinks of your game, you get feedback on what to work on and you get a better picture of what your coach wants from the position. In developing your program, use all the available resources to you, especially when it comes to experts outside the sport.

As a coach, I won't pretend to be an expert on a lot of things that contribute to success on the field (i.e. building strength and speed, increasing aerobic capacity, etc.), but as a player, I was good at finding people who were and using their insights. If you want to get faster, find a track coach; stronger, find a strength coach; and so on and so on. If you can't find a person, find a book. The more information I had, the better. After all that, go back to your coach. It's important to prioritize what you want to accomplish in the off-season. Some goals can not be met in eight weeks.

Now (finally), about training programs.

I'm a big fan of aerobic activities in the off-season and as much as most keepers play goals because they hate running, I think running is important. As a player, we always had to do the same fitness tests the field players did in selections. At least one of those tests was an aerobic test, whether it was a five-minute run, a twelve-minute run, a timed five-mile or 5km run. Nothing did more to hurt my confidence, or perception on the team, than to finish last in those runs. I don't know that the ability to run 1500 meters in five minutes made me a better keeper, but it made me a better athlete.

There are a wide variety of aerobic activities that are excellent for building endurance. Swimming, roller-blading, cycling and jumping rope are all good activities. How long and how hard you do these activities will obviously depend on things like age and your starting fitness. As a general guideline, aerobic means more than fifteen minutes of continuous activity. If you bike or blade and are stopping every other block, it no longer constitutes an aerobic event. In the off-season, I like to fit in two or three aerobic workouts a week.

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Speed work is important. The further away from the start of the season I am, the more I try to focus on sprint work at longer distances. Sprint work is any distance shorter than 400 meters. As I get closer to the start of my season, I'll move to shorter distances. Once again, things like distances, repetitions and recovery time between sprints will vary from keeper to keeper.

Agility is important. I can't just be straight line quick, I need to be able to change direction. Basketball and soccer are good sources for agility drills. I make up a lot of patterns built around movements inside the circle. I'll place anywhere from ten to twelve cones around the circle in different positions and incorporate the movements I'll use in the circle: forward, backward, side shuffle right, left, etc. I'll place them anywhere between three to ten meters apart and make keepers touch the cones to make things more dynamic. I won't do these things in pads, and I like to keep the drill so the total distance they'll do in a drill isn't more than 75 meters. Once again, distance, repetitions and recovery will depend on the keeper. I try to fit in two or three speed/agility workouts a week in during the off-season

Rachel makes a really good point about working out of pads in the off-season. I want to be excited when I get in to pads during the season. Having said that, depending where you are, indoor hockey might be an option. I highly recommend it for keepers. The number of touches, types of situations you face and decisions you have to make happen more frequently in the indoor game. A keeper can see more shots in three indoor games than he does in an entire outdoor season.

I think soccer is a great off-season activity, not as a keeper though. In earlier tips, I've mentioned the importance of kicking. Playing soccer in the field allows you to work on aerobic fitness as well as kicking.

I like to throw in reflex workouts/activities into my off-season also. Tennis or racquetball are good for working on eye-hand coordination. I mentioned that you make best use of the facilities you have available to you at the time of year. I've used racquetball courts to do soccer ball work. In the Summer months, I'll move my workouts to the beach. Be creative, make up games or drills.

Strength training has become a major part of all sport. Explosive leg strength is critical to goalkeeping. Hamstrings, quadriceps and calves are important muscles. Upper body strength is required for quick recovery. While a keeper doesn't need to be the Incredible Hulk, he does need to be able to lift his body weight. If you don't have access to weights, things like push-ups, pull-ups, squat thrusts and knee bends are good alternate exercises.

Anytime you workout, it's important that you warm up. Warming up means, a short jog, followed by a complete stretch. By the same token, following your workout, it's important to warm down and stretch.

Finally, one important thing about an off-season training program, take some time to do nothing. Rest is important. Burnout is a real problem in sport. Too many times I see keepers go straight from their outdoor season, right in to an indoor season and all the rigors of training full time for both. Your body and mind need a break.

Some things need to be done just to have fun. Recognize that. When you're doing a fun workout, keep it fun, but know that it's different than a hard workout. Hard

workouts aren't always fun. There's the need for both the hard and the fun and good off-season training programs capitalize on them.

Off Season Training (2)

By Rachel Durdin

Please note that I am not a qualified expert in this area and all that I have written is on my own previous experiences. Many people play all year round both indoor and outdoor, but for some that don't play all year round there is a time out period generally called the off season.

Training during the off season doesn't have to include putting your gear on. For me I find it better not to put my gear on, assuring that I will be fresh for the coming season.

The tendency to stop training during this time is sometimes overwhelming but the goalkeeper who is committed to bettering their game will continue to train during this valuable time.

The value of the off season can never be underestimated. Getting stronger, fitter and faster is something that is best done in this period. As we all know, a goalkeeper needs to have a high level of concentration throughout the whole game. This can be helped tremendously over the off season.

The Whole Approach:

What do we work on?

- Strength
- Aerobic fitness
- Speed
- Agility
- Variety

Strength Training

This should be done in consultation with a fitness trainer or strength and conditioning coach. Some exercises that are good for improving general strength are:

- Squats
- Bench press
- Lateral pull down
- Sit ups
- Biceps curls
- Leg press
- Leg curls
- Leg extension

A basic guideline is that you should do 3 sets of each exercise with 8-12 repetitions in each set. Please remember that it is also good to have a break between each set generally 2 times as long as it takes to do the exercise.

Aerobic Fitness

Aerobic fitness is something that not all people enjoy doing. Aerobic fitness can be done in many forms, from running to roller-blading. For goalkeepers it is important that you do have a level of fitness so that your concentration level is up to a satisfactory level that can help you sustain your focus for the whole 70 minutes.

Aerobic fitness doesn't need to be long and tedious, frequent sessions for a 20-30 minute duration should be sufficient to sustain and maintain aerobic fitness, if done at a reasonable pace (not a stroll in the park).

Speed and Agility

Speed and agility are two of the most important things a goalkeeper needs physically to be able to perform to their highest level.

Being a goal keeper, sprinting and quick changes of direction are things that we do in every game. Thus, this area should hold great importance to goal keepers and be reflected in your training sessions.

Recovery is an important aspect of doing sprints and agility. It is essential that you work out what you are actually doing it for, speed, agility or anaerobic fitness.

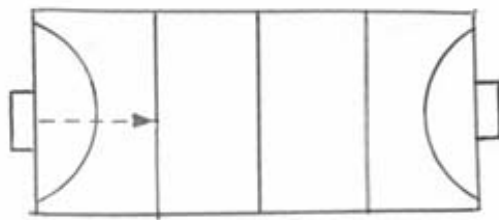
Speed = 2 minutes recovery

Agility = 2 minutes recovery

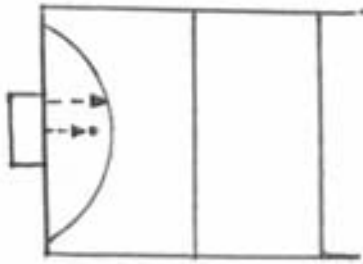
Anaerobic fitness = walk back recovery and start again

(Short sprints of no longer than 25 yards varying in distance.)

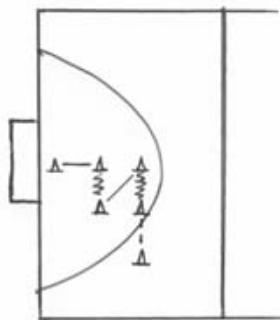
I have included some diagrams for your reference of example drills. I have been given some of these drills, but don't forget you can make your own up so that you have plenty of variety. Make sure if you are doing your own drills that you include forward, side ways, turning and backwards movements. Varying the distance - acceleration and deceleration are an important part of the game, so your body must be conditioned to cope with these. Lateral movement builds muscles for the many saves that don't require as simple forward movement.



Short sprints to the twenty five.

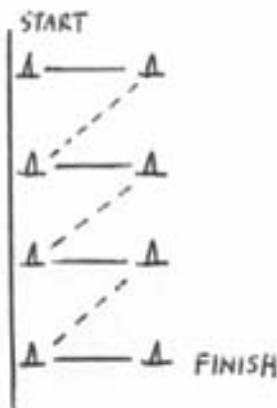


Varying the distance - acceleration and deceleration are an important part of the game, so your body must be conditioned to cope with these.

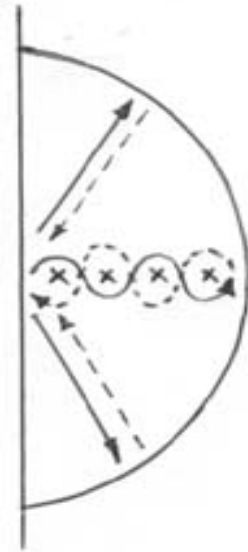


— FORWARD
 W W W SIDE STEP
 - - - BACKWARDS

Lateral movement bulds muscles for the many saves that don't require as simple forward movement.



More lateral movement.



This diagram describes running around in all sorts of directions

Variety

This is the essence of a good off season program. If you love running then you can go running every day, but for many of us variety is what keeps us going. Some examples of things that you can do include:

- Running
- Swimming
- Cycling
- Tennis
- Squash
- Roller Blading
- Canoeing
- Kayaking
- Rowing

...or anything that you can get your heart rate up for a sustainable period. I'm sure that some of you can become creative in this area.

Finally, keeping a diary of your activities is a good idea. It enables you to have an accurate record so that you can evaluate your performance in your personal program. This also helps you to see whether or not you need to increase or decrease your work load.

Good luck with it all and don't forget to consult your coach about a program for you during off season.

Goalies at Practice

By Rachel Durdin

As many of us know, training with the whole team can sometimes be a little tedious, especially when the coach does not include the goalkeeper in the sessions to the best of their ability. We have all been through sessions when all that is done is goal shooting. Don't get me wrong this is a good thing to do but it has a time and a place just like everything else.

There are ways to incorporate goal keepers into your training sessions which make the sessions more enjoyable for not only the keeper but the whole team.

The first step in this is to liaise with the goalkeeper or coach in your team making sure the requirements of your team and keeper are fulfilled. A happy keeper usually means a happy and successful team.

Getting the most out of a session is quite easy for a goalkeeper. If you treat each save as though it is a save in a game then you should get the maximum benefit out of your session. This is the easy part, complications set in when all that is done is continual goal shooting or sessions where the keeper doesn't touch the ball.

A quality training session should include:

- goal setting
- thorough physical warm-up
- thorough skills warm up
- shooting drill
- game like drills
- specific keeping skills

Goal setting

Setting goals for each session is extremely valuable and can not be over looked. If you go into a session and without planning, then it is likely that you will not get anything out of the training session. It can be something as simple as making sure your clearances are going wide and flat or making sure that your positioning is correct when meeting players during one on ones.

Thorough Physical Warm-up

Your warm-up should be as thorough as it is for a game. Start by doing laps, stretching and joint mobility exercises. This could then be followed by run throughs so that your legs are used to doing quick explosive exercises.

(Put your gear on)

Thorough Skills Warm Up and Shooting Drill

I start with balls in close and gradually move them out to the top of the circle. At the beginning of the first stage I kick the ball back at the person who is warming me up. This helps to get good accuracy. As the warm up progresses I tend to get the ball wider to practice wide clearances.

The next stage of the preparation is to sharpen my reflexes. I have the balls lined up around the penalty spot. The person who is warming me up then flicks and chips the balls at me one after the other, not giving me enough time to set for the next save.

This is followed by a team drill of rapid fire shots to sharpen my reflexes. It is important that you do not feel the need to stay in the goal for the whole time. If you are the only keeper at training then make sure you get adequate rest and recovery. Perhaps you could be in for 5 and then out for 5 shots as you would in a sharing situation.

Game like Drills

It is extremely important that a keeper and the team's coach both understand the importance of this. For the keeper, it is great practice for calling the defence. As someone once told me, if you don't get a touch all day you have done your job, simply by calling all of the right moves.

Drills that can be used are 3 on 2's, 4 on 2's and 1 on 1's. These drills are often used by coaches but sometimes are used too far away from the goal. For goal keepers these are most useful in the 25 yard area coming from all areas of the field. Defence versus the attack is also extremely valuable. This can be done starting outside the circle in a situation like a free hit. An important point is to have the attackers out numbering the defence.

Specific Keeping Skills

This is up to the individual to liaise with the coach on specific needs or concerns that you have. I think you need to be proactive in this area and make sure that you get what you want out of a session that you require for improvement.

Good luck with your training sessions and keep on enjoying your hockey.

Training on your own

By Jon O'hair

We receive a lot of questions about training on your own and training programs. I will always refer people to check the other information on this web site. Rachel and I both have covered a variety of issues on the topic. In addition, the subject is also covered in the previous Q&A section of the website. Having said all that, let's talk about it some more.

Having a training program means you're training for something. What that something is, is completely up to you. It can be to get better, to make a team, to kick better with your left foot, to win a tournament, a championship, the World Cup, whatever you want. It's a goal that means something to you.

It's important to set goals that are realistic, measurable and obtainable. It's great to want to win an Olympic Gold Medal, but to do that you have to make an Olympic team. That's not something everyone can do. Anyone can set a goal of clearing 80% of all shots to their left foot to safety. Set goals that you can make. There are long term goals and short term goals and it's important to have both. Achieving goals is part of the process for measuring improvement.

Whatever the level you play at, overall improvement is always a good goal. It's also a very broad concept. Getting better means knowing what you're good and bad at. It requires you to review and critique your game and that involves some thought. I think

better when I write things down and if you're going to the trouble of doing a training program, you should have a training notebook.

As a player, I used my training notebook as a resource for a number of areas. It's a place to keep notes and materials as they pertain to my team, my training, my game play, my mental game, my skills or whatever is important to my development as a keeper. Many coaches ask their teams to keep a notebook and have very specific formats as to what should go in them. If that's the case, you should also consider keeping a notebook of your own just for goalkeeping. A notebook can be a personal thing and some things you might not want to share. I can keep whatever I want in my own notebook and have access to it all the time.

When you decide that you want to start a training program on your own make sure you check with your coach. I get a lot of keepers who tell me their teams don't do anything for keepers and then you talk to their coaches and they tell you something different. Not every practice is going to be a goalkeeper practice. Coaches have a lot of needs when it comes down to meeting the demands of preparing for a game. Sometimes a coach doesn't realize they've ignored the position and by your going to them, they realize that.

It's also important that you let your coach know what you're doing if you're thinking about a training program. If you have access to a training program with your team, then obviously that takes precedent over everything else you do. Many players don't. Either way, your coach is someone who's there to help you get better. By keeping them informed of what you want to do, you let them help you.

We talked about general improvement as a goal earlier and how broad a concept it is. There are ways to make improvement tangible. First off, think about the skills of the position. Now is a good time to get the notebook out. Write down the skills that are involved at the level you play at. Saving is a skill, but there are a hundred different skills that can be used to make a save. Clearing skills are just as important as save skills and there are another hundred skills available to make a save and take the ball to a space. It's important to identify skills as they relate to the level you play. A 12 year old isn't likely to be seeing the same kind of situations as played in Premier leagues.

Breaking skills down by saving and clearing skills is only one way to start a skills inventory. Saving skills can be broken down by parts of the body: feet, legs, hands, or body. You can break it down by speed of shot: slow, medium, or fast. Use Left side or right side (as in feet and hands) and areas of the goal (centre, within two feet reach and balls in the corners) are other ways you can break down skills. Think of ways you can clear the ball: first time with your feet, a stationary ball with your feet or stick, first time off your hands into space, etc. Deflecting is a clearing skill, especially with hand protectors and high-density foam in general. There are a hundred different ways you can kick a ball to a certain area using a particular foot. You can identify those skills and should.

Once you've identified skills you use, think of a way you can measure them. I like to think of skills as a test when I measure them. I like to drill where I have ten repetitions and I see how many I'm successful in. 7 out of 10 is a C, 8 out of 10 a B, 9 out of 10 an A-, and 10 is an A. Until I get an A in a skill I can stand to work on it.

When you test yourself make sure you're doing an accurate test. If I want to test

kicking medium paced balls within two feet of my left foot, I need someone or something to deliver the ball with proper speed and location. That's something you might be able to organize with the help of your coach. If you can't work this into your team training, see if you can get your team-mates to help out.

If you are going to train on your own, make sure you're really training. If forwards are going to help me out with putting balls at goal, I want to help them out by letting them know exactly what I want. If I want a ball hit from a specific location, put a cone there. Make sure they know exactly where you want the ball and the pace you want it at. There's a huge difference in how you're going to kick a medium paced ball on the ground and one that's twelve inches in the air. You base mastery of a skill by consistent repetitions and you can't do that if balls are all over the place. Tests can be fun and training should be, but make sure you're doing what you want to when you train. If things aren't defined, it's easy for them to break down.

We talked about using your coach as a resource. Make sure you do work with someone. It's a good idea to have a sounding board when you set goals, plan drills or do tests. Equipment is another resource. Equipment is everything from having enough balls and cones to playing on the right surface to working with good people. The internet is another resource. Use everything you can to help you get what you're training for. Prepare to be flexible. You may have to invest in some balls. You might have to make rebound boards. You might end up training on tennis courts. If training is going to be important, having the right equipment is essential. If you're creative, you can turn virtually anything into a training situation.

Creativity is key. As I said, we get a ton of questions about training programs and what the best program for a certain keeper is. We don't know the best particular program for you, but you probably do. If you're critical you know what you're good at and what you need to work on. Think of ways you can work on the skill and make it happen. This starts with a vision and a notebook is a great start. Use it to plan your future successes and chronicle the progress.

COACHING

The Mental Game

By Jon O'hair

In the quest to become better players, goalkeepers train thousands of hours, burn millions of calories and spend hundreds of dollars on equipment. Yet when it comes to the difference between becoming a good keeper and a great keeper, the answer may lie between their ears. The mental game can be a critical part to success.

It's always interesting to talk to keepers about the mental side of the game. There are many great keepers who succeed on their athleticism and instincts. They can simply go out and play well. For others, training and playing are only part of the equation for success. Visualization, mental imagery, relaxation techniques, breathing exercises, focus and confidence are every bit as important as weight training and skill work.

How effective sport psychology may be in your game can be influenced by how open you are to change. For many, the mere mention of sport psychology and a mental game implies weakness of the worst kind, the mind. Somehow, it's easier to say you're going to the weight room to get physically stronger than it is to say "I'm off to a quiet place to visualize." In reality, one is no different than the other.

I'll confess to being a convert to the value of the mental game. Early on, my experiences were jaded by my prejudices and perceptions. When I encountered problems with my game, my answer was more practice but there's only so much you can physically practice. Like it or not, the nature of the goalkeeping position is goals will be scored, mistakes will be made and games will be lost because of them. There are internal and external pressures to succeed in hostile and distracting settings. How do you practice dealing with problems like these? In time I figured out all the physical training in the world didn't help if I couldn't let go of the goal that was just scored. I needed to fix how I thought and how I reacted and I needed help.

As a player and a coach I've had the opportunity to see a number of sport psychologists at work at the team and individual level with players ranging from high school to international standard. Their work can be invaluable as these specialists draw from their education and experience to bring out the best in athletes. Unfortunately, not everyone has access to a sport psychologist. While complex problems are best left to experts, there are common problems that keepers can improve on their own by using sport psychology techniques.

Time, energy and resources often limit how a player can work on a specific skill or situation. Mental imagery, or visualization, is a sport psychology tool used to simulate physical training or game situations and is proven to be effective in improving performance. Essentially, mental imagery is the practice and repetition of a skill in the mind. Through internal repetition the mind trains the body.

In visualizing, detail is important. You get best results by being clear and specific about the skills or situations you're training. When it comes to skills, video can help in establishing a clear picture of mechanics. For a skill like kicking a cross ball with the left foot, visual details could include: the left wing coming down the side line; the keeper establishing position off his line; the player striking the cross; the keeper pushing off his right foot getting solidly behind the kick and clearing safely and

powerfully to a teammate. Replay each part of the skill in your mind, see your body explosively moving to the ball and executing the skill, replaying that perfect clear.

When visualizing a new skill, start by seeing the skill in slow motion so that you can begin to establish a link from the mind to each part of the body that's involved with the skill. While you're not physically moving when visualizing skills, try to "see" and "feel" the movements you're trying to master. As you become more comfortable with visualizing a skill and had the opportunity to physically train the skill on the practice field, you can speed up your mental video to game speed.

Mental imagery can also be used to visualize game scenes, especially pressure situations: the big save with time running out and the match on the line, getting on with the game after allowing a bad goal and tuning out trash talking opponents and hostile crowds. It's difficult to physically recreate the feeling of these pressures on the training ground, but mentally you can train for these types of situations. Whatever you can imagine, you can train and prepare for.

An important part of any mental training is creating an environment for work. For the mind to work best, the body needs to be comfortable and relaxed. Loose clothes, a clear mind and a cool place where you can lie or sit comfortably are a good start in creating that setting. Avoid areas where there are distractions like noise and activity. Mental training is like physical training in that you improve with repetition. Mental training does require energy and sessions are best-kept under 30 minutes. Many athletes use visualization around the time of their events, the morning of afternoon games or the afternoon of evening matches. Mental imagery can be practiced before sleeping, but training should be built around times when you're not tired.

It's one thing to be psyched up for a game, it's another to be psyched out. Picture a game, the keeper hasn't seen the ball in his circle for 20 minutes. The ball enters his 25 and he's screaming to organize his defense. The ball is played in to the circle, the keeper is ready for the bullet shot and the forward hits a medium paced ball just to his left. The keeper explodes and the ball goes under his foot. Was the keeper ready? If anything, the keeper was too ready. Extreme anticipation and over arousal are terms used to describe what happens when athletes are too keyed up.

Athletes perform best in an aroused state. The aroused athlete is alert, aware and ready for action. Arousal can be confused with anxiety, though. While the aroused athlete is alert and composed, the anxious, or over aroused athlete is alert to the point of panic. It's natural to feel a rush of adrenaline in pressure moments of a match, but it's critical to manage that rush of energy. Often it's wasted on nervous movement, excited communication or hyperventilation. Many sports psychologists point to breathing as one way of managing arousal.

Simple breathing exercises focus on controlling the breath. It starts with practice before the match. Typically, the breath is used to center the athlete. The practice is drawn from yoga and is built on using the inhalation to draw oxygen, or energy, into the body. The goal is to build to full, deep inhalations and complete exhalations. By focusing on the breath an athlete is drawing energy into the body through the intake of oxygen. Obviously breathing isn't a keeper's sole focus while the ball is in his circle, but he can use breathing to relax and re-energize when play doesn't involve him in a game and practicing breathing does train the body to stay relaxed in pressure situations. Breathing is often used to establish a setting for visualization away from the field.

Focus is concentrating on what's important in the context of the game. The game can be filled with distractions. Focus is filtering those distractions out and taking in the important information that's critical to reading play. It's recognizing scoring opportunities, reading passing lanes, positioning defenders and anticipating situations. Athletes talk about being in a "zone" where they know where the ball is going before it's shot. That "zone" is the direct product of focus.

An important part of managing focus is recognizing when you have the opportunity to relax. A keeper can mentally and physically exhaust himself by being too focused. 100% concentration isn't required when the ball is in the other team's circle. Take those moments to breathe, stretch, and relax.

One of the most frequent mental problems I hear from keepers concerns confidence. How do you find confidence when you allow a soft goal or get in to a run of bad play? Confidence can be precarious, especially when the stakes are high. Many keepers are their own worst enemies. Every keeper has let in a bad goal and sometimes a team loses because of it but it's important not to dwell on goals that are already on the board and create self-fulfilling prophecies of disaster. Don't use a past event as a projection of what's going to happen. A keeper's ability to play well doesn't just disappear (barring injury). The good keeper treats history for what it is. Yes, I want to think about what I might have done differently on a goal immediately after it's scored, but I need to be ready for what's coming next by the time my team takes the push back. Confidence should allow a keeper to be secure in the knowledge that whatever comes, he's probably seen it and saved it.

When assessing your game, what are the things that give you confidence? For me, a big one is the knowledge that I have played well before. Success isn't a fluke or an accident. It is the product of preparation and opportunity. When I get in a good groove playing, I try to stay consistent in my training, my sleep patterns, my diet and my pre-game warm up. By the same token, if I'm not playing well I try to look at those factors. Success is a habit and I find that I play my best when I'm consistent. Having said that, it's important to not get married to routine. There will be times that I have to deviate from my routine, but that's where the knowledge that I've been successful before comes in.

Competitive sport is challenging, physically and mentally. Two teams are playing to win and sometimes a team is going to come up short. The challenge is how will a keeper respond, what changes will you make? Sometimes the answer lies in a skill; sometimes it lies within, literally. As I mentioned, I'm not a sport psychologist. The techniques I've talked about are ones that I have experience with. Newspapers and books are filled with stories of athletes from a variety of sports who've benefited from working on their mental game with trained professionals. Read about them. You can learn a lot from their experiences, whether it's in a magazine or on the Internet. If you genuinely want to improve your game, leave no stone unturned. It isn't crazy to work on your mental game; it's crazy not to.

Big Game Preparation

By Rachel Durdin

Everyone at one stage in their hockey career has to prepare for a big game, whether it be a:

- Club Final,
- Olympic Final,
- Team Selection Trial

... or just a game that is important to you and your team.

Before you can even start to think of a big game, the pre-preparation that you need to do includes all of the training — including both physical and skills specific.

In the last couple of sessions leading up to the big game I try to slightly adjust my training so that I do more close in work so that my reflexes are sharp. This helps me to make those saves that are made purely with reflexes.

Let's imagine that you have done all of the preparation that is needed. There are steps that you can follow for your game preparation.

Mental imagery:

The day before the big game it is a good idea for you to try to imagine some of the saves, if not all of the saves, that you need to make during the game. To do this effectively you need to break the skill down so you almost feel what save you are making. I think that it is never too late to do this as it can always help.

I have also done this in the warm up stage after the run during my stretching time, however, you can do this at any time. I have mentally prepared before a penalty stroke by imagining myself making up to 6 different saves before I actually save the stroke.

Physical warm up:

To warm up properly before a game I do at least 3 laps of the field. This is followed by stretching and some active warm up exercises. These include swinging the legs to get good movement, rotation of the hips followed by run throughs. The run throughs are from 10-25 m. At this stage I put my gear on.

Skills warm up:

Generally, I try to have around 20 minutes on the turf to warm up. I start with balls in close and gradually move them out to the top of the circle. At the beginning of the first stage I kick the ball back at the person who is warming me up, this helps to get good accuracy. As the warm up progresses I tend to get the ball wider to practice wide clearances.

The next stage of the preparation is to sharpen my reflexes. I have the balls lined up around the penalty spot. The person who is warming me up then flicks and chips the balls at me one after the other, not giving me enough time to set for the next save.

After this we tend to practice corners as a team. This is followed by two team drills of rapid fire to sharpen my reflexes.

If I follow all of the steps, my warm up should be complete and I should be ready to play the big game.

It is important to remember that this is an example of my warm up and that everyone has different needs. You may want to take some or all of these ideas for your own warm up.

Decision-Making and Team Defense

By Jon O'hair

I often receive questions such as this:

Hi Jon,

The thing that I really need help with is two on ones! When I'm up against two forwards with no defenders I really struggle with my decision, as to whether to go out to the player with the ball or whether to hold my ground? People tell me there is nothing I can do but surely there is something I can do to prevent them scoring? Any advice would be greatly appreciated!

thanx

Jen

Whether it be two forwards going to goal with just the keeper, or virtually any other situation that results in a goal, there is the question, "What could I have done differently?" Depending on the situation, the answer could be nothing. The answer could be positioning you or your defender in a different place. It could be playing the shot; it could be playing the pass. Most frustrating of all, what worked in one situation, might not work in another. The good news is that whatever the scenario, there is a way to defuse dangerous situations if a defense can play together as a team. Team defense requires players to think as a team and that's essentially decision-making.

Good decision-making may be one of the most critical elements of successful team defense. It can also be one of the most difficult elements of the game to learn. The longer you play hockey, the more you realize there are very few absolutes. Hockey is a game of options, attacking and defending, and while a goalkeeper may be the last defender, he is a defender with options as long as he can play with and off his teammates. Good decision-making especially as it applies to team defense depends on assessing those options, developing a plan of defense, communicating the plan and executing the needed skills, usually in less than five seconds.

We've stressed that hockey is not a black and white game in terms of absolutes. Having said that, it's critical that a keeper and his teammates have an understanding of the attacking situation if they're going to be able to defend it. To understand attacking situations, it's important to have an understanding of defensive principles, especially as it pertains to your team. Whatever level you play at, you and your teammates need to have a common understanding of these principles if your team is going to be successful.

That understanding becomes the crux of decision-making and as such, your coach is the person responsible for shaping your decision-making. While teams may play similar styles and use similar skills, each team is unique. Good coaches recognize that and will play the systems and skills that draw on the best of their team and

players. For that reason it's important that your coach is your first resource when you have questions about defensive principles.

This tip started with a question about what to do with two on the keeper. My best recommendation is to not let the situation happen, though sometimes that's not possible. In my own personal experience, two attackers bearing down on a keeper don't just happen. Usually there's a breakdown up field and a chain reaction that leads to the keeper's ultimate problem/nightmare. Early identification of a potential problem is critical for effective decision-making. Who identifies those problems on your team will depend on where the ball is on the field, the position of your opponents and the system your team plays. If you're not sure, that's usually the start of the problem becoming your nightmare.

Once a problem area is identified on the field, the next component is dealing with it. Essentially that's a matter of positioning the available defenders to take away the most dangerous passes or penetrating runs and once again that will depend on the systems your team uses. A team that plays man-to-man defense will position themselves differently than a team that plays a zone defense. Some teams play a combination of zone and man-to-man. Regardless of the system, it's important that all players have a common understanding of the situation and know their roles within it.

While systems may differ, there are common defensive principles and roles that all successful teams use. In a situation where a defender has been eliminated up field, there are a number of things that need to happen. First off, it's up to the remaining players to reorganize. Positionally, players may not need to physically move, but their responsibilities in those positions may change. We talked about taking away dangerous passes and that's marking. Going back to marking, that means that a defender has to position himself, or be positioned, to deny the opponent the pass if he's in a direct line to goal.

If a defender is beaten and his player is going to goal with the ball, channeling and delaying are important concepts. Channeling is taking away the straight line run to goal and allowing/forcing the opponent back or wide with the ball. Delaying is often a successful tactic in the early stages of a fast break and can take the form of a player fouling to stop the play. We're not advocating deliberate fouls, but a spoiling tackle by a defender, or a loose ball put out of play, allows an outnumbered team the time to get back in to the play and match up even numbers. Where ever the ball is on the field, the beaten player has got to work their way back in to the play and that's recovery. A defending team will always be numbers down unless they accept the responsibility of working themselves back in to the play.

We've talked a little about understanding and executing roles in a team defense. Understanding and execution can be two different things and most problems with break-downs in team defense come from misunderstanding. Typically communication, or lack thereof, is the biggest culprit when it comes to breakdown and misunderstandings. As we mentioned before, who identifies problems and communicates them, will depend on where the break down on the field is and how your team is set up. Once again, it's important that players have an understanding of who communicates what as play develops.

What is communicated is also critical. Players need to understand what they're being asked/told to do. Quick, direct, effective communication is critical, especially in the

early stages of a breakdown or as the ball moves closer to your circle. While there are common things teams try to do in defending, the terms used to communicate them might be different. Know the language and terms your team uses in communicating and make sure all players understand what is being said.

It's important for a keeper to have a style of communication that is effective. That starts with identifying the player you're talking to; call a name. Next, let that player know what you want to do, especially as it pertains to the urgency of the situation. There's usually not a reason to get hysterical screaming at your right back to move two meters when your team has the ball in the opponent's circle, but if the ball is in your circle and you've asked him to do the same thing three times, a little volume might be warranted. Communication is not personal. Make sure your teammates understand that if you are yelling, it's only to stress the speed needed for them to respond to what you're saying.

Finally, it's critical that a keeper has an understanding of his responsibility in the team's defense and is able to execute the skills required for the role. Just as a defender may need to mark or channel, a keeper may need to mark or channel. If a team plays with an up field forward, you may be the player responsible for denying them the ball. In a breakaway a keeper can win the time to let his teammates get back into the play by forcing the ball carrier wide, the same as a defender channeling. That can happen simply by stepping up and putting pressure on the player or taking him wide where he has a poor shot or passing angle.

This tip started with a question about two forwards on the keeper. I've played this game for over 20 years now and probably the biggest lesson I've learned in this game is there is not a definitive answer for everyone. There is an answer for you and your team if you can put your heads together and work as a unit. As situations come up, talk about them. If they're not addressed in training or in a game, write them down. Sit down with your coach and your teammates and make sure you're on the same page. I can't promise that you'll find an answer that will work every time, but I can promise you that if you and your teammates don't talk about problem situations, you'll get the same results. Finding answers can be frustrating. It can also be so rewarding when your team works through these situations together.

Setting Your Defence

By Rachel Durdin

In each defending situation each player has a general role, depending on the coach or the team, they might have a specific role for a specific game. Defensive systems are set up as a guide only.

Following is my interpretation of the Australian system that has been in place for over 20 years. This does differ from what teams are using presently however the basic principles of all defence is the same. I will highlight what I believe the role for each of the main defending players includes:

GK Goal Keeper:

Keep the ball out of the net

RB Right Fullback:

Last line of defence, tackling and communication, marks the CF and anyone else that is left floating around

LB Left Fullback:

Last line of defence, tackling and communication, same marking situation as RB

RH Right Halfback:

Attacking half, generally marks the LW and Left Inside

LH Left Halfback:

Defensive half, marks RW and Right Inside

CH Centre Half:

Marks opposite CH and sometimes CF or who ever is there, generally a playmaker and good distributor of the ball

RI Right Inside:

Marks the LI and is there as a player to pass too when the play is on the right side

LI Left Inside:

Marks the RI and is there as a player to pass too when the play is on the left side

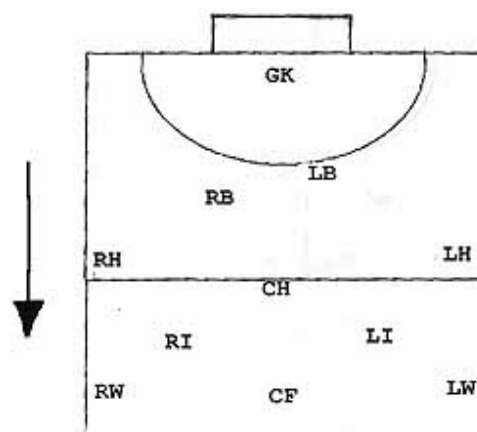


Diagram 1A&B refer to the general movement of the defence when the ball is over to one side. A shuffle effect occurs with players on the opposite side shuffling across to be inline with the play. You will notice that on both diagrams that the RW or LW comes back when the ball is on the opposite side to create a let out pass.

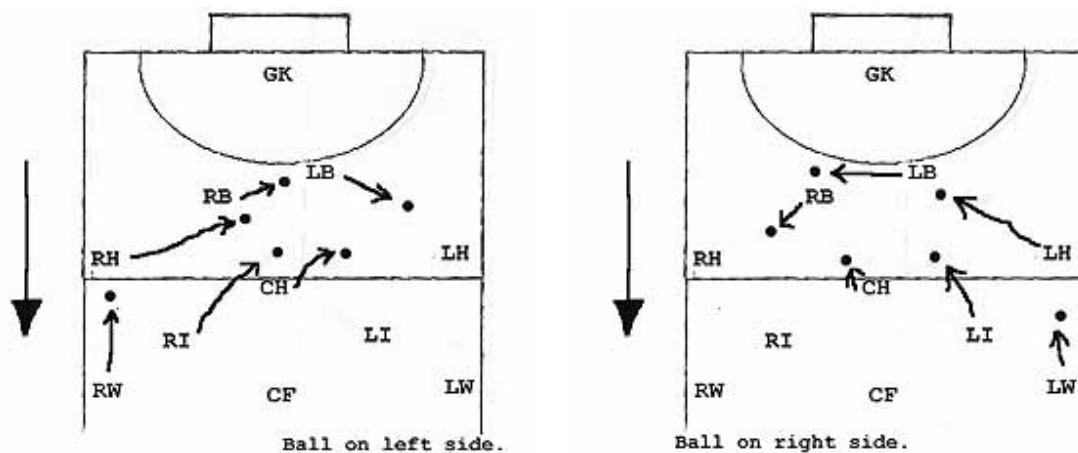


Diagram 2 highlights positions that should be taken if the ball is on the right hand side of the field for the attacking team. You will notice that most of the players are marked and are marking. The LI is marking the space to enable her/him to move freely to any player that becomes free. The LI is also there to receive the let out pass when the defenders regain possession. You will notice that the LB is not marking anyone, this is deliberate so that they can be a back up for the LH if the ball gets through. The LB should only be free if everyone else is marked!

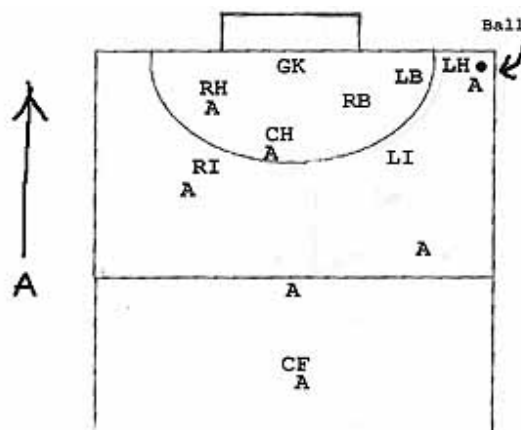


Diagram 3 is again another example of a defensive set up. You will note that a slight change in the positioning of the players occurs. The RH is not man to man marking, they are giving the attacker some breathing space. Where the attacker is in relation to the ball they are not in any danger if they cover the line to the ball and are not too far away.

All players are generally in-between the player and the goal. If you look closely you will notice that the RB is actually level with the player. This allows he/she to beat the player to the ball, they must stand close to the player to tackle if necessary, this is different from the days when people were instructed to stand behind the player. The LI is again marking space, they do not necessarily have to come back this far but being a goalkeeper I prefer this so that you have an extra person in defence.

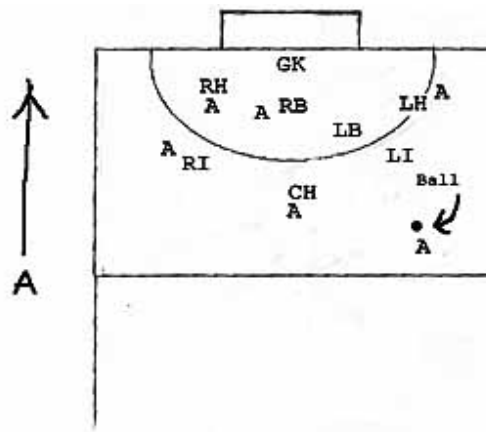
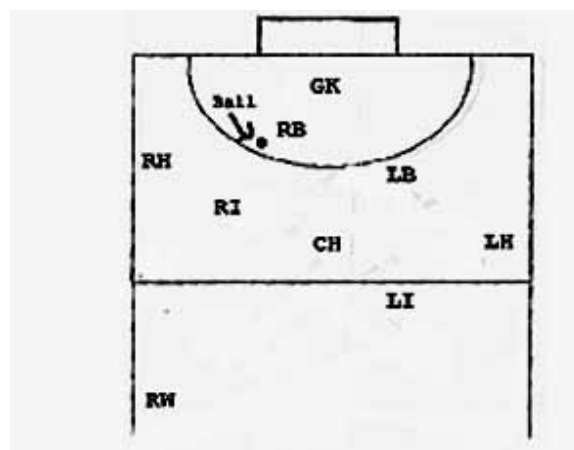


Diagram 4 highlights the set up of the defence when taking a 16yrd free hit. The LH is out wide for the quick transfer of play. The positioning of the other players allows them to have their own space to receive the ball in and move with it or pass it off.

With the ball on the right side you will notice that the RW has dropped back a little. This is due to the RH taking a deep wide position and the need for a player to come back and help. It is important that players do not crowd each other and the spaces as this usually results in a turn over of possession.



Please note that this is only a basic guideline of one defensive pattern. Something that I have found important is that each situation is different and it is important to trust your goalkeeper to make the right decisions with calling their defenders.

They should have control of the whole situation from the 50 yard line onwards, as they have the best view of the whole field. It is also important to remember that goal keepers need to concentrate on making saves so the other defenders need to take responsibility for communication also

Team Dynamics

By Jon O'haire

In the ideal world every goalkeeper is a starting keeper. You play every minute of every game and never let in a goal. Reality tells us this isn't true. The world is filled with keepers with a wide range of skills and a limited number of teams. Not every keeper gets to play, but that's not to say that every keeper can't have an impact on his or her team's performance. How goalkeepers work together on a team is an important dynamic on and off the field.

While field players can play in a number of positions all over the field, the nature of field hockey is that there is only one keeper that plays. That can be a tough pill to swallow for keepers who have invested time, effort and money in the pursuit of a spot on the field. Team success isn't always just a measure of what happens on the playing field. Often, what happens on the practice field, in the locker room, on the track, in the weight room and in the social circles that are part of every team impact performance. Keepers, coaches, and players all play a part in shaping that performance.

As a player, I've had a variety of experiences in a number of roles on a range of teams. At the club level I started as the second keeper on a second team before I became a starter for the firsts. At the international level, I trained as a member of a national development squad, had a run as the starting keeper on the US national team and finished my career as the "dependable reserve" keeper. On the in between, I've had the privilege of playing for a variety of select teams around the world. Perspective has allowed me to see that while I may not have handled each situation as well as I would have liked, there were opportunities for me to play a positive role in the team's performance whether I played or not.

Being a starting keeper isn't usually a hard position. You know you're going to play and you typically have the support of your teammates and coach. Your commitment is to helping your team win. Practices and warm ups are geared to a starting keeper playing well. That doesn't have to be the complete scope of the starting keeper's responsibilities. As a leader on the team, a starting keeper has an opportunity to be a mentor and a role model to other keepers on the team or in the club.

Athletes are naturally competitive, but as a competitor it's critical that keepers bring out the best in each other. Too often, I see keepers who try to stay on top by keeping others down. They take all the shots in training or warm ups. They treat other keepers with indifference or contempt. They're quick to point out the deficiencies in others. As a starter, a keeper needs to be confident enough in his or her abilities to see the big picture. Yes, I want to make sure that I get the time and repetitions to make sure I give my best performance, but I also need to make sure that I'm being inclusive when possible. Words can go a long way when circumstances don't allow that, especially before a match. Keepers usually warm up and stretch together before a game. By including a second keeper in your preparation, you help prepare them in case of the unforeseeable injury.

In a club setting, you may train with keepers on the other teams. While you might not want to think of yourself as a role model, you are. The other keepers aspire to your position and you play a role in their development. Do you model good work habits? Do you share what you've learned through experience? The big keeper shares insights, the small keeper keeps secrets. Do you share time in drills? Do you do the little jobs like collect balls or get water? What do you want to be known for?

Being a reserve keeper on a team might be one of the hardest jobs in sport. You train

as hard as you can and there might not be much separating you and the starting keeper, yet one keeper plays and the other sits. Not playing can be a crushing blow, but how a keeper handles the situation can turn a personal setback into a positive for the team. Do you work hard in training or simply go through the motions? Some keepers are happy simply being a part of a team. Not everyone aspires to a World Cup or an Olympics. There's nothing wrong with that if you're honest about your aspirations, but realize the effect on others. Apathy and a lack of effort and intensity are contagious, especially at higher levels.

Do you support the starting keeper? Support doesn't mean that you have to be best friends (though that helps), but you should be working partners. Solid partnerships are built on trust and respect. Cliques can be especially divisive in a team and there's no quicker way to start them than by lobbying for sympathy as to why you should be playing. Be honest in your relationship with your teammates and fellow keepers.

Team members need to respect their goalkeepers, both starting and reserves. Respect shows up in variety of ways. It's not taking a full-blooded chip shot from seven yards out in training. It's saying well done and keep at it to the third keeper as well as the first. It's knowing that no one deliberately makes a mistake and intentionally allows a goal. It's not supporting people when they're being petty or complaining. It's recognizing that every player is important.

As a coach, I try to reinforce the concept that while there is only one keeper who plays, the position is a reflection of the collective effort of all the keepers on the team. Most players only reach their full potential when challenged and pushed by their teammates. Depth at the goalkeeping position is vital. An injury can happen at any time and every player needs to be ready to step on the field at any given moment. How do you prepare the other keepers on your team? Do you give them specific feedback on the things they need to work on? Do you encourage them in training? Are you honest with them in their position on the team? All of these things go a long way to making all keepers feel they're part of the team.

When faced with the challenges of a talented opponent, goalkeeping can be a hard enough position on its own. It doesn't need to be made more difficult by playing against the enemy within. We're all in this together.

What Makes a Good Keeper?

By Rachel Durdin

There are many different goalkeepers playing all over the world. Some of them will hold at least one of these traits, if not all. The traits that I perceive to contribute to making a good goalkeeper may not be totally the same as what you would believe.

The position of Goalkeeper needs to be a person who can think and act immediately when a decision is required. Below I have outlined what I think will make a successful goalkeeper and why this is so.

Good Basic Skills

The key to your success as a goalkeeper is having good basic skills. If you do not have good basics you will find it very hard to make even the simplest of saves. Basic saves of importance include instep saves — getting wide clearances, hand saves left and right and many more, please refer to previous tips pages for more details.

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Reflexes

Reflex saves are vital to the performance of every keeper. If you don't have natural reflexes it is important that you work on these to make sure that you make those match winning saves. As mentioned in previous tips, a good way to improve your reflexes is to get someone to hit tennis balls at you. The balls generally come faster than most hit hockey balls, thus making you react quicker than usual. You can also do this training with hockey balls and getting someone to hit or flick them at you one after the other.

Decision Making

Decision making is something that comes naturally for most and with time it can be greatly improved upon. Decision making comes in two forms: when playing in goal, deciding where to call your players and deciding what save you make and how you are going to make it. The best way to improve this is to simulate match like situations in training.

Speed & Strength

Speed and strength are vital components for success as a goalkeeper. Both of these components are ones that you can work on if you are not naturally gifted in this area. You will need to consult your coach or a physical trainer for more specific detail that is relevant to you as an individual.

Attacking Play

With field players getting better every day it is important that the keeper keeps on top of the situation. An easy way to do this is to be an attacking keeper. By taking charge of the area around you and closing down players as soon as they receive the ball they don't get the chance to have a shot at goal. There is much more information on Attacking Play in the previous tips pages.

The Ability to Accept Responsibility for Actions

Some goalkeepers tend to blame others around them when a ball goes in the back of the net. In many situations this may be the right thing to do, however, on occasions the goalkeeper has neglected to call a player into line or just made a bad save. It is important for the goalkeeper to admit when they have made a mistake as it keeps the team cohesive, and when it is not the fault of the keeper the team will usually recognise this.

After reading this you may think of many other traits you or another goalkeeper may possess that make you a great keeper. This is only what I think and is here to make you think a little more about your keeping.

Goalkeeping Books & Other Resources

By Jon O'haire

Recently I got a question asking about books on goalkeeping. I looked on my bookshelf and quickly realized that most of the titles I've accumulated on the subject are long since out of print. Books may not yet have gone the way of the vinyl album, but increasingly other media is replacing them. Video and computers help make the printed word come alive and open a completely new library that everyone can access. The Internet can be a tremendous resource for the resourceful coach or

keeper.

Once upon a time, there was a logjam of information trapped at the highest level of the sport. Unless you went to an Olympics or a World Cup, it was difficult to find out what the top keepers in the world were doing. You could read articles in the newspapers or if you were lucky, maybe talk to a friend of a friend who knew someone who was there. Information was often third hand, subject to interpretation and frequently inaccurate. Satellites and video have changed much of that. With the right technology, anyone, anywhere can watch the best teams in the world play live, or within days of the game or read about new skills and techniques.

Before I became a coach, I was a student and then worked as a librarian for nine years. This was great preparation as I went about researching field hockey and goalkeeping. I can tell you that I spent more than a few hours leafing through card catalogs and library stacks in search of such elusive titles as Horseshoes and Hand Grenades (yes, its about field hockey goalkeeping) and any other book that might have more than a paragraph about goalkeeping. Often, it was like looking for a needle in a haystack. While I don't spend as much time in libraries, I do spend a lot of time on the computer and on the Internet. In this tip, I'd like to share some of my favorite sites as well as some advice for your own searches.

First and foremost, this tip is not intended to be a definitive list of sites devoted to goalkeeping. Like books, Internet sites disappear and new ones emerge every day. Whether its news from around the globe, video highlights from the Champion's Trophy, the latest equipment on the market or what's going on in my area, it's all up there on the worldwide web. The biggest trick is finding it.

Search engines play a critical role in finding websites. They are today's card catalog, but they can come at a price. The GOOGLES and YAHOOOS of the world will provide you with results for any search, but recognize that most search engines give priority listing to sites they do business with. Worse, in this day and age, people have found ways to hack into search engines and manipulate listings. If you're really interested in getting the best information on the Internet, prepare to be patient and thorough. If I'm looking for new sources, I'll often use a variety of engines and a wide range of search terms. I can't tell you how many times I've found great sites on the 50th hit of a list. Patience and persistence are good things when it comes to searching.

One of my favorites news websites is www.fieldhockey.com. Managed by George Brink in England, the site is a daily collection of hockey related articles from around the world. Another news related site is www.planetfieldhockey.com. The site features many of the same articles as [fieldhockey.com](http://www.fieldhockey.com), but also offers readers the opportunity to post comments. Though not strictly news-related, one of the best new sites I've come across is www.fieldhockey.tv. The site features video of top international tournaments and games from the Dutch Men's and Women's First Division league.

Obviously if you're reading this tip, you're familiar with the OBO website and virtually every hockey manufacturer has their own site. In addition to manufacturer sites, there is a wide range of vendors who feature equipment from a variety of brands they often have their own sites. Rather than list sites, you can find many of them under the search heading HOCKEY; EQUIPMENT. The better sites offer more than a listing of items and prices. Several of them have links to other sites of interest, as well as technical information about their products and tips for using them.

I've mentioned before that I came to field hockey from ice hockey and while the sports are different, there is much we can learn from the common perspective of stopping a shot when a game is on the line regardless of the sport. One of my favorite websites that's ice hockey based is found at www.promasque.com. Promasque makes custom ice hockey masks and like the OBO site, they make educational use of their site. Promasque has a HOCKEY FACTORY section that features tips from Fred Quistgard. While Fred's background is an ice hockey coach, there are many good tips for dealing with pressure, winning a starting position, coaching strategies and many other relevant topics. If you're looking for new ideas about the position, it never hurts to be open and to look outside the field hockey box.

The Internet can also be a great way for getting connected to events in your local area. Many national hockey associations maintain their own sites and they'll post information about coaching and player clinics as well as news about their respective national teams. In addition, many of them provide contacts for local leagues and clubs. This can be invaluable, especially when you're moving or thinking about playing somewhere else.

Finally, there are user groups or chat rooms that are keeper specific. I'm afraid that I'm not enough of a computer person that I regularly check these but if you're looking to chat online with someone with similar interests, they can be entertaining and educational. The great potential of message boards and chat rooms is the sharing of ideas and information. I've discovered new sites through postings. If you know of a good site, I'd love to hear about it.

The Internet can be a valuable resource. One of the most important skills required for success at any level of hockey as a keeper is the ability to process information. A keeper needs to be discriminating. Just because something is up on the web doesn't mean that it's gospel and that you should absolutely do something because it's on someone's site (even ours). Read, think, try and then assess whether you're getting the information you're looking for. As we continue to develop as keepers, we develop with new technology and new ideas. The Internet is great tool for finding them.

MATERIAL

Kickers

By Jon O'haire

No matter how talented a carpenter is, with bad tools he'll be hard pressed to produce a good product. The same holds true for a keeper. A good keeper with bad pads has a hard job, made harder.

How does the job get easier? Simple logic says good equipment helps. Somewhere along the line, though, logic has become expensive when it comes to pads. Outfitting a keeper can be expensive and money isn't always something that's available by the buckets.

It is possible for a keeper to be well kitted without spending a fortune, just as it's possible for a keeper to spend a ton of money and be poorly protected. Part of being well kitted is assessing what you have and what you need based on the requirements of the level you play, the surface you play on, your size, your aspirations, your gender and finally your budget.

In the modern game, the typical list for the well kitted keeper includes a helmet with face mask, chest protector, pelvic protection, padded shorts, hand protection, legguards and kickers. At the international level, a keeper can easily spend over US,2000 on equipment. By the same token, you don't have to spend US,2000 to have a set of useful equipment.

Very rarely does a keeper come to the goals without some kit to draw on. In assessing what a keeper inherits, questions that come to mind are does it fit? does it protect? and will it do what I want it to do? If the answer is yes, then the job is easy, take care of what you've got and it should take care of you. If the answer is no, then you've got to prioritise making do with what you've got, with what you really need to replace.

In this tip and the equipment tips to come, I've put together my priority list. Under the item of equipment there follows a description of what to look for, how it should fit and how to take care of it.

Kickers

There are still a variety of different kickers available on the market and in various stages of circulation from old equipment bags. If there's one piece of equipment that should be replaced immediately, if not sooner, whether it be inherited or recently purchased, it's bad kickers.

Bad kickers can be, but are not limited to, bamboo and leather square toe kickers, worn foam kickers, kickers that are too big, or kickers that are too small. First off, kickers determine the techniques available to you to clear the ball. Modern hockey requires a keeper to be able to first time clear a shot. In square toe kickers, that is a technique that is among other things, extremely painful, if not virtually impossible.

If you've inherited foam kickers the tests for finding out if they're up to snuff are fairly quick and simple. If kickers are too big, you won't be able to fasten the straps tight enough to secure them on your feet. If they're close, you might be able to punch extra holes in the straps to make them fit. That might keep them on your feet for a

while, but the biggest problem with kickers that are too big is that they're difficult to move in. The foot doesn't make actual contact with the field, the kicker does. As a result, you end up slipping or tripping.

When kickers are too small, the problem is usually equally obvious. Toes hang out, or the kicker doesn't sit back far enough to cover the heel. There don't seem to be enough holes in the straps on the large end. Once again, you might be able to work around it by punching extra holes, but after time and practice, you'll find that you end up getting hit in all the places that are exposed with kickers that are too small.

The problems with worn kickers are equally painful. When high-density foam kickers break down, they lose their rebound and protective qualities. They're about as useful as over-sized slippers and should be put out to pasture. Just because kickers are old and ugly, doesn't mean they have to be replaced. A well struck shot will usually sting no matter how new, or good your kickers are. There's a difference between sting and collapsing in a heap in pain when the ball contacts your arch. The rebound qualities of the kicker are far more important. As long as rebound off the kicker is fairly proportional to the speed of the shot coming in, there's life in the kicker.

If after you've assessed what you have in your kit bag and finding it lacking, or you just want new kickers there's a lot out there, good and bad. We'll start with the good (OBO of course).

OBO kickers, whether it be Robo, Cloud 9 or Yahoo, are all similarly shaped. For a young keeper that's important because he'll be playing in a kicker that's shaped the same way as he grows as a person and a keeper. The kicker is designed with a tongue that locks the leg guard in place and keeps it from twisting. In the Robo line, the straps that keep the kicker down on the foot are built into the kicker. This keeps them from sliding back on the foot, a problem with kickers that have external straps.

When selecting a kicker, durability can be a consideration. How long a kicker will last depends on how often you play, the surface you play on and the velocity of shots you face. OBO kickers are designed to wear well. The foam has a coating that stands up to abrasive surfaces like sand-filled pitches far better than the average foam kicker. The kickers also have bonded rubbing strips for the bottom of the kicker where most contact comes. This adds life to the kicker without sacrificing rebound. If there's a complaint about OBO's, it's that they last too long.

High rebound kickers use foam that is less dense than normal kickers. They offer great rebound, but over time and use, the foam compacts, losing elasticity and rebound. If you play a lot and don't have the resources to replace your kickers, high rebound kickers probably aren't your best choice. On the other hand, if you want a kicker that puts a shot back as quick as it comes in, they're the way to go.

No matter what kickers you select, they become a useless accessory if your foot won't stay in them. This is a common problem with kickers that use external, web nylon straps. Toe straps frequently slip and the front of your foot is exposed. There are a number of ways to deal with this. You can tape the toe strap to the strap that goes around the ball of the foot. Don't use so much tape that you lose contact surface with the bottom of your shoe. You can also merge the strap that goes around the ball of the foot with the toe strap so that they cross under the foot. Finally, the way some kickers fit, you might not need the toe strap at all.

Care of kickers is fairly straightforward. Kickers can get dirty and do need to be cleaned even on artificial surfaces and especially on natural surfaces. A plastic scrub brush and a mild household detergent are usually all you need to put a sparkle back into the foam bits of your kit. Avoid cleansers that are abrasive or caustic. On the maintenance front, two tools are very handy, an awl and needle-nose pliers. An awl is great for punching holes in straps when your feet seem to fit just between the pre-punched holes of the kicker. Needle-nose pliers are good for crimping the roller part of buckles that always seem to come off when you tighten your straps. They're also quite useful when you first slot the internal straps through Robo kickers.

There is a breaking in period for high-density foam kickers. Like any new piece of new equipment, you should use them in training before you break them out in a game. When breaking in kickers, I'll usually wear two pair of socks for the first three or four training sessions. Foam can be stiff and will rub all the sensitive areas around your ankles. An extra pair of socks will eliminate most of that chafing.

Most kickers are shipped flat from the manufacturer. To help shape the kicker, I'll tighten the straps as far as they'll go. Beating the kicker with a stick or wrapping them snugly in an elastic bandage are also good ways to speed the break in process. Know that bottom line, all kickers usually need to break in are three good training sessions with lots of shots.

Getting the best out of your Kit

By Rachel Durdin

Kickers

Seven steps to getting the best rebound out of your kickers

1. Start in the attacking position with feet slightly apart, knees bent slightly, body weight forward, hands in a position to save high balls i.e. above waist line and finally raised comfortably on the balls of your feet.
2. Attack the ball (meet the ball slightly in front of your body.)
3. Rotate the ankle so that the instep of the foot meets the ball. (Like a soccer short pass.)
4. Contact with the ball should be made in the centre of the kicker to get maximum projection.
5. Follow through with the foot to ensure a solid clearance. (This is like a putter swing, you need to have the same amount of back swing and follow through).
6. Contact with the ball should be made with force. This does not mean that you have to kick the living daylight out of the ball as the most important thing is the timing of the contact with the ball.
7. Finally you need to keep your head over the ball to ensure flat rebounding.

Threading Kicker Straps

Kicker Straps can be a nightmare to thread first time - Simon Barnett, OBO's owner, showed some of the OBO team that it really easy if you knew how to do it. After we showed a lack of faith in his ability, Simon threaded all four straps in 2 minutes, which was pretty amazing. His tips are as follows - the first three are the most important.

Simon Barnett's Tips:

- Pre bend the straps to the shape you want them in.

- Make sure holes at the top of the kickers are a decent size, cutting them to enlarge if necessary.
- Cut the straps to a pointed end like > rather than the / which we are phasing out, but this may take a while.
- Put a small amount of dishwashing liquid on the tip of the strap. Don't get any on your fingers or you will not be able to pull the straps through.
- If you are still having problems, try gently forcing the end of a spoon or fork down the holes to force them further open.

Right Hand Protector

If your Right Hand Protector is not performing as well as you had hoped, try tightening the straps. If you can not hang on to your stick and move it in all different directions because you are worried about the grip you have on the hand protector, this will be why. A small change makes a huge difference, both to the feel & to the performance of the product.

Equipment: Part 1

By Jon O'haire

One of the most important parts of any keeper's game is his (or her) equipment. Good equipment, effectively used, is one of the cornerstones of goalkeeping. When a keeper chooses his equipment, he's choosing a style of play. That's an important choice. Unfortunately, that's not a choice that all keepers get to make for themselves. Many keepers are provided with kit through their clubs or schools. Other keepers are responsible for providing their own equipment. Whether you or your team is responsible for your equipment, money can be an issue. You can't spend what you don't have. Having said that, there are ways to get the most out of the kit you do have and a number of things to consider when selecting new equipment.

In the next two tips, we'll cover equipment. We'll give you an idea of what to look for, how it should fit and how to take care of it. In part one, we'll cover general things to think about when selecting and caring for equipment, and specifically, equipment bags, kicker and leg guards. Part two will cover pants, upper body protection, hand protectors, sticks, helmets, shoes and everything else.

Before we start, there are a number of things to consider when selecting equipment. First and foremost is the level you play at. Above all else, goalkeeping equipment must be protective. If you're getting hurt with what you're using, new equipment is more than a good idea. Identifying the level you play at isn't just a matter of age. Playing level is impacted by the skill and size of your teammates and opposition, as well as the surface you play. Twelve year old club girls on grass don't need the same gear as 25 year old International men on turf. That much is obvious. The point where a 16-17 year old moves on to senior elite pads isn't always so easy to identify. If you are consistently being exposed to dangerous shots, especially lifted shots that don't allow you time to react, adequate protection is essential. Adequate equipment should not leave a keeper consistently bruised and battered.

Equipment can be an expensive investment. You want to make sure you get the most out of your investment. If you're still growing physically, it's a good idea to wait before spending a lot of money on pads that might only fit you for a season. By the

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same token, hold off on making a substantial investment in kit if you're not sure that you'll be playing in two seasons. We talked about the importance of having kit that's appropriate to the level you play at. It's also important to consider the level you ultimately want to play at. Junior level pads have different playing qualities than more elite type pads, especially leg guards and kickers. If your aspiration is to play at the highest level, playing with and getting used to that gear is important. It doesn't make a lot of sense to spend time on a tricycle if you want to ride a bike.

When selecting equipment, do your homework. The internet is a great resource for information on equipment. Many manufacturers have websites that illustrate their products. Make sure what those websites illustrate. Nice photos and catchy slogans are great, but technical information is important. What materials are pads constructed of? How are they made? What is a company's history? Who is using their gear? How are their products serviced (i.e. where are their local agents, what are their return policies, what kind of customer support do they offer)? These are all important things to consider when investing in equipment.

Taking proper care of equipment is as important as selecting the right gear. Care and maintenance of your equipment is a fairly broad subject and it can cover everything from "de-funking" (odor reduction) to unforeseen pre-game buckle replacement. It's a matter of taking care of the things you can take care of well before a match or training session and having the resources to take care of the unexpected mishaps that hockey brings.

First off, let's start with some of the things required to keep your kit in good shape. One of the most important things is the ability to read. OBO products (and some other makes) come with product information sheets. They're there for a reason. Not only do they give you cool schematic pictures of your pads, they also give you some technical information about the equipment and often, instructions on how to properly use and take care of it. Make sure you have it and read it if at all possible. If you're using a club or school's kit, that's not always possible, but companies like OBO do have that information online. In addition, check the Product Tips and Q&A section of the OBO website for OBO products, there is a ton of useful information there.

As I mentioned, it's important that you have the resources to handle equipment emergencies. I keep a small tool bag with my kit. You don't need to lug a whole tool box with you, but a few items are all you need for most repairs. I have screw drivers (Phillips and regular head), regular and needle nose pliers, scissors and an adjustable wrench (in a pinch it doubles as a hammer) that I keep in portable tool kit. I also keep what's called a leatherman (a multi purpose tool that has files, an awl/leather punch, knife blades, screw drivers, and pliers all on one tool) in addition to several heavy needles and threads. I'll keep an assortment of extra helmet hardware (screws and bolts), as well as spare kicker straps and buckles and duct and athletic tape in the tool kit. I have a small plastic box (like Tupperware) that I keep the tools and materials in and keep it in my equipment bag.

I also have a bigger repair kit that I keep at home. Other items to keep on hand are Shoe Goo or some other kind of plastic/rubber/foam adhesive. Plastic scrub brushes and mild household cleansers are also strongly recommended. Get in the habit of checking your equipment regularly after you've played or trained. It's a lot easier to mend/replace something that's breaking after training as opposed to trying to repair it when it's broken during warm up or worse, during a match. As we deal with specific items of equipment, we'll cover the tools and techniques used for their respective

care and maintenance.

Equipment Bag



Wheelie bag



Body bag

This is where all kit starts and ends up. While not a huge thing (figuratively speaking), a good equipment bag is quite useful. When you think about storing and transporting your kit, you start to realize all the deficiencies in your equipment bag if it isn't up to the task. Gear can be heavy, especially when it's wet. In addition, there is a lot of gear. The last thing you want is a bag that is too small, or isn't sturdy enough to carry all of your kit.

When investing in a bag, there are things to check for. Is the bag waterproof? That's important not only because hockey is a game that's played in the rain or on watered turfs, but because often after a match, your kit is wet with moisture and/or sweat. Sometimes keeping moisture in (on a very temporary basis) is as important as keeping moisture out. Plastic bags are also good for keeping wet stuff from dry stuff.

Side and end pockets are useful. Not only do they help keep things separate, like especially wet, disgusting items from the only semi-damp disgusting items, but they allow you keeper to organize your kit. The more organized my bag is, the easier it is to find things and the less likely I am to forget things when I pack. If I'm going away for a weekend tournament, I'll throw a couple of shirt hangers and newspaper in my bag. Newspaper is excellent for drying out wet shoes. Hangers are good for airing and drying pants and upper body pads.

On the sturdy front, check the stitching on the bag. There should be double-stitching or rivets where straps are attached. Make sure the material the bag is made of is strong enough to carry the load and stress of carrying your equipment. It's also a good idea to see where the stress of the bag is when you carry it fully loaded. If you've got to walk a fair distance with your bag, the last thing you want is to lose the circulation to your arm as you're carrying the bag. Equipment bags with wheels are a welcome development. It's not a bad idea to test drive an equipment bag. Wheels aren't too handy if the handle of the bag is positioned so that your bag is crashing into the back of your legs as you pull it.

Kickers



Robo kickers



Cloud 9 kickers



Yahoo kickers

There are still a variety of different kickers available on the market and in various stages of circulation. If there's one piece of equipment that should be replaced immediately, if not sooner, whether it is inherited or recently purchased, it's bad kickers. Bad kickers can be, but are not limited to, bamboo and leather square toe kickers (yes, they're still out there), worn foam kickers, kickers that are too big, or kickers that are too small.

First off, kickers determine the techniques available to you to clear the ball. Modern hockey requires a keeper to be able to first time clear a shot. In square toe kickers, that is a technique that is among other things, extremely painful, if not virtually impossible. It's like trying to drill a hole with a wrench, square toe kickers are simply not the right tool.

If you've inherited kickers, whatever the type or brand, make sure they fit. If kickers are too big, you won't be able to fasten the straps tight enough to secure them on your feet. If they're close, you might be able to punch extra holes in the straps to make them fit. That might keep them on your feet for a while, but the biggest problem with kickers that are too big is that they're difficult to move in. The foot doesn't make actual contact with the field, the kickers does. As a result, you end up slipping or tripping.

When kickers are too small, the problem is usually equally obvious. Toes hang out, or the kicker doesn't sit back far enough to cover the heel. There don't seem to be enough holes in the straps on the large end at the back of the kicker or you can't pull the buckle tight enough to get the kicker to sit right. Once again, you might be able to work around it by punching extra holes, but after time and practice, you'll find that you end up getting hit in all the places that are exposed with kickers that are too small.

The problems with worn kickers are equally painful. When high-density foam kickers break down, they lose their rebound and protective qualities. The same applies to worn square toe kickers. Both are about as useful as over-sized slippers and should be put out to pasture. Just because kickers are old and ugly, doesn't mean they have to be replaced. A well struck shot will sometimes sting no matter how new, or good your kickers are. There's a difference between sting and collapsing in a heap in pain when the ball contacts your instep. The rebound qualities of the kicker are far more important. As long as rebound off the kicker is fairly proportional to the speed of the shot coming in, there's life in the kicker.

If after you've assessed what you have in your kit bag and finding it lacking, or you just want new kickers there's a lot out there, good and bad. OBO kickers, whether they are Robos, Cloud 9s or Yahoos, are all similarly shaped. For a young keeper

that's important because he'll be playing in a kicker that's shaped the same way as he grows as a person and a keeper. The kicker is designed with a tongue that locks the leg guard in place and keeps it from twisting. In the Robo line, the straps that keep the kicker down on the foot are built into the kicker. This keeps them from sliding back on the foot, sometimes a problem with kickers that have external straps.

When selecting a kicker, durability can be a consideration. How long a kicker will last depends on how often you play, the surface you play on, and the velocity of shots you face. OBO kickers are designed to wear well. The foam has a coating that stands up to abrasive surfaces like sand-filled pitches far better than the average foam kicker. The kickers also have bonded rubbing strips for the bottom of the kicker where most contact comes. This adds life to the kicker without sacrificing rebound. If there's a complaint about OBOs, it's that they last too long.

High rebound kickers use foam that is less dense than normal kickers. They offer great rebound, but over time and use, the foam compacts, losing elasticity and rebound. If you play a lot and don't have the resources to replace your kickers, high rebound kickers probably aren't your best choice. On the other hand, if you want a kicker that puts a shot back as quick as it comes in, they're the way to go.

No matter what kickers you select, they become a useless accessory if your foot won't stay in them. This is a common problem with kickers that use external, web nylon straps. Toe straps frequently slip and the front of your foot is exposed. There are a number of ways to deal with this. You can tape the toe strap (front) to the strap that goes around the ball of the foot (rear). Don't use so much tape that you lose contact surface with the bottom of your shoe. You can also merge the strap that goes around the ball of the foot with the toe strap so that they cross under the foot. Finally, the way some kickers fit, you might not need the toe strap at all.

Care of kickers is fairly straightforward. Kickers can get dirty and do need to be cleaned even on artificial surfaces and especially on natural surfaces. A plastic scrub brush and a mild household detergent are usually all you need to put a sparkle back into the foam bits of your kit. Avoid cleansers that are abrasive or caustic. On the maintenance front, two tools are very handy, an awl and needle-nose pliers. An awl is great for punching holes in straps when your feet seem to fit just between the pre-punched holes. Needle-nose pliers are good for crimping the roller part of buckles that always seem to come off when you tighten your straps. They're also quite useful when you first slot the internal straps through kickers.

There is a breaking in period for high-density foam kickers. Like any new piece of new equipment, you should use them in training before you break them out in a game. When breaking in kickers, I'll usually wear two pair of socks for the first three or four training sessions. Foam can be stiff and will rub all the sensitive areas around your ankles. An extra pair of socks will eliminate most of that chafing.

Most kickers are shipped flat from the manufacturer. To help shape the kicker, tighten the straps as far as they'll go. Beating the kicker with a stick or wrapping them snugly in an elastic bandage are also good ways to speed the break in process. Know that bottom line, all kickers usually need to break in are three good training sessions with lots of shots.

There's a wide range of price to kickers and leg guards. If you are buying kickers, it is best to buy the matching leg guards. You should plan on spending about half your

goalkeeping budget on leg guards and kickers. If there's a place to go cheap on equipment, this isn't the place to do it. Nothing will limit the development of a keeper more than bad pads and kickers.

Leg guards



Robo SP legguards

Robo legguards

Leg guards and kickers are the most important pieces of equipment for a keeper. Watch the game for any length of time and you realize that easily more than half the plays on a ball made by the keeper are with those two pieces of equipment. Leg guards and kickers aren't important solely for the frequency that they're used. Equally important is how they're used and that's determined by the type of leg guards and kickers a keeper uses.

Leg guards came in two types before 1985, cricket pads and skeleton (or continental) leg guards. Cricket pads were taken directly from that sport. They're made of canvas and stuffed with cloth scraps. They're designed more as incidental protection, rather than primary protection (you don't try to get hit with the ball in cricket). Skeleton leg guards are made of canvas or leather and have bamboo cane ribs along the front and canvas with cloth scraps behind the canes for protection. They are designed for a person intending to be hit by a ball, but they have their own deficiencies. A well-struck shot will break bamboo.

Cricket pads, skeleton leg guards, cloth and bamboo square toe kickers are all still available and used, especially at the junior and lower club level. They can provide adequate protection with severe technique limitations. I would not honestly encourage anyone to buy them, but they are usable, especially skeleton leg guards. Why? Because when a keeper, club or school is faced with having to buy a full set of goalkeeping equipment, costs can be a major consideration. Some items might need to wait. If you have to make a decision between replacing kickers or skeleton leg guards, there isn't a decision in my mind. You replace the kickers.

If you've inherited a set of cricket pads or skeleton leg guards, realize full well that if someone hits a ball on your leg pads really hard, you're going to feel it. If you play at a level where that doesn't happen, then you're all right. If injury or discomfort is something you're looking to avoid, foam shin guards and/or kneepads worn under your leg guards are a good idea. With the advent of instep kicking, many keepers find the inside of their leg is a vulnerable area. You can similarly turn foam shin guards to

cover the calf area if you're getting hit with shots there. Make sure you really need the additional padding. Many keepers who have worn shin guards with other pads will use them when they get newer leg guards out of habit. Most leg guards that have wrap around protection will not sit properly on the leg with shin guards stuffed under them.

None of these problems exist with good high-density foam leg guards. High-density foam leg guards come in a variety of styles, sizes and densities from a number of manufacturers. Make sure the foam thickness of the pad corresponds to the level you play at. The harder the shot, the thicker the foam needs to be. When buying leg guards, it's usually best to buy kickers at the same time. If you are using kickers and leg guards from two different manufacturers, make sure they are compatible. OBO kickers can be used with other leg guards, but one of their best features is the tongue that locks them in to place with OBO leg guards. Other kickers have different designs around the ankles that require modification if they're to be used with other brands of leg guards.

When you buy leg guards, the surface you play on does have an impact. Whether it is grass, sand-filled turf, dry turf or water-based turf, the surface you play and train on will affect the life of your leg guards. Playing style will also affect pad life. If you're a keeper that slides a lot on sand-filled pitches, the life span of your pads is likely to be much shorter than the upright keeper who plays on a watered turf.

There are a number of things to take in to consideration when it comes to leg guards. First, make sure they fit. Leg guards should protect from above the kicker to above the knee. Leg guards that are too short leave the keeper's knees exposed, especially as the keeper moves. Pads that are too big are cumbersome and often painful to wear. They dig into the top of the kicker and the straps often rub directly behind the knee, chafing and digging into your leg. Leg guards should protect the inside of the calf. Just as the instep is a primary clearing surface, the inside of the leg is a frequent saving surface.

Depending on the type of leg guards you wear, maintenance will take different forms. Leather skeleton pads need to be left out to dry after use. Leather straps will crack or rot quickly if you don't properly air dry your pads. In addition, metal buckles will rust. You should replace broken canes in skeleton pads. Obviously foam leg guards don't have these problems. You should check straps periodically. Most foam leg guards now have nylon straps with plastic buckles. Occasionally the stitching around the buckles will wear and they should be re-stitched before you have them go in the game. Most manufacturers sell replacement straps and buckles for their pads, but if you're in a bind many sporting goods or camping stores sell backpacking supplies (plastic buckles and nylon strap) that can be used.

It's a good idea to clean your pads periodically. Skeleton pads can be scrubbed down with a wet hand brush. Foam pads can be cleaned using a mild household cleanser and a scrub brush. Even if you play on watered turf and your pads seem clean, washing and rinsing them on a regular basis is a good idea. Foam can absorb sweat and you can easily get a nice coat of bacterial slime going if you don't clean your pads. In addition to smelling, that bacteria can cause a nasty rash. When drying foam equipment, always air dry it and avoid keeping it in direct sunlight or extreme heat for extended periods of time. The inside of a car can reach 100 degrees centigrade in the summer, hot enough to damage foam.

Equipment: Part 2

By Jon O'hair

Last tip we made a start to covering goalkeeper equipment. We talked about what to look for, how to take care of it and specifically looked at equipment bags, kickers and leg guards. In this second part, we'll look at helmets, hand protection, body pads, pants and assorted other items.

Helmets/Masks



Robo CK Helmet

Starting from the top, helmets or masks are one of the most important pieces of equipment a keeper can wear. Too often, though, fashion rather than function become the criteria for selecting head protection. The most important factor when selecting a helmet or mask is whether the item can provide adequate protection for the level you play at. In other words, can it stand up to a shot in the face that you're likely to see (or not see)? Unfortunately most keepers don't consider the possibility until it's too late. We talked about a number of factors to consider last tip in selecting equipment, cost, durability and the level you play at. These factors are very relevant when it comes to head protection.

One of the most basic types of head protection is an ice hockey helmet with wire cage attachments. They are among the most affordable types of protection and also among the most durable. When selecting a helmet, make sure it fits your head. Most helmets are adjustable within a range of head sizes. Most manufacturers use hat sizes to calculate the range that a helmet will fit. It helps to know that information when you go to buy your helmet. When properly fitted, a helmet shouldn't move when you shake your head. Many helmets are available with wire cages already affixed. That's usually the best way to make sure that a cage will fit your particular helmet. If you are buying a cage separately, make sure that it's compatible with your helmet. Cages from manufacturers different than your helmet may not fit and that can be a big problem when you get hit. Also make sure the cage is properly fitted to your face. If there is a chin cup, your chin should rest in it. At no time, should the wire cage be able to come in to direct contact with your face.

Masks with built in cages are becoming more and more popular. They are available in a number in a number of different styles from a variety of manufacturers. If you're looking at this type of protection, make sure you pick a mask that's compatible with the shots you're facing. I've seen extremes at both ends; junior keepers playing with OUS carbon/Kevlar masks where shots are rarely hit in the air and on the other side, elite level keepers playing in the equivalent of glorified street hockey masks.

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As a rule of thumb, the harder the shot you face, the sturdier you want your mask to be. You need to consider the techniques you're using and the conditions you play in. If you're lying down on corners or playing on the ground, your reactions are limited. The chances of getting hit in the face in situations you can't control increase. Many of the plastic masks are subject to extreme heat or cold. Combine extreme conditions with extreme impact and some plastics will shatter. Carbon/Kevlar masks may be more expensive, but they are also more durable. At the end of the day, you get what you pay for and you don't want to be cheap when it comes to your head.

Masks do come in sizes also. When ordering make sure you get the right size. Most masks have a chin cup to keep the mask away from your face. Make sure your chin fits securely in it. Once again, if your chin can slip, the mask will make direct contact with your face and you can get badly cut if you're hit in the head with a shot. Many masks also come with extra padding to help customize the fit. Take the time to properly fit the mask when you get it. As with a helmet, the mask should not move when you shake your head if it's properly fitted.

Throat protectors are more than a good idea; they can be the difference between a wake up call and a tracheotomy. Throat protectors come in two types, a collar type protector or a plastic hanging type. One thing to consider with the hanging type is whether it will flip up when you slide or go down. If the protector is flipping up, it's not protecting your throat. The clear plastic hanging type used by ice hockey keepers can be tied to prevent it from flipping up.

A few things to consider when selecting a helmet or mask, color can make a difference, especially if you play in hot, sunny conditions. Dark colors will absorb heat, making them hotter to play in. Similarly, if you play in hot conditions, look for a helmet or mask that is well ventilated. Many keepers have taken to painted masks or helmets. Most masks or helmets must be painted with special paints. The process can be detailed and expensive and if not done properly, the wrong paint can ruin a good helmet by compromising the integrity of the materials the helmet is made. The same can happen when you drill holes in a helmet to adjust the fit of a cage.

Helmet/mask care is fairly straightforward if done regularly. Make sure screws and bolts are tight. The best time to check is immediately after training or games. Keep a screwdriver handy. A towel is also a good idea. If you play on wet turf or sweat a lot, helmets and masks can get wet and some hardware will rust. Wipe your helmet dry after use. It's also a good idea to periodically wash and rinse your helmet with mild soap or detergent periodically to prevent cheese like aromas.

If you wear a helmet, make sure you attach the chinstrap. If you wear a mask, make sure the straps are secured. Helmets and masks can be loose enough to allow you to talk, but they shouldn't be so loose that they come flying off when you slide. If the wire cage on your mask or helmet gets dented, replace it. While the dent may not be serious, the welds to the cage can be compromised with a dent. If you get hit again in the same place, you risk serious injury.

Hand Protectors/Gloves



Robo Hand Protectors

Hand protection used to be gloves and they were your one and only option. The rules of the game called for keepers to wear protection on their hands that had five "separate and independent fingers". Those rules often allowed for those independent fingers to get broken by equally independent and hard shots. Mercifully, those days are gone and we've seen the development of hand protectors.

Depending on your needs, your budget or what's available, gloves can be adequate protection, particularly at the junior level. At a minimum, gloves should protect the hands, wrists and lower forearms. Basic features of the left hand (or hand-stopping) glove are a well-padded palm, in addition to wrist and forearm protection. The right hand (or stick) glove should have padded fingers, a sturdy thumb shell, as well as wrist and forearm protection.

Gloves should be big enough to cover the lower forearm, yet not be so big that they slip off. A keeper should be able to comfortably handle his stick in one hand. Some keepers prefer gloves for indoor hockey specifically for their ability to stick handle. If you do wear gloves, make sure they do what they're supposed to; protect your hands. If your hands are getting stung making saves on hard raised shots, it's time to replace them.

Hand protectors not only offer superior protection to gloves, they offer a keeper a wider range of skills to play aerial shots much the same way high density foam kickers allow keepers a wider range of skills to play shots on the ground. With hand protectors, a keeper can use the pace of a shot to deflect the ball away from him and into space. While a keeper still can't bat a ball, the rules of the game now allow him to intentionally deflect a ball out of play over the end line or crossbar.



Like kickers and leg guards, the primary difference between most models of hand protectors is the density of the foam. The harder the shots you face, the thicker and denser you want the foam. If your hands are getting stung by aerial shots, it's time to upgrade your hand protectors.

The shape of the right hand protector can also affect the way you play. Early models of some types of right hand protectors had a round hand. This often made it difficult to get your stick flat on stick tackles, especially to the reverse side. Others have padding at an angle that is better suited to playing with your hands back, closer to your body as opposed to in front of your body. It makes sense to buy hand protectors that are suited to your style of play.

At the senior men's level, hand protectors are pretty much a one-size-fits-all affair, but the distinction isn't so clear for boys, girls and women. Similar to gloves, hand protectors should protect the hands and lower forearms. This is especially critical for younger keepers who may have smaller equipment. Fingers should never be exposed on the right hand protector. If you wear arm pads, the hand protectors should overlap on the lower forearms. Your wrist should not be exposed. Even if you don't wear arm pads, your wrist and lower forearms should be protected. Make sure the finger loops on the right hand protector allow you to hold a stick with a confident grip. The strap on the left hand protector should be snug enough that a well-paced shot won't knock the hand protector off.

Care of hand protectors is similar to leg guard and kickers. You can easily clean them with soap and water. Check straps periodically. If you do wear gloves, make sure you keep them dry. Leather will crack if it's not properly dried. Balled up newspaper or a hand held hair dryer are good for drying out soggy gloves.

Upper Body Protection



Robo Body Armour

Upper body protection takes a number of different forms and what's best for you will depend on your style of play and what you're comfortable playing in. The two main types of protection are body pads with attached arm protection and stand alone chest pads.

Stand alone chest protectors are usually preferred by keepers who want lightweight protection that allows for open movement or junior players who don't face a lot of hard, raised shots. When choosing a chest pad, make sure the pad fits. The chest pad should cover the front of the shoulders and extend from below the throat to just below the abdomen. If the pad is too small, the keeper will have open areas exposed as they move. When the pad is too big, movement is usually restricted. Make sure straps are properly adjusted. The pad should be loose enough to allow for full range of motion, yet be secure enough that the pad doesn't twist or shift when you move.

If you do wear a chest pad, elbow pads are highly recommended, especially for advanced play. Sliding on abrasive surfaces like artificial surfaces can leave nasty turf burns. In addition, consider the materials chest protectors and elbow pads are made from. Look for water resistant coverings, padding and plastic as materials, particularly if you play on water based turfs. Some keepers who wear chest pads will wear separate arm pads that cover the inside of the arms as well as the elbows. If you go the arm pad route, make sure the arm pads work with your chest pad. The biggest thing to avoid is a set of arm pads that cover the same area as your chest pad. If they do, the pads overlap and the chest and arm pads tend to bunch up and restrict movement.

The second style of upper body protection is a body pad (or body armor). Body armor was first developed for ice hockey keepers and as mentioned earlier is a one-piece pad that covers the chest and arms. Because they are designed as a one-piece pad you don't get the bunching you do with separate arm and chest pads. Body armor provides excellent protection for the chest, the inside of the arms and the elbows. Having said that some body armor is more restrictive than others and may need to be modified depending on the level of protection and mobility you require.



OBO body armor is designed to provide a full range of motion for the movements of a field hockey keeper. Some keepers prefer ice hockey body armor that offers more protection, though sometimes at the cost of mobility. Ice hockey body armor can be modified to increase range of motion, particularly in the shoulders. Often times it's simply a matter of getting used to and the pads breaking in, both of which happen in time. If you haven't used body armor before, whether it is OBO or ice hockey, it can be bulky, it can be hot and it might feel restrictive. The same can be said for bruises and internal bleeding. Swelling is bulky and restrictive and it also hurts. I'll take body armor.

If at all possible, try body armor on before you buy it. As mentioned earlier, body armor will become more flexible as it breaks in, but no amount of breaking in will help if the elbow and shoulder joints of the body armor don't correspond to your body. There are usually a number of points of adjustment to body armor. Take the time to adjust straps to your body and needs. These straps may slip over time. Check them periodically. You may need to stitch or tape problem straps. Make sure protruding buckles face out so they don't dig in to you when you slide.

Contrary to popular myth, upper body equipment can and should be washed. It's best to hand wash them with soap or a mild detergent. Allow plenty of time for them to air dry. Don't ever try to dry them in a machine dryer. Plastic buckles on body pads may break. If they do, you can often find similar buckles in camping/backpack shops or on old luggage you might have

Lower Body Protection



For the most part, gone are the thrilling days of yesteryear where lower body protection was sweatpants and a bruise the size of a grapefruit was a badge of courage. Padded pants are more than a good idea at every level of play. Once again, depending on your budget or what's available to you, there are a number of affordable and adequate options. In recent years, field hockey goalkeeping pants have been developed and the OBO pants are excellent. Regular ice hockey or ice hockey goalkeeper pants are also reasonable alternatives.

Goalkeeping fundamentals start with the keeper trying to get his or her body behind the ball when making a save. That requires confidence and confidence comes from having good protection. At the junior level, danger may not always come from raised shots as much as it may come from bad bounces on grass fields. The pace of shots is usually such that the keeper only needs pants with protection on the front of the thighs and pants with foam padding are usually enough.

Once shots start to get harder and a keeper is using more advanced techniques, needs change. A keeper is exposed to hard, raised shots in training and games and is frequently making contact with the ground while developing skills like slide tackling and logging on corners. Getting hit once with poor equipment is bad enough, to risk it on a regular basis is asking more than should be expected of a keeper.

At advanced levels of play, pants should have padding in the more exposed areas that is as hard as a hockey ball. Those areas include the front and inside of the thighs, and the front and outside of the hips. As mentioned earlier, OBO makes two types of field hockey goalkeeper pants that are designed to specifically cover those areas. They are the Smarty Pants and Hot Pants. Smarty Pants are designed for keepers who favor a loose pant that will not hinder movement. The padded panels of the pants move with the keeper, especially on the area at the front of the hips. The Hot Pants are a snugger pant that is made of a stretch material. The main part of the pant is like a girdle. The padding sits directly on the leg and the stretch material allows the pant to move with the keeper. An outer shell is worn over the girdle to protect the pants and provides additional protection. Both Smarty Pants and Hot Pants are available with a durable outer that can be replaced.

Many keepers also wear ice hockey pants that come in styles similar to the OBO pants. These pants also come in a girdle style that should be worn with an outer shell, or a baggier pant that is a shell with built in protection. The major problem with these pants is that they are designed for ice hockey. Ice hockey players need protection on the outside of the thighs and hips for checking. They don't want protection on the inside of the thighs as that restricts skating. The padding on the outside of the thighs is redundant for field hockey and the inside of the thigh is an area where field hockey keepers frequently get hit so the drawbacks are a problem.

Ice hockey goalkeeper pants provide excellent protection for many of the areas that the field hockey keeper is exposed, but it comes at the cost of mobility. An ice hockey keeper is usually playing within a three yard area of a much smaller goal while a keeper may have to play anywhere in a sixteen yard circle while defending a goal that is almost four times as big. Having said that, ice hockey pants are better than nothing.

Whatever type of pant you use, fit is critical. Pants need to be big enough that they don't restrict movement. By the same token, you don't want them so big that they shift when you move or prevent your other equipment from sitting properly. As a note, the Smarty Pants are designed to be big and baggy. Many keepers who are used to a snugger pant may be put off. Smarty Pants are not designed to be flattering to the figure. They are designed for function. Pants are usually held up with an adjustable belt or suspenders. Make sure they are adjusted to keep the pant from slipping down, yet still allow you to breathe.

Pants can and should be cleaned. The pads can be removed from the Smarty Pants and the shell washed. The inner pads can be removed and hand washed with soap and air-dried. The shell can be machine washed in the gentle cycle. The same holds true for the Hot Pants and most girdle type ice hockey pants. Ice hockey pants with pads built into the shell should generally be hand washed only. Periodically check the outer shell of your pants. If you've got holes in the shell, or it's starting to rip, replace it.

Pelvic protection should be worn in addition to pants. Whether it be a protective cup for boys or men or a pelvic protector for girls or women, the consequences of injuries without them makes them invaluable, end of sermon.

Sticks



OBO Goalie Stick

A keeper doesn't use a stick for the same thing a field player does. He doesn't need to hit a ball 70 miles-an-hour. He needs to stop the 70 mile-an-hour shot. For that reason, weight and stopping surface are important.

Goalkeeper sticks are becoming increasingly popular. Made from wood or composite materials, they are light and stiff and have an extended toe that provides a large stopping surface. Longer sticks allow a keeper maximum reach when making stick tackles and as long as the stick length doesn't interfere with your ability to make plays in your normal position, they are a good idea.

Some goalkeeper sticks have a shorter, flat handle. They are designed to provide a flat stopping surface for those keepers who lie down on penalty corners. While they do provide a more predictable stopping surface, their shorter length is a drawback when making stick tackles, especially when you need maximum extension. Goalkeeper sticks with especially big heads present a different problem in that you may not be able to get your stick flat when making reverse stick tackles.

Many keepers prefer traditional sticks and they are perfectly fine for goalkeeping. Indoor sticks or lightweight field hockey sticks are fine for goalkeepers as long as they allow you to perform the skills necessary for the position.

Whatever stick you use, make sure the grip allows you to comfortably and adequately hold the stick. If you sweat a lot, tennis racquet gauze tape can help prevent your stick from slipping. Athletic tape near the head of the stick is also a good idea, especially if you're a post banger. It's a good idea to have a second stick in your bag and to have at least played with it a couple of times in the event that your stick does break in a match.

Shoes



Shoes are important. All the equipment in the world is pretty useless if you can't get from point A to point B without falling on your face. Having the right footwear is a matter of knowing the surface you're playing on and the conditions you'll be playing in. These can change during the course of the match and it's critical to be prepared.

Different surfaces require different shoes. Natural surfaces like grass require multi-cleat shoes, but depending on the length of the grass and weather conditions, a shoe with a longer cleat may be needed for adequate footing. There are a variety of artificial surfaces, water and sand based, that require different footwear depending on conditions and your playing style. Athletic shoes with flat, rubber soles are good for dry, artificial surfaces and some sand based pitches. A multi-cleat shoe with lots of short nubs or studs is good for wet, water-based turfs. Shoes with longer studs may be needed depending on how heavily watered the turf is or how slick the surface is, particularly with new pitches.

When you go to buy shoes for hockey, take your kickers with you. Some shoes are better suited to wearing under kickers, especially when it comes to kicker straps and stud alignment. Ideally, you want a shoe that will allow the straps to sit directly on the sole and between the studs to provide maximum traction and prevent the straps from slipping. Barring that, look for shoes that will allow the straps to sit as close to the sole as possible. You can cut a slot for straps with shoes that have short rubber studs using a utility knife but you don't want to do have to do radical surgery on your boots if there's an easier choice.

Use your warm up to test which footwear will be best for your playing conditions. As noted, conditions can change during a match. Dry fields can be naturally watered with rain, wet turfs can dry out. Make sure you have shoe options to meet your playing conditions, especially as they might change. Also be aware of how you play. Keepers who play up on the balls of their feet may not want a shoe with long studs as they're likely to get stuck making a save. On the other hand, keepers who play more flat-footed will require a longer stud. Know how you play and what's best for you.

Shoes do need to be taken care of. They need to be aired out and dried properly, especially when wet. Balled up newspaper is good for absorbing moisture. If you play on wet turf, look for shoes made of water resistant materials. Leather shoes can be treated to better deal with water. Avoid extreme heat when drying shoes.

Final thoughts

There's a lot to think of when it comes to equipment: how to select it, how to use it and how to take care of it. All affect your ability to play well. Make sure you take the time to take care of what takes care of you.

If you play for a school or club team, I highly recommend getting your own kit, especially if you plan on playing for a while. Having your own kit allows you access to it all the time. Many schools have policies that prevent issuing equipment out of season. Club equipment often has to be shared. If you have your own equipment, not only do you have access, you have the ability to make adjustments and select equipment that is ideal for you.

Money is often an issue. I mentioned the internet earlier when researching equipment. It can also be a resource when looking for bargains. The OBO seconds sale is one such place for savings. You may be able to find similar savings when looking for ice hockey equipment like helmets, masks, body armor and pants. You may not always be able to get what you want immediately, but if you do your homework you can get what you need.

Equipment is a substantial investment. It's an investment in your safety. Treat it accordingly. Don't expect anyone else to take care of it. Don't throw it in your equipment bag after a match and expect it to be good to go when you take it out of the bag a week later. As a wise man once said, "Failing to prepare is preparing to fail." The right equipment properly cared for can make the difference between winning and losing. Do what you can to make sure you have that advantage.

Q&A

Techniques

Scoring from a flicked ball

Recently I had to make an aerial save from a short corner. I know that for the first shot to be a goal it has to hit the back board, but does the same rule apply if the ball is flicked? My question is, could I have left it to go into the goals?

Jon's reply:

A flicked ball can be scored at any height on a penalty corner, a hit shot has to be less than eighteen inches high crossing the goal line. In a penalty corner situation, I recommend playing every shot no matter what the height and let the umpire make the decision as to whether it's too high.

Penalty strokes

I was just wondering if you could give some pointers for defending penalty strokes, they just seem to me like the hardest thing to do. Any help would be greatly appreciated.

Jon's reply

Rachel has a tip on penalty strokes. Good strokes should go in. A shot from 7 yards is going to be difficult to save if well placed. I think the big thing is to give yourself a chance to save it. Be in a good ready position with your feet shoulder width apart. If you get too wide in your stance, it's tough to explode. I think your reaction needs to be strong and reaction is key. I don't like to guess on strokes. You can get left looking pretty stupid when you guess. Certainly you can anticipate, but you're reacting when there's actual ball movement. Too many times a keeper gets caught looking for all these cues that will tip off where the stroke is going to go, when the only cue that's relevant is the ball. Make sure only your heels are above the plane of the goal line, as opposed to your toes. Do all these things and you at least give yourself a chance to save a stroke. Biggest thing, experiment, try to do something when you defend, see the result, if you're making saves, keep doing what you're doing.

Which way will the opposition go? Going to ground

I played a game of Hockey today (obviously I am goalie) and I have only just recently "learnt" how to lay down. A short corner was awarded to the opposition and I took a step out and proceeded to prepare to lay down (I do this just in case they flick it or whatever). Normally the person who traps the ball doesn't shoot (because there are two defenders running out at him!!!) but this time he did and I didn't have enough time to react, I was half down but on the way down the ball went through my legs! I was wondering whether or not you could tell me what the process - or what the exact things I should do! I was told at the second half to move out about 2 metres (about 2.2 yards) this was more effective. Also - On a penalty stroke it is sometimes difficult to know which way the opposition are going. How do you take an educated guess as to which way they are going?

Jon's reply

First on strokes, all you can take are educated guesses. Unless the player has volunteered where he is going to put the ball and is capable of putting it there, everything you do is guesswork. You can look at how he sets up his feet, the more open they are to you, the more likely he is to put the ball to your right. Look at the angle of stick if he takes a practice step. See where he is looking as he steps up to take the stroke. These can be useful input, but usually what best gets the result is a

strong reaction save. As far as corners, if you are going down, the important thing is how you end up, not how you do it. There are several variations of going down, but bottom line is that you have to be down as the ball is coming to goal. Depending on your speed off the line and reactions to a struck ball, your methods might vary. You want to end up between two and three meters of the line when the shot comes in. Whether the ball is struck at your feet or your hands, you still have to stretch your legs and body out. A lot of time when the ball is hit to the keepers legs he tries to play it as if he were up right. He can't. In going down, you're taking the role of a wall. Let the ball hit you. If you're going down, you have to be down.

Communication

I'm finding that when I'm playing that my defence is not doing as what I tell them to say. I've tried to explain that if I tell them to mark someone then its for a reason but because the marked player doesn't get the ball they don't think they need to mark them. They also seem to always go for the player with the ball. I have also told them that a player coming along the base line is easier for me to take than a shot from the top, but they always seem to keep going for the ball. I talked to the coach about it but he doesn't seem to do anything about it. So I was wondering if you had any ideas!!

Jon's reply

Communication is critical and it's important that you, your team-mates and coach all be on the same page. Situations where more then one defender are involved require the defence to work as a group. That's not to say that situations can only be successfully played one way either. Your coach probably has philosophies about how he wants those situations played. Make sure you and your defenders are all on the same page. Communication is only effective when people do what you want. People can also be motivated to listen. Make sure your communication style is one that motivates people to listen and do what you want. You do that by being direct and confident. You don't need to be a cheerleader (please don't), but occasional praise is useful. Stick measurements

Vulnerable between the feet

One of my goal keepers is vulnerable between her feet. As she steps to clear - a high percentage of balls go between her legs. Is this a timing issue or technique issue? Please help me help her!!!

Jon's reply

I saw your goalkeeper at the Jnr. Pan Ams in Barbados. She either needs to bring her feet in and narrow her stance, or her knees further apart. I think it's narrow her stance. With her feet wide and her knees in, her weight is too far forward and she just drops. For ball between her legs, it can be a timing and technique issue. She needs to take the ball in front of her body and if she's too wide with her stance, she's going to be slower coming forward. Have her focus on opening up with her kicking leg, pushing off her plant leg and deflecting balls between her legs.

I keep lifting my clearances

I am a South African student playing for the second team at my club. We play on grass that is at the best of times very bumpy. I have not been able to afford OBO kickers yet but am still saving, and although my club keeps promising to invest in some better kit I hold little hope. One of my major errors at the moment is that I often give away needless short-corners by clearing the ball and lifting it out of the circle. Our coach, who is one of the best in South Africa, has been working on the problem with me but I am still struggling and am in need of further advice. As far as I can tell

everything is by the book, my head is over the ball. I do not take my eye of it, I use an open flat foot but still the result is the same. Any advice you can give would be extremely welcome!

Jon's reply

If your head is over the ball and it's still coming up, the thing you might want to consider is your leg angle when you contact the ball and where on the kicker the ball is hitting. On grass, the ball will skip and if the ball hits you on the top of the kicker as opposed to the instep, it will come up. The other thing that can happen is you can have your head over the ball, but if your foot is out in front of the knee of your kicking leg, the ball will still come up. Try really pushing off from your non-kicking leg and getting your head out in front when you contact the ball. If you do this, you should have an easier time contacting the ball with your foot and knee at an angle perpendicular to the ground when you kick. With bouncy, skippy balls you can even try making contact with your foot slightly behind your knee and then kick through. Good luck on the new kicker front.

Is being nervous before a game a good thing?

I wrote in some time ago about playing goalkeeper for our first team (after playing full back). Well 5 games later being a 46-year-old female does not seem to have been a problem. Expecting too much from myself has. We are playing in a Challenge Cup final on Sunday (Mid season final between two top teams in the grade) and I am extremely nervous. Before each game now I get more nervous and expect more from myself - is this a good thing? I do have a problem with my timing on a slide tackle but continue to try every training session and hopefully it will eventually all fall into place. Yes, I have let goals in but then again I have also saved goals thanks to your Q&A section that I try and log into every week. I am a GOALKEEPER thanks to you and your OBO goalkeeping chat site. Once again thanks and I will continue to log into the OBO website to learn from the many goalkeepers writing in.

Jon's reply

Thanks for your note. I'm glad to hear you're enjoying your adventures in goal. I don't think it's a bad thing to be nervous before a game. For a lot of keepers, pre-match jitters are nothing more than nervous energy. As far as expectations, it's important to keep them in perspective. It's one thing to be nervous about making mistakes, it's another to be nervous about an opponent. As long as there are keepers, there will be mistakes. It's how you treat a mistake that's important. Treat mistakes like learning opportunities and life is a whole lot easier.

Taking on two forwards

I play keeper for one of our school teams here in South Africa. One of the biggest problems I have is when there are two forwards coming at me, I go for one, and he passes the ball across to other forward, and I don't have time to get back across the box to make the save. Very often, our sweeper is left alone with me in the D and the forwards get past him because he can't take on both of them at once. I know we should work on defence as well. Any advice you can give me regarding this would be really cool. By the by, we play most games on grass.

Jon's reply

faced with two forwards, your job is never going to be easy. You can't take away everything, but you can try to turn the situation to your advantage. If you have a defender with you, try to position them in a way where they're not totally committing to the ball. If they can pressure the ball carrier in such a way that they're also able to

contest a pass, you make life difficult for the opposition. Similarly, if you're the defender taking on the forwards, step up in to the same type of space. For more ideas about that, see the tip I have on slide tackling. Whether you play on grass or turf, the tactics and techniques are similar. Two on a keeper should score, but that doesn't mean you have to automatically give them the goal. Mix up what you do and evaluate where you're most successful. Experience will show what's best for you.

Getting on your feet quickly

I am a coach of an age group rep team in NZ. One of my goalies is struggling with a good technique to quickly get back on their feet after they have made a dive or split save. They almost get stranded like a turtle on its back. Any thoughts or suggestions?

Jon's reply

Typically if a keeper is stranded on their back after making a save it's because their weight is back when making the save. Make sure keepers are leading with their head when making a save and their weight is on the balls of their feet. If keepers are having trouble recovering when they go down, practice having them get up. Make sure your keepers aren't just using their legs when they get up. They can and should use their hands to recover. As you probably know, it does no good to make the first save going down, if you're just going to let the rebound in because you can't recover.

Foot saves

I'm a goalie in New Zealand. I play for an U18 rep team and for a senior mens' A grade club team. At this level I can sometimes get into trouble with foot saves (sending the ball wide). The slow to medium pace shots I can save and send wide. But the ones that are belted at me often get me into trouble. Firstly, if a ball is coming straight at me, between my legs, I can get a foot to it but it usually goes straight back to the shooter. I am wondering if, for the really fast reaction save shots, I should just worry about getting my foot there or, as I am playing at quite a high level, I should try to clear the ball like you said in an earlier letter, where you push off the non-kicking foot and cross kick in front of where you started. Secondly, for the shots going along the ground to either side, when all I have time to do is move my foot there (in a lunge), when I have already dropped my shoulder to do this, should I just get my foot there (having more surface area), or should I try to rotate my foot to clear the ball wide (less surface area). Remember these are for VERY fast shots.

Jon's reply

I think the biggest thing for you to think of when saving fast shots straight at you is what your contact foot angle is like. Too often on straight on hard shots, the keeper simply turns his foot square and puts the ball right back to the forward. There are two ways you can try to fix this. One, you try to play the ball in front of you, so you push off your non-kicking leg. If you have good hip rotation, try to change the angle really leading with your heel and opening up with your hips and shoulders. If you don't (this is the second way), don't open up so full with your foot when saving. You're just going to angle your foot so when you make contact, the ball deflects to safety. Obviously with fast shots, your first job is to stop the shot. These shots can be controlled and save/cleared, though. It's just a matter of setting your body up to take the ball to your target.

Where can I stand in a flick situation?

I was recently told by an umpire that in a flick situation a goalkeeper does not have to be fully behind the line. Apparently a goalkeeper can stand in any position as long as his/her feet are on the line. I decided to try this with just the back of my feet on the

line. I am currently in the process of deciding whether this has any benefits or whether I feel comfortable with this. I was just wondering what you thought and whether this is common knowledge.

Jon's reply

My experience has been, that when you're first playing there is very little that is common knowledge. If you didn't know it before, that was good stuff for you to find out. As far as penalty stroke, a keeper can stand with any part of his foot on the plane of the goal line. Your feet do not have to physically touch the line. If I put my heels above the plane of the front of the goal line, I can cover a little more net. With someone shooting from 7 yards away, every inch helps.

Slide tackling

I am 46 and have been asked by our 1st side (State League 3 in Perth Western Australia) to play in goal. I am nervous but feel very comfortable in the position (it actually feels normal and I enjoy it). My concern is slide tackles. I can picture myself doing it and have had a few practice slides at training (not against an attacker). Is speed the most important thing when slide tackling? I am guessing that timing is pretty important as well. I have spoken with my coach and explained that as I am not a keeper that they must not expect too much but that I would put my heart and soul into the job I have to do. All I need is your help on those slide tackle and possibly any other pointers you can give a new goalkeeper.

Jon's reply

Welcome to the club, I don't think anyone is too old to become a keeper. As far as slide tackling, speed is important to an extent. You hit it on the head when you talked about timing. Speed means nothing when you hit a forward at semi-warp speed and the ball is out of your reach (actually it means a penalty stroke). I'd point you to the tip I did a while back on slide tackling on the OBO website. I think the biggest problem most keepers have when slide tackling is that they go to where the attacker and the ball were as opposed to where they are going. In that regards timing and anticipation mean everything. When it comes to basics, the biggest skill I'd focus on is saving/clearing. Notice that I didn't separate the two. I think the quicker you can learn to clear shots on the ground first time, the easier the job will be. Once again, I'll refer you to the tip I had on kicking. It sounds like you have a great attitude about taking on a new position. Enjoy it and be patient. Don't worry about letting your team-mates down if you make a mistake. If there were more capable keepers, they'd be playing.

"Skyballs"

I have been watching some international and national hockey games lately and I've noticed goalkeepers are starting to use "Skyballs". That is, when the ball comes into the D, instead of clearing the ball the keeper kicks it into the air, over the players, with a more "overhead" style to it. I was wondering how keepers do this? I've noticed some lean back when kicking, thus forcing the ball to be raised, while others kick it like a soccer ball. What way is the best technique and how can I go about practicing it?

Jon's reply

The technique you're talking about is basically putting the ball over the top in a crowded circle. You can't do this on every ball, the ball has to be moderately paced and at least six inches off the ground. Typically these are either flicks that have been saved and are going down of your hands/body, or even more, balls that are bouncing up off the turf. Sometimes you see this when there is a bouncy cross coming in. To get the ball up, you use the top of your kicker, just to the instep side and kick up and

through the ball. You can accentuate loft by leaning back as you kick. Two things need to happen for the kick not to be dangerous, you need to get the ball up in a hurry and it needs to clear the circle by ten yards. If a player in the circle can make the clear dangerous, rest assured you're going to call for a corner. It can be a very effective technique. The place you see it in a lot in international games is when the ball comes off a keeper's left hand. He'll bring a lifted ball down, deflect it in to space, have a yard or two to set his feet up for the clear and then, boom. He sails it 30 yards or more. If you play soccer, this is a pretty easy skill to learn. If not, practice. In the beginning don't worry about distance. Look to get the ball up, and you do this by kicking on the upswing. You want your foot to be in a position close to straight down from the knee when you make contact and then follow through up with your foot. When you practice this, you don't initially want players in the way. Set up cones as targets. Then work up from there. Try not to kill people as you learn this skill.

Slide tackling

I am a average to getting better goalie and I find sliding the hardest thing to do. I have a very tight muscles and when I assume the sliding position I tend to fall backwards, I have been trying to stretch myself to get a better sit but I am having problems. I have been trying to assume the "hurdlers stretch" position as well as normal stretching but I just seems to not be working for me. Can you give me any more advice?

Jon's reply

Take a look at the slide tackling tip and review your technique. Flexibility shouldn't be a major issue. If your weight is back, you probably need more speed in setting up your slide and need to keep your top shoulder and hip forward as you execute the slide. Flexibility is still a good thing to work on.

When to go out and when to stay in

I'm a 20 year old goalie from Germany. I have been playing hockey for 2 years, since 4 months I'm goalie. because I played tennis for over 10 years, my reflexes are good, my stick is ok. But: I don't know, when to go out and when to stay in the goal-I don't know the tactical things about goalkeeping. Because I'm the only goalie in my team, there's no special goalie-training. what can I do to improve the tactical aspects of goalkeeping?

Jon's reply

Tactically, a lot of what makes sense for you to do will depend on how your team defends. I think more and more the keeper is being asked to play off his line and mark, but that really depends on your coach and team's philosophies. Try to get that defined, then you can start to evaluate your effectiveness. As a keeper, there's a lot to organise and identify; ball movement, danger players and marking responsibilities, communication is very important. Those are all tactical issues. On your question as to whether or not to play up, see where you're most successful. If you look at 20 situations, and when you stepped up, you save 70% and when you stayed back, you saved 30%, I'd say stepping up is better for you. If it were the other way, I'd say stay back. I think rather than worrying about right or wrong, you start to figure out where you're most successful. Hockey isn't always an easy game to learn, but you make it easier if you have a plan.

Pigeoned toed keeper

I have the problem that I am slightly pigeon toed and that I don't get onto the balls of my feet when I get ready for the save. What can I do to correct this?

Jon's reply

If you are pigeon toed, you probably have a secondary problem, in that you're also knock kneed. If that's the case, bring your feet slightly closer together in your ready position. Make sure you keep your head and chest forward also. That will help keep your weight forward and up on the balls of your feet.

Sliding and diving

I was just wondering about sliding and diving. They are definitely my two favourite things to do, but when in goal and I am down in a split and the ball comes back for a rebound I go into a dive to save the ball. It works great for me, but my mom says that she thinks I should get up right away. I think what I am doing is right, but I just wanted to make sure it is normal for goalies to use their own tactics.

Jon's reply

When it comes to making rebound saves, you've got to do whatever you can to make the save. When you do have the opportunity to decide how you want to play the ball, I try to stay upright. In the event there is another rebound, you're in a position to make a play on the ball. I don't think there is a way normal keepers play the shot. You need to play the ball the way that's most effective for you. As you said, every keeper has their own tactics as well as their own individual talents. Jon... thank you soooo much for responding. I had a game today (Sunday) and my mom read your response before the game & told me what it said when we were on our way. All my teammates, the ref., the parents, and the other team went out of their way to tell me that I did a good job after the game. I was really happy. Everyone thought that one move I did was really amazing... it had to do with what you said. There was a shot coming and so I did a split to save it, then the team came back right again with the rebound which I dived for & then right after that I had to do another split save. This happened in a matter of 10 seconds. It was sooo good and everyone was cheering and sooooo proud of me. I wish that my town had started to put together a field hockey program for when we were younger because all the towns around us start at pretty young ages or at least 8th grade, where my town starts at 9th. I played varsity my second year & I am a very dedicated player. Well, I just wanted to tell you that your advice made me understand that you must do whatever you can to stop the ball... there is no right or wrong way as long as it stays out of the goal..... Thanks again!

Covering shots to the left

On the forthcoming Thursday I have a key match for my school against a strong side to continue our unbeaten 7 match run. At the moment although I am having a good season, I am having problems when making saves with my stick at the bottom of the goal to my left. At the moment, I am more-or-less dropping to the floor but as I land my stick bounces off the floor and the ball goes underneath it and into the goal. I have been advised to slide across the floor in order to produce a better and confident save. I have tried this but I have trouble in staying in a comfortable position. I was wondering if you could give me some tips and drills that I could do so that I may improve this area of goalkeeping. Somehow, I manage to get it right in our matches but one slip could cost us a match. I have read your tips on slide tacking which has helped me improve in this area.

Jon's reply

The shot that sounds like it's beating you, or causing you to drop is the one about four feet away from your body to the side. It's too far to reach with your legs, upright, but not really far enough away to get into a full dive for. When you're dropping, or thinking of alternate ways of covering, a couple of things come to mind. If you're

dropping and have problems with your hand and stick bouncing, try landing more on your elbow and side, as opposed to your hand. It will cushion your landing and hopefully stabilize your forearm and stick to make the save. Another way of trying to cover those balls is to throw your legs out in tandem as in a double leg stack. You're sliding to the side and throwing your legs out at the ball. I find it really useful as I'm having to go from side to side to make a save.

Shots near the posts

Thank you for your advice. Things are going really well and the journal of goals and saves is growing. We lost a match on Sunday 1-0. The goal was maddening, a free hit about 25 yards out, fired in hard, no-one touched the ball, so I shepherded it as it went off. It crashed square off the post, straight to an attacker who jumped faster than the defence. He flicked the ball past me. Question - next time - do I leave the ball or play it (the D was crowded with players)?

Jon's reply

Balls anywhere near the goalpost can be an adventure. I think there are a couple of things to keep in mind. First, expect the worst. Shepherding is an interesting term, but I think one that is probably appropriate. Too many times, I see keepers coming out and jumping over the ball or dummy kicking as its coming in, only to see the ball carom off the post. I think, if there's any doubt as to whether a ball is going to hit the post, a keeper needs to drop in to a position where he can see where the forwards are coming in from and where the keeper has an opportunity to make a play of the ball. Sometimes the best you can do is play the ball over the end line to concede the corner. Second, is that a keeper is better off playing the ball where he has a chance to dictate the situation. Playing the ball and being played by the ball are different situations. When a keeper plays the ball, he has control, when he's played by the ball, he's reacting. A circle may be congested, but if there's a chance that a ball is going to hit the post, my personal preference is for me to play the ball. Not every situation is clear black and white, but I'd rather err on the side of possibly conceding a corner as opposed to allowing the scrumbly goal.

Diving tips

I've just bought my first set of Robo gear, it's brilliant! You used to have tips on diving on the web (I think) I need to work on technique for getting up after a dive.

Jon's reply

The tips are still up on the OBO website so please do check there, especially the tip on slide tackling. The point that I make there is you can and should practice recovering from a dive or slide. You don't necessarily need to have a player shooting to practice the mechanics of getting up. You can do this by simply going down and getting up again. The thing to keep in mind is that whether you practice this with a player or on your own, you want to get up as quickly as possible in a manner that allows you to be balanced and ready to make the next play on the ball after the first shot. Typically that means using your arms as well as your legs to help get up to your feet. The last thing you want to do is make a great diving slide or save, and then get scored on the rebound as you're flopping around like a fish out of water trying to get up. It takes practice and persistence, but so do most skills.

Playing a shot straight at you

I play for a New Zealand varsity side, and I would like to ask you a question about kicking/clearing wide. The problem I have is when a shot comes on the ground directly between where my feet are placed. I am not sure about the footwork that needs to happen to redirect this wide effectively. i.e. - Which foot I should use -

Should I look to direct the ball across the front of my body, or not (i.e. If I am using my right foot, then should the ball be sent to my left or my right) - Should I be stepping back and opening up my body, or stepping forward? (I suppose this is directly related to the answer to the previous item) I often find I am too indecisive when this type of shot comes, and the ball ends up going back to where it came from or going in between my legs.

Jon's reply

The ball you describe can be a problem. There are a number of ways to play the shot straight at you, but a lot of it will depend on a number of factors; your abilities, style of goalkeeping, speed of shot and distance of the shot all impact the best way to play this ball. Typically the ball between the legs is a problem for keepers who get too wide in their basic stance and don't have their weight on the balls of their feet. There is no set distance for feet apart in your "ready" position, but as the name implies, you want to be ready to make a play of the ball. I like to keep my feet slightly wider than my shoulder width in my ready position and really want to be up on the balls of my feet. For medium paced shots from the top of the circle you can play them wide by dropping your shoulder, letting the ball slightly pass your body and take it with the foot to the side the ball is shot to. So if the ball is hit centre, to your right side, you drop your right shoulder, take your right foot back, let the ball come even to or slightly behind your body and take it wide by opening up with your right foot and following through wide to your target. The footwork you're talking about is your preparation step and that basically comes from taking your right foot back and pivoting off the ball of your left leg. It's critical that you push off the left leg when you make this kick because your weight will be back and you won't have any power to your clear. To aid that, when you push off with your non-kicking leg, you want to lead with your head (see kicking tip). If the ball is closer in or faster-paced, a crossover clear may be your best way to take the ball wide. Dealing with a ball centre towards your right leg again, I'm now going to try to line the ball up just inside my right leg. Instead of letting the ball pass me, I'm going to push off my right foot forward, bringing my left foot across and kicking through the line of the ball to take it wide. I'm trying to make contact with ball between 12 and 18 inches in front of my right leg. Here, the footwork is getting your right leg lined up on the line of the ball, pushing forward off the ball of your right foot and taking your left leg across your body along the line of where you want to clear the ball. Typical problems with a crossover clear come when you let the ball get too close to your non-kicking leg or when you don't kick through the ball. I still need to lead with my head, but now instead of dropping my right shoulder to open to that side, I'm bringing my left shoulder forward as I kick to take the ball right. For shots to the left, the same basic principles apply, only reversed. Opening, or dropping my shoulder to the side I want to clear to is key. If I keep my shoulders square to the shooter when I make my clear, my hips stay square to the shooter. If my hips are square to the shooter, the only way I can change the angle of my clear is to angle my kicking foot. The problem is that when most keepers make a save with their kicker, they open up square to the ball with their kicker. If you don't change the angle with your shoulders you know what happens, you kick the ball right back to where it came from and that's not a good thing. Like anything, practice makes perfect. I prefer to take those balls that are pretty much straight at me using a crossover clear, rather than opening up for a couple of reasons. If I let the ball go past the plane of my body and miss, that ball is in the back of the net. With a crossover clear, I still have my plant leg as backup if I do miss. More importantly, because I'm coming forward with the crossover clear the odds of me missing the ball are less because I'm coming forward and cutting angle as I make my clear. Footwork is key. Most shots between the feet go in because the keeper is still moving and not set, or because you have your weight on your heels as opposed to the balls of your

feet. Work on doing your basic skills on the move and I think you'll see an improvement in these type of shots. A good basic drill is to start from one post, have to move across the goal mouth and have a feeder push or hit balls at you.

Sliding in Robo SP legguards

I recently purchased some Robo SP pads and Robo high rebound kickers. Everything about them is excellent except I can't slide in them. The surface I play on is a water-based turf. The last set of pads I had were a straight set of Cloud 9's which slid ok on the surface. I don't know whether they're not sliding because they are new or because of the material they're made from. Does this problem occur often? Is there any advice you can give me about this problem?

Jon's reply

One of the things you've probably noticed about the Robo SPs is that they offer great rebounding qualities. The rebounding qualities come from the foam compressing. Compression also causes the foam to "stick" sometimes when you slide, especially if you slide with your legs as opposed to your hips. Check the slide tackling tip to review your technique. My experience has been that if I come down on my knee instead of my hip as I slide, I'm more prone to stick and that the qualities of the Robo SP foam accentuates that sticking.

Saving on your non-dominant side

The biggest problem I have is that I am almost completely right side dominant, so much so that even basic saves on the left can be a chore, while on the right I fly about like super man plucking every ball out of the air. Up to this point it has not really been a problem because even at county few players can angle the ball to my far left and lift the ball, but as I wish to take my keeping to the highest level possible, and because of the large amount of indoor keeping I do, I really ought to do something about this. At the moment I am doing basic juggling drills to work on my weak side, and my team coach has agreed to help by getting players to flick to my left, but there is not enough time to solve this problem with the team. Are there any solo drills to improve my hand eye co-ordination, or to improve my confidence in making saves (especially diving) to my left. Hopefully I can nip any problem in the bud.

Jon's reply

There are no instant answers. The answer is repetition and hard work. You've identified your limitation and have help to work on it, so that's good news. When I first started playing, I had a similar problem in that I'm left handed and my right side was weak. I spent time with my left hand strapped to my side and had people hit to my right over and over and over and over. Sound repetitive. It was. With time, though it improved. Anything you do with your left hand will help. Juggling is good. I played tennis, table tennis, and racquetball using my right hand, you can do the same with your left. Don't expect to win games, but realise that you're doing it for your hockey. On the hockey front, you can have people hit tennis balls at you, focusing on your left side. On the flying save front, I wouldn't be so concerned with making the diving left hand save as much as I would be with being 100% on controlling the balls that are within reach from an upright position. Stick with it. Developing weaknesses can be frustrating, but with hard work there is a payoff and it will be most rewarding.

Quick recovery

I have a question about a quick recovery. Whenever I slide down and then need to get up quickly I get tangled up in my pads and take a really long time to get up and

save the rebound, is there anything I can do to make it quicker?

Jon's reply

Like anything, the more you practice anything, the better you get. The same applies for recovery. You can practice going down and getting up with or without a ball carrier. Besides practice, one thing that does help you get up quicker, is using your arms when you get up. A lot of keepers just use their legs to get up when they go down. If you use your arms, you're usually more balanced and able to get back in the play quicker.

Here's a tip to add to your penalty flicks answer

Thought you might want to add this to your penalty flicks answer - a goalkeeper passed this on to me and it works really well....always stand a little over to one side - the side you don't want the attacker to pass to! The majority of time they will pass to the other side.

This has happened every single time for me ... and I easily save the stroke on my stronger side!

Jon's reply

Thanks for sharing your experience. The one thing I would temper you with from is my experience has been that as soon as you think always, something else happens. I've seen keepers set up all the way to one post to give them the entire goal other side of the goal to shoot at and the stroker beat them going right where they set up at. Stokers like to play mind games just as well as keepers. I'll never argue with what works, though, and if it works for you, keep at it.

Slide tackling/corners when playing indoor

I have two questions, both with are a result of recent experiences indoors (I'm a great believer in the positive value of Indoor keeping).

1 Some indoor surfaces are very tacky, making sliding almost impossible, (I can usually manage about a meter on these surfaces). Do you have any suggestions on situations where you want to attack, but can not make full use of a slide? (e.g. one on ones)

2 If I don't charge a short corner for whatever reason a get in the "set" position. However I used to play in goal for a foot ball team and I can set myself too low. A number of times the ball hits the net and the words stand tall ring round my helmet; but I think there is a more fundamental problem with my technique. When a ball comes straight at me the simplest thing to do is stand tall and let it bounce off my chest plate. Instead, and this is where football comes in, I try to play the ball with stick and glove. In order to do this I shift my weight so that I fall back and then twist my torso to bring round my hands. I know I should not, but it only happens on the fastest shots that are at my shoulders, either side of the helmet, when it is a reflex action. Do you have any suggestions/drills that will help me with these shots/my technique?

Jon's reply

In regards to your two questions, first about sliding on tacky, indoor surfaces. If you can generate a meter on a slide, that's all you really need. The distance you slide isn't as important as your position in the slide. The thing I find, when I slide on a sticky surface, is that my hip sticks and I almost end up rolling forward on my stomach. That prevents me from presenting as big a block when I slide. For that reason, the one thing I would suggest when sliding on a rubber floor is adjusting your slide so that your weight is slightly back, usually by keeping your top shoulder and hip slightly back. When you do plant and roll slightly forward, that will get you in a position where your hips and shoulders are perpendicular to the floor in your slide

tackle position. The other thing about sliding, I need to be able to recover and get up after my slide tackle. That's pretty difficult if I'm sliding two or three meters like you can on wood floors. As far as indoor corners, I think the biggest thing you're recognising is bigger is better. The closer you can get to the actual shot, the better your chances of getting hit with it. The problem that happens when most keepers slide, rather than going out and staying up, is that they don't get close enough to the shot and a horizontal keeper two meters away from the shot isn't much of an obstacle. If I'm charging on a corner, I don't try to react to the ball if it's going to hit me. I play with an ice hockey keeper's body and arm pads and am very comfortable getting hit with shots straight at me, particularly the inside of my arms. That allows me a couple of things, one if I'm charging and the ball hits me in the upper body at the top of the circle, rebounds carry out of the circle. Second, the only thing I need to react to is shots wide of my body, which at that range might also be wide of the goal. I wouldn't recommend falling backwards and trying to parry balls with your hands from close range unless you're very good at it. It's like swatting at flies, very hit or miss. Also, I don't know how comfortable that makes the rest of your defence feel. Finally, I don't know that there are any drills per se, short of practising these situations. Work on forwards taking you on at the top of the circle. Do short corners ad nauseum. Repetition brings comfort and with comfort comes success.

Setting up right for corners

I have played hockey for nine years and have played international hockey up to under 21 level. At a short corner I position myself at the usual 3 paces out from the goal line and kneel down on my right knee. This technique works brilliantly for all levels of short corner hitting I have played against. At senior club level most flicked short corners are of a mediocre standard and my current technique suffices. However, at a higher level I am concerned that my position will not allow me the time to react to a good, high and powerful flick. Should I change my technique or work on my current one until it is successful for me.

Jon's reply

I'm not a big proponent of the technique where you go down on one knee as a set up to logging. As you've noticed, the technique is good on hit shots, but drag flicks present a big problem. Your weight is committed to the knee and you're basically rooted. You can stay with this technique and try making an adjustment to keeping your weight more on your left foot as opposed to your right knee, but with a good drag flick to the upper corners, even that will find you lacking. At the level you're playing at, I'd suggest more of a stance where you're in a lean, to get down. The following is a summary of the technique. You're starting in a position on the corner where you are square to the stick stopper and shooter as opposed to being square to the pusher outer. On the push out you're looking to get out three to four yards. On the stop, you are set with your feet about a yard apart, your right foot is inside your right shoulder and your left foot is about eighteen inches to two feet outside your left shoulder with your knees slightly bent. These distances will vary depending on your height. The big thing is, you're leaning to your right as you face out from the goal. To get down on a hit shot, you collapse your right. This allows you to drop down on to your side to log. To make yourself as big as possible, you straighten out your right leg and drop down on your hip. On balls that are struck to your far right, you can push off with your left foot to fully extend. When you're down, you're trying to do the same things as when you log out from being on a knee. You want your legs straight out, you want your hips and shoulders perpendicular to the ground or slightly forward so when the ball strikes you, it doesn't deflect back and up in to the goal. You want to watch the ball all the way on to your body. The strength of this stance is the flexibility

it allows you on drag flicks or variations. On drag flicks, you can easily get yourself in to a balanced position by just getting your right foot outside your shoulder so that you can cover the upper corners of the goal. With that one adjustment, you're basically back in to a set position for the shot. The same principle allows you to easily change your positioning with the changes of angle that come with variations on corners. Like any change, it will take a while to get comfortable. You'll need to work on footwork and getting down from a slightly higher position, but as you get more comfortable, I think you'll find that you can cover struck shots just as well and will have more success with good drag flicks.

Communication and concentration

I'm a well respected keeper in Ireland, and need help. When you are talking at the back, what should one say, because my captain keeps saying I'm not saying constructive things, but my coach says that I'm fine. Also, this is going to sound strange, but at the moment, I can't concentrate on the game, and aren't making the outstanding saves I used to make. I am confident, and am still willing to do anything to keep the ball out of the net, but I have tried to tell my coach about it, but all she says is that I've got too many coaches coaching me that I've got too much information. Any suggestions will be much appreciated.

Jon's reply

I don't know if I'm going to be construed as one of the too many coaches, coaching you, but... I think the bottom line with communication is "what is the result of it?" If players do what you ask, it's effective communication. If not, you need to find out what it takes to get people to do what you want. Some people respond to simple, direct instructions, others need to be clued in at urgent times and you're going to convey that with your voice. Obviously your rapport with team-mates can influence things. Constructive comments are always appreciated. You're the best judge of whether people are doing what you want. If they are, you're fine, if not, you've got to tinker. As far as confidence and making the outstanding save, outstanding saves happen, I don't worry about making that save all the time, I found I had my most confidence when I made the routine save, automatic. There was no doubt I could do the skill and I did it. Confidence comes from reading situations and successfully defending them. Finally, I don't know that you can have too many coaches. Coaches are information and I don't know that you can have too much information. Now there's nothing to say you have to use all that information, but thinking about things reinforces and clarifies issues.

Do your tips apply to playing on grass?

I am a varsity goal keeper in a high school at mass. I am a rookie goal keeper but this session I had made 13 shutouts. I was reading your articles & I noticed that its turf playing you are talking about. My high school has a wonderfully maintained grass field & all the other teams have grass fields also that I play. So I was wondering if the slide tackles or any other moves you know that would help my game on grass fields? Any information would be gratefully appreciated as I wish to play in college. Thank you very much & I love reading your articles!

Jon's reply

Basically all of the skills discussed on the web site are just as applicable on grass as they are on turf. I talk about artificial turf because most hockey outside of high school hockey in the United States is played on a surface other than grass. Slide tackling is certainly a skill that can be done on grass and well maintained grass fields are great. It's when grass isn't in good shape and you start to get adventurous bounces that technique starts to become an issue. You can try anything Rachel and I have spoken

about in the different tips we've written on grass, you just need to evaluate whether they're working for you on the surface and at the level you're playing at. Thanks for reading.

Penalty flicks

I have been goalkeeping for 3 years now and I am 16. I now play for the Cambridge (England) fourth team. I have noticed that penalty flicks are ever increasingly going to my right. When standing in the middle of the goal it is too far to make a save with our foot and too close to dive down with my stick. Can you suggest how I might be able to save these? I am also thinking of buying some Cloud 9 kickers and legguards. Would you say it is really worth spending the extra money for Robo legguards at the men's level I am playing at?

Jon's reply

As far as penalty strokes go, I would suggest you think about your positioning. Unless you're very big and flexible, it's hard to get to the low corners with your feet. Typically, I'm most successful getting to those shots by diving. Work on keeping your feet about shoulder width apart with the weight on the balls of your feet. Look to explode, pushing off from both of your feet and try to get those shots with your hands or stick, especially for the low ones to your right. Penalty flicks are equal parts skill, reaction, intuition and sometimes luck. The thing that I would offer to you when you buy pads is to think of the level you want to play at. If you plan on playing seriously for a while, I would recommend the Robo.

Kicking power

I have difficulty getting power into my kicks unless they are cross kicks. I was wondering if you have any tips of how to increase the power. I think it is a technique thing not a big lack of strength in the legs.

Jon's reply

Take a look at the kicking tip I have on the site if you haven't already. If you have, a couple of points to reinforce, first kick through the line of the ball, rather than kicking to the ball. Weight transfer through the ball gives power. You get more weight transfer by pushing off from your non-kicking leg when you go to kick also. You're right, it is a technical thing and it comes with being aware of your mechanics. Make sure that your head is forward and that your kicking foot isn't out in front of your kicking leg knee when you make contact with the ball. Practice makes perfect.

Timing a slide tackle

I read your tips on slide tackling, but what do you do if the ball is pushed under you. I can never get my timing quite right and the forward pushes the ball under me as I am going down making me look a right prat. Can you help me, I would be very grateful.

Jon's reply

You are right, that ball being pushed under you as you go down is the shot that you do feel like a complete idiot letting in. I think two things help, first is not just dropping, but sliding forward at the same time you go to make your tackle. Second, is the element of vision the forward has when you make the tackle. If a forward can see you coming, there are a lot of gaps for them to see. Look to line the ball up more on your body and get down from your feet to your hip quickly dropping sideways. Your aim is to smother coming out at the forward before they have the chance to release. Speed and timing are critical. Stick with it.

Split saves

I have reached the stage in goalkeeping where I want to learn how to do the Splits. I don't have a clue how to do them and I don't want to try without some advice because I could injure myself. Can you give me some advice?

Jon's reply

I don't know that there are a right and wrong way to make split saves. I don't look at split saves as anything more than a reaction save. Definitely dramatic reactions, but reaction none the less. The biggest thing to keep in mind physically, is that you need the flexibility to make the save. That means you need to be well stretched. Split saves look great, but if you're smart with your positioning you shouldn't be in the situation where you have to make them. As far as learning to do the splits, I'd recommend anything that stresses stretching. Yoga or any of the martial arts are great exercises for developing flexibility.

2 on 1s without defenders

I am a college goalkeeper and I did read your tips concerning 2 v 1 situations but I had a further question. When the situation is 2 v 1 (the 1 being the goalkeeper, no other defenders) in the circle, how then do you suggest to play the ball? I know that a lot of goalkeeping is situational and experimenting is necessary but again I am looking for some guidelines as to what you would suggest. I have grown up with one method and a new one is being introduced and I am trying to decide which is more sound and effective.

Jon's reply

I have a pretty extensive tip on slide tackling on the site so hopefully that might provide some insights. However, in a 2v1 situation where you are the 1 I think it is important to be aggressive. However, it is very much controlled aggression. Too many keepers just stand on the goal line and let the shooter walk right in. I like to step up, but at a time where I am defending the goal and making the forward pull wide at the same time. I also need to be aware of where the support player is in the 2v1. I want to stay in the play as long as possible and make the forwards make the perfect pass if they are going to beat. In a well executed 2v1 you should get beat, but if you can buy time and force forwards to make passes they don't want to make that buys you time and gives you a chance.

Moving to the right post

My daughter is a 10th grade High School varsity goalie in Nazareth, Pennsylvania, USA. When she is on the left post, what is the best way quickly get to the right post to defend a quick shot across the front of the cage for a deflect shot on the right post. She is stronger to her left and needs a better technique to get to the right faster to cover these quick shots to the right post when she is set on the left post defending stick activity there.

Jon's reply

If the ball is moving quickly and the player on the other side of the goal is not going to have the time to stop and control the ball, then I need to get across quickly. Usually, I'm trying to take away an area, like the backboard as I go across and will dive to cover as much area as I can. If the ball is slow and the player on the other side has time to stop and control the ball before they shoot, I want to be upright and try to make a play of that ball while I'm on my feet. In either case, as the ball goes across the goal mouth, I don't want to chase after the ball. I want to go to the goal post, covering as much of the goal as possible. Ultimately,

the shooter wants to put the ball in the goal. It makes sense that I take the most direct path to where they want to go. Experiment. There is no set way to play this type of ball as long as you're successful.

Defending two on ones

Could you please advise as to the "recommended" way to deal with a two on one situation, i.e. two attackers versus the goalie. 1) two attackers approaching outside the circle 2) two attackers inside the circle. This situation is nearly always difficult to defend.

Jon's reply

I'm not clear whether you're talking about two attackers against a defender and a keeper, or two attackers straight up against a keeper. With a defender helping, you're basically trying to encourage the attackers to take a shot from a bad angle. You best do that by positioning your defender just below the player with the ball and in a lane between the ball carrier and his teammate. As long as you don't allow the ball to cross from one player to the other, you can usually slow down the attack and reduce the shooting angle. Two attackers straight up against a keeper is a different matter. My next tip will be on slide tackling and a lot of that pertains to this situation. You need to keep a couple of things in mind when you make a decision on how to play these situations. How much time and space the two have, where your help is coming from and where the attack is coming from all impact how you can be successful in the situation. I won't say there is a "recommended" way. You can play these situations eighty different ways and be successful with all of them, but I have a couple of things I try to do. If the ball is outside the circle, I'll play about ten yards off my line. I'll try to force the ball carrier to make a decision to take the ball to a side. If I can do that, I'm going to try keeping myself in a position where I'm near the line between the ball carrier and his team-mate, while still being near the goal. If they've got time and space, my focus is defending the circle and trying to pick a spot where I've got my best chance to play the ball. For me, that's when the ball carrier has his head down and is moving at speed with the ball off his stick, preferably, just as he enters the circle. Another good time is when his focus is on his team-mate. The biggest thing I want to avoid, is taking him on when he's got the ball on his stick and can see me coming. I don't want to be all the way at the top of the circle when the attack is coming in, as I won't have any momentum if I do want to slide tackle. I'll let them get in so I can use my whole body, and then take them within a yard of entering. As I said, there's no right or wrong way to play these situations as long as you keep the ball out of the net. Keep track of what you do and the result. That should give you your best "recommended" way of playing these situations.

Timing a charge

I have a bit of a strange question, but I am sure this will probably apply to others as well. Is there any way in which you can address the correct timing to charge. By this I mean when it is suitable to charge in a D that is "busy" or when it is better to stay on your line? There are obviously cases of 1 on 1's but with a couple of players in the D, this becomes harder to decide.

Jon's reply

Several things dictate whether I want to charge a shooter, whether the circle is congested or not. First is where the shooter is in the circle. When the ball is wide, it's generally best to hold your line. From the middle of the goal, it's a different matter. Another factor is how close a defender is and whether they have the opportunity to

influence the shot. In addition, you need to evaluate how much time you have and the amount of ground you have to cover before the shot comes. In a congested circle with a player taking a big back swing from inside ten yards of the goal, chances are that you're probably best off coming off your line and looking to smother. On the other hand, faced with a forward that has time to see me coming and the ball on his stick, I'm likely to hold my position and force him to beat me. I would strongly encourage you to keep a journal. Keep track of situations, keep track of what you did, and whether you were successful. That should be the best guideline of what to do when. There are no absolutes, but you should see trends.

Diving to the left

One of our goal keepers dives to the left as an instinctive reaction, rather than the right. Even when logging at a short corner he will dive left. Is this something which I should attempt to coach him out of and, if so, how. On the positive side, he has a much higher success rate at reverse side tackling and regularly surprises centre forwards.

Jon's reply

Next month's tip is on slide tackling so stay tuned. Your keeper is going to have to learn to slide tackle to his strong stick side. Usually when a keeper has the problem you described, it's because he has a dominant foot, left or right, and is way too comfortable going to a side. Work on your keeper's footwork leading up to his slide. If he's slide tackling to his strong stick side, his last step will be with his left foot and he'll throw his right foot/leg down, getting his right hip down. This forces him to slide tackle on his strong stick side. As for laying down on corners, he really has to be on his stick side. He puts his post player at risk laying out the other way. Like any new skill, be patient. Don't expect instant results, but know that there will be payoff.

The instep method

I have begun to teach the instep method. The biggest problem I am seeing with my goalie is that a direct shot is coming at her and she misses the ball on her instep and it ends up going between her legs. It almost looks like her leg is going too far. Do you have any advice?

Jon's reply

A couple of things... with any new technique, be patient. When your keeper tries to contact the ball, she should be lining the ball up on the area of her foot between her ankle and the bend of the foot back to the ankle (the centre of the instep area on most kickers). It sounds like she may currently be lining the ball up too far back on her foot, nearer to her heel. She may have to cross one foot in front of the other at shots directly at her. This is ok if she is pushing off from her non-kicking leg. Make sure she is leading with her head when she looks to save. If she is back with her weight it will look as if she is reaching too far. To do that, she must push off with her non-kicking leg, which requires good body position to start off, along with a surprising amount of footwork for those new to the technique to set up the simple instep clear. Stick with it! Also, check out the kicking drills tip, but remember, with any new technique, realise there will be a learning curve. Don't expect a keeper to save/clear at game pace until she has mastered the curve. Good luck and keep me posted how things go.

Short corner defence

The type of attack that seems to succeed against our defensive unit is not direct

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shots or flicks but manoeuvres where the attacking players at the top of the circle hit or push the ball to wing attackers who have run in and are standing about three or four yards from the goal line (and in line with or slightly outside either the right or left - but particularly the left - post) when the ball reaches them. If the ball is received by these players they are either level with or behind me and can score easily. I find it difficult to cut off the ball before it can reach these players and have to rely on the defenders. What can we do? Similarly, where do you think the left post defender should stand - on the post or a couple of steps out level with the keeper?

Jon's reply

Short corner defence is really a category where there is no perfect defence. Seven or eight attackers against a defence of five should be able to create good scoring chances. I think the biggest thing you try to accomplish in setting up a corner defence though, is forcing the attack into opportunities that are more saveable. It starts with not over committing to the shot at the top with your first wave, or rusher outer. If the first out over commits, every one else in the defence is left in a reactionary position with a lot of ground to cover. Facing out from the goal mouth, I do like my second out high, two to three yards behind the first out and to his left. This prevents the slip ball that would force the first out to play the ball on his reverse. Obviously this leaves a slip down low open to the keeper's left and for that reason, I do prefer my post player to play even with me. The shots I like my chances of saving are from the top, and a slip to my right facing out. If my defence can establish a unified front and take away passing lanes, those become the only options available. A defence gains this understanding and composure through repetition, discussing responsibilities and priorities. You can't take away everything, but you can limit options.

The punch clear

Increasingly I see goal keepers running out to the ball and then sliding on one knee and kicking the ball with, usually the sole of the foot. At close quarters it can be effective, however, if they miss the ball they have not created any sort of barrier and they end up looking foolish. It seems to be a technique used in America. Do you have any views on the matter?

Jon's reply

The clear you were describing is one that is taught to girl's American high school keepers and is called a punch clear. It's a very flashy skill, but also one that is incredibly overused. About the only time I can see use for it is when a keeper has a ball going away from them and a forward coming in to a rebound (i.e. a flick, or uncontrolled shot). Otherwise, I much prefer to slide tackle with my legs if a ball is coming in to me in a 50/50 situation.

Playing the ball on the ground

Lately I've had some problems playing the ball on the ground with my stick (in a head-first slide). When I push my hand on the ground I pull my stick up, so the ball can get underneath my stick a goalie's worst nightmare! The only thing I can do is lift my elbow, but when 'falling' down that is not always possible.

Jon's reply

My first question is: are you using OBO hand protectors? Unlike other hand protectors, the stick or right hand protector with the Robo set is contoured to allow you to get your stick flat for both front and reverse stick tackles. Generally we try to avoid head first diving for the ball as the margin of error is great when making a tackle (stick clears are different than tackles). If you're using your stick for clears, though, try holding your stick closer to the end of the handle. This will reduce the degree of angle for the stick and the ground allowing less room for the ball to go

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under the stick. This requires you to have good forearm strength, but that's the trade off.

Instep kick vs. direct shot

Is there a time to use an instep kick on a direct shot vs. the traditional two legged stop and clear to side?

Jon's reply

Depending on your level of play, I would encourage you to get used to clearing first time using the instep method. Unless you're playing on an extremely bouncy surface, or the shot is hit directly at you knee height, a keeper greatly simplifies his job if he or she can clear first time.

Picking up the ball

I seem to have a problem picking up the ball....for instance: Standing in the goals a striker comes from my RHS cuts in towards the "D" Moving across the top of the "D" to my LHS and is approximately a meter outside my LHS upright at the top of the "D" when the shot is taken. The ball then travels across the goal mouth and into the RHS board of the box. I'm finding it hard to deal with the shot that goes across the keeper. Each time I check my positional play at practice and I find that I have not moved over exposing the RH post.

Jon's reply

There a couple of things to check positionally as the ball moves from right to left across the circle as the shot is taken. Keepers tend to make a couple of common mistakes:

- (1) The ball moves to change the shooting angle, but the keeper doesn't.
- (2) The keeper doesn't move proportionally to the ball. If the ball moves two yards across the plane of the goal at the top of the circle, a keeper doesn't need to move two yards. He may only need to move a shuffle step depending on how far out of the goal he is.
- (3) The keeper doesn't round his steps back towards the post as he moves from the centre of the goal, he moves along the plane of the goal line.
- (4) The keeper takes steps that are too big so that his weight is "stuck" on one leg and he can't react. A simple drill to reinforce angles is to have a forward carry or pass the ball from left to right. Practice your movements across the goal, if you're off on your angle, the forward shouldn't shoot. Have him hold his shot, check your positioning and note the correction.

Keeping the ball down when kicking

Whenever I come out to kick the ball, it seems to fly up in the air. So I had to kick the ball with the side of my boot. This way doesn't give me enough power to get the ball out to the other players. Would you be able to give me a tip on how to keep that ball down?

Jon's reply

One of my tips has been on kicking so that should help. The biggest problem keepers have with keeping the ball down is they kick with their foot too far in front of their body. Read the tip, but in addition, keep kicking with the inside of your foot rather than your toe. When you do kick, push off with your non-kicking leg and get your head forward. Try to make contact with the ball so that the knee of your kicking leg is straight up from your kicking foot when you make contact. If your knee is behind your

foot when you make contact with the ball, your clear will come up. Pushing off your non-kicking leg should also give you more power.

Training

Drills for hand/eye co-ordination

I am have reasonable hand/eye co-ordination and my stick and glove saves are at a good level. However, I really want to take this skill to the next level and was wondering what type of warm up drills and practise drills could be recommended.

Jon's reply

I just had a tip on aerial balls. As far as drill work, tennis balls are excellent for handwork. Have a partner hit tennis balls at you. They can use a tennis or racquetball racquet, working from around the top of the circle. The biggest thing is just getting repetitions of the skills in.

Training schedule

With our new hockey season coming up I would need to get fitter and stronger. I can do this but need some kind of schedule to stick to. I would be incredibly grateful to you if you were to help me with this so could you please send me something in return to this e-mail to help me?

Jon's reply

Take a look at the off-season training and training program tips on the OBO website. There's enough information to build your own program. If you have any questions after you've read them, get back to me.

Staying alert

I recently went to a goalie training session that was about 6 hours long. Near the end of the session some of the goalies were still on their toes and were alert. I found myself not being able to stay alert for the whole session. Is there any way that I could keep alert and on my toes? PS it was very hot.

Jon's reply

How you perform at a camp and clinic is affected by how you've prepared. If you haven't trained leading up to the practice and then haven't rested properly, eaten enough, or had enough fluids, your setting yourself up to "burn out" before six hours. Big thing is fluids when it's hot, but the other things are important.P

Training programs, the BIP test.

I got your email off the OBO site and I was wondering what ideas if any that you have about the defence perspective. Also would you be able to provide me with a suitable training program concerning weight loss and aerobic fitness. I currently weigh 110 kilograms and play the top level of hockey available for my age group. I can get level 8 on the bleep test and by next March I would like to be the fittest as I can get, any program you could give me would be greatly appreciated.

Jon's reply:

If the new defensive perspective you speak about is referring to the keeper as defender/marker at times, I like it a lot. I think you can figure a reasonable program from what was in the last tip on the website. On the BIP test, I think field player standards are reasonable and 9.5-11 is a good range for scores.

Training post surgery

I recently have come back from a torn anterior cruciate ligament. I am having some trouble with foot speed and getting from one goal post to the other quick enough. Do you have any training tips?

Jon's reply

Coming back from any kind of surgery, I think it would be really wise for you to consult with a physical therapist for advice for rehab and development. Fortunately, I've never had a knee injury and don't have a lot of knowledge of the area. You might try the net and see if there is a sports medicine site that could give you ideas.

Returning to hockey after an injury

I was a goalkeeper at the school last year, but was forced to stop because of an injury. I haven't been playing for about a year now, and wish to go back into the hockey scenes in July. I have very hard competition at school at the moment so I was wondering if you have any tips for me which could help me get back in form. Thank you for your concern.

Jon's reply

My last two tips on the OBO website have a lot of ideas about training programs. I think you'll find some useful stuff. The big thing for anyone coming back from an injury is to be patient and listen to your body.

The bip test

At my hockey training we have to do the shuttle run bip test. I was wondering what level a goalkeeper should be able to get to. Thanks for sending those tips out for training, they were very helpful.

Jon's reply

I don't know of any research that's been done with keepers, fitness and the bip test. If anyone does, I'd be interested in knowing about it. I know of a variety of soccer studies and they're good for establishing a frame of reference relevant to position. Obviously a keeper doesn't need to be as aerobically fit as a midfielder, but it doesn't hurt. Look at the bip test as a challenge. Don't worry so much about running to get to a level, as much as giving everything you can on the test and improving from there.

Psychological off-season training

After reading your tips about off-season training, I had some comments. I think you forgot to mention a very important thing in an off-season training. I have been a coach and my goalies had a good off-season training (physical), but unfortunately that wasn't enough for them. They missed a psychological training, without it they couldn't perform as good as they were able to. So I looked at my own off-season training, which is based on 3 things: physical, psychological and tactical capabilities. When I started my season again, I came on the field looking like a man who can't loose at all. And even better I felt that way too. To mention Carel van der Staak: "Prestation is based on technic, tactic, mental condition and physical condition." So I hope you will also write something about psychological condition, because I think that it is as important as the physical part.

Jon's reply

Thanks for your comments. Psychological training can be a tremendous asset to a keeper, but I wouldn't limit it to the off-season. Used properly, sport psychology can be a valuable tool throughout the season.

There are a couple of things to take in to consideration when using sport psychology. First, your keepers need to be open to working with a psychologist. Not everyone is open to working with a psychologist or the concept of sport psychology. If the athlete isn't open to the concept, it can be a frustrating exercise. Having said that, I do believe there is a place for sport psychology in hockey and especially for keepers. Dealing with pressure, mental imagery and goal setting can all be valuable to keepers at any level. The person presenting this material is equally important. Just because someone reads an article on sport psychology, that doesn't make them a sport psychologist. It's critical that the athlete and sport psychologist know and trust each other. On that note, I'll tell you I'm not an expert on sport psychology, but have been exposed to it and do believe in it. Thanks again for your comments.

Goalkeeping training programs

I am enquiring if it is possible for you to send me a goalkeeping training program it would be a great help for my goal keeping.

Jon's reply

I don't really have a one-size fits all training program for keepers. Obviously training is very specific to the individual, their strengths and weaknesses, etc. Age, level of competition and fitness are also important things. Rachel has a good tip on the OBO web site for different training exercises. That's a good place to start.

Warm-up drills, helmets

I'm a goalie for my school's field hockey team. I was wondering if you could send me a list of good warm-up drills for goalies. Also some good drills for goalies in practice. I have a new coach and she does not know too much about goalies. If you could send me some drills I would greatly appreciate it. Also I'm looking for a new helmet, since mine is too small for me. If you could recommend a good brand or a certain helmet, I would also greatly appreciate it. I need a helmet that is not too expensive though for my school is not rich. Thanks very much.

Jon's reply

Stay tuned to the tips. I have a lot of good basic stuff in the kicking drills tip and there will be plenty more in the New Year. Also look at Rachel's tips as she has a lot of good information in them. As far as a helmet, if money is really an issue, you might want to see about a used sporting goods stores. Ice hockey equipment is a big seller and all you really need is a good helmet fitted with a wire cage. Also check the internet, there are some good sites for ice hockey equipment. You can tell if a helmet is good by whether it's safety approved.

Can distance running slow a keepers reactions?

I have always incorporated distance running into my training, especially in the off-season, but recently someone told me that extensive aerobic exercise like distance running can slow down your reactions, which is not exactly a good thing if you're a keeper. I know that sprinters refrain from doing long aerobic exercise, as it slows their sprinting time. Do you know if there is any concrete evidence to support this claim?

Jon's reply

There has been research done and the basic principle is that goalkeeping is a fast twitch position and to reinforce that with fast twitch training. Longer, aerobic workouts can be construed as reinforcing medium twitch training and probably isn't considered as productive as sprint and explosive exercises. Having said all that, I don't think there's anything wrong with keepers doing aerobic workouts. I actually encourage our keepers to do it. You need to balance distance work with sprints, but as long as they are done with moderation, I don't see a problem. If you're looking for scientific reference, check sports medicine/training books/journals. My reference is the US Olympic Committee Strength and Condition Director.

Off-season training

I live in South Africa and am the 1st team keeper for Maties (University of Stellenbosch) Hockey Club and the Western Province U21 B side keeper. I only achieved this at the end of the past season. There is a great deal of competition between myself and the now 2nd team keeper and the Western Province (W.P.) U21 A keeper and I hear that there are a few more up and coming keepers coming to the club FOR next years season. As a result of my desire to stay in the 1st side as well as to get in to the W.P. U21 A side and maybe junior nationals, I would like to know what I can do in the off season to improve my performance for next year. By that I mean what sort of off-season training should I be doing?? Bearing I mind that I am in desperate need to get fit and lose some weight. I think that the biggest problem is not the training, but rather the motivation....could you help??

Jon's reply

One of my tips deals with off-season training so check out that. Everyone needs to have their own motivation. Obviously you see your weight and fitness as a problem. What you do about it is up to you. As an athlete, there are some things you can't control. I don't see these as those kind of things. Controlling the controllable is key to getting what you want. As far as motivation, for me personally, I can tell you that I did struggle with fitness and I know that it did affect my selection. I took the line that no one was going to work out me. Every time I went out to train in the off-season, I went out thinking of my competition. Whether they were doing the same training I was or not, I imagined them doing it and pushed myself to work that much harder. There's a lot in the tip about training ideas, but it starts with setting goals that motivate you and that are attainable. Work hard, there is a pay off to it.

Drills for indoor

I'm writing in regards to GK drills for Indoor hockey. If you have the time would you mind forwarding some to me?

Jon's reply

I don't know that I have any brilliant drills for indoor as much as ideas on how to modify drills for outdoor to fit the technical and tactical requirements of indoor. The big thing I try to emphasise with keepers for indoor tactically is the concept of defending the circle using the keeper's privileges for using the whole body to tackle and defend. That doesn't mean just going out and throwing yourself on the ground. Drill-wise, or more accurately situation-wise, I like a lot of forward and the keeper stuff from different approach angles in to the circle. We'll build on that and do two forwards versus a defender and a keeper, emphasising that the keeper has to mark as well as defend the goal. You can flip it so that the keeper is the primary defender on the ball and the other defender is marking the second forward. You can build on that and throw in a third forward with a recovering defender. Indoor is excellent for emphasising that the pass can be more dangerous than the shot. Anticipation and

mobility is crucial. Technically, nothing is more important than being able to control the shot. Rebounds and lifted saves are disastrous in the indoor game. We do a lot of repetition work with simple shots at the keeper focusing on having the skill to clear low shots on the ground and the patience to cover lifted shots by getting your body behind the ball, waiting for the ball to settle and playing it out. I think the big thing to think about in setting up your indoor practices for keepers is the situations that happen in games that you want to recreate. Baseline balls, deflections, set pieces, odd-man situations, they're all things that happen in games so set them up in practices. I hope that helps.

Stretches for goalies

Do you have any ideas on the best stretches for a goalie? This doesn't seem to be mentioned in Rachel's tips and although I have been playing for quite a few years, this is something that is rarely taught to goalkeepers.

Jon's reply

Obviously stretching is an important part of goalkeeping. Flexibility gives you range and the more range you have, the more goal you can cover. There are a couple of things to consider when you think of the flexibility required for keeping. Keeping requires explosive, dynamic flexibility; the flexibility you see in plyometric stretching. You're right about there not being a lot of material available for stretching programs for keepers, but there are stretching programs available for sports with the same kind of range of motion required for keepers. Yoga is excellent for increasing flexibility. If you're not very flexible you should plan on spending 30 minutes a session, three times a week just on stretching. That includes warming up and warming down. Depending on the time of day and weather, warm ups can vary. If I'm outside, a three minute jog is a good idea. Indoors, jump rope for the same time. I have a routine that I go through when I stretch. I'll stretch muscles in the same order. I start with my trunk, doing waist bends working range with moderate stretching then taking to a side and holding the stretch. It's important when you stretch, that you're holding it for at least 15 seconds. 15 seconds is a minimum to maintain flexibility, if you want to increase it, you hold for 15 seconds, then try to take the stretch further. Don't bounce when you stretch. Do breathe, you can usually take your stretch further on an exhale. My routine goes from trunk, to hamstrings, to groin to abductors. I'll then do quads and calves, then work my way up from the waist, doing neck, shoulders and arms. Your routine can be different. If you're looking for specific stretches, I mentioned yoga. There are a lot of good books available. Martial arts books are also a good source for stretches and exercises. When you work on flexibility, remember how it applies to the position. I emphasise explosive, you are reacting to a shot or a situation. This isn't gymnastics. Reaction also means recovery. It does you no good to be able to make a split save, if you need a crane to get up. Plyometric exercises where you stretch and then recover back to your original position are good for developing flexibility and strength. Finally, do make sure you warm down after you've stretched. Be creative. One of the fun things about developing flexibility is you learn a lot about the limits of your body. Increased flexibility means increased range which means increased confidence.

Practicing slide tackles

I really enjoyed your sliding tackles tips this month. As an ageing goalie who plays at a very low level of game, I have great difficulty in putting myself on the floor. I just cannot get the technique right. What would you suggest would be a good exercise to

do? Apart from having too much beer before the game, whereby naturally falling over!

Jon's reply

Slide tackling is one of the hardest skills to practice because rarely do you get anyone who wants to practice for the sake of helping the keeper. Forwards want to score, which doesn't necessarily mean that they want to do things repetitively or at slower speeds. Things that help a keeper master a skill. As far as getting used to sliding, it is something that takes getting used to. I think the biggest thing is repetition. When I first work with keepers, I focus only on the technique. We slide to a target and focus on footwork and body positioning. Once the keepers start to get confidence we'll start to work with field players and a ball at half speed. Like any new skill, you work on things in practice before you try them in a game, and probably overdo them in training so you get the reps you need.

Training courses in Heartfordshire

As a young keeper (15), even at county level the training for keepers consists of lining up players who then fire off a volley of shots from the top-D and little else. I have not got the means to pay for a professional coach and while yours and other websites offer a great deal of help in terms of exercises there are few players (or coaches) who will put aside the time to go through dedicated goalie sessions. Living in Heartfordshire (England) are there any course training sessions etc. that I could attend to help me advance my keeping? Are there people in my area that I should contact? I have been pointed towards John Hurst as the local man in the know.

Jon's reply

John Hurst is definitely the man in your area to speak to about keeping courses. It's good that you check the net and other resources for keeping ideas. On the OBO website look back at old tips, especially Rachel's. There are some good ideas there. The big thing I would encourage you to do, is to make a skills inventory of your strengths and weaknesses and try to work drills around them. If you think about drills field players do, many of them can be converted to keeper drills.

Ball machines

Can you please give us some advice on ball machines that are suitable for hockey goal keepers.

Jon's reply

The ball machine I'm most familiar with is available from: The JUGS Company P.O. Drawer 365 Tualatin Oregon 97062 USA Phone - 503 340-9997 They have a machine that is designed for field hockey, called the Jugs Jr. Pitching Machine. You can also find them on the net at:

<http://www.thejugscompany.com>

Bruised feet from shooting drills

I am a young goalkeeper and I play at a very skilful club with many international players but when we do shooting drills I always go home with broken toenails and swollen feet. There is another goalkeeper in my club who has just recently bought Robo legguards, kickers and hand protectors and he does not seem to be affected by it. Is there any way of preventing my feet getting bruised or do I have to go out and buy Robo legguards and kickers.

Jon's reply

I don't know that you need to buy new legguards and kickers, but it sounds as if the kickers you're wearing now don't fit. Make sure your kickers aren't pushed back so far on your foot that your toes are hanging out. The heel straps control how far back the kicker is pulled. Also, make sure that the kicker is pulled down so that your foot is snugly inside the kicker. If the straps that go around the bottom of the kicker are too loose, your toes will stick out when you extend with your toes downward. Your kickers may well be too small or too big, but try adjusting the straps before you buy new pads. If you do have to buy new pads, the Robos are a good way to go.

Drills to impress the new coach

I am a high school hockey goalie and I want to impress the new coach with some drills. I would really like to improve my skill level, but I am tired of the same old jab and punching drills. If it isn't too inconvenient, could you please send me some good ideas.

Jon's reply

I think I'd be remiss to give you flashy drills to impress the new coach. As a coach, the biggest thing that impresses me is a keeper's ability to do the basic well and work hard throughout a practice, especially when you're left to work on your own. It's really important when you work with a new coach to find out what her expectations are for you specifically and the position in general. Give her time to see how you'll be used in practice. If you don't feel you have enough time to work on specific skills or fitness, ask for time to work on those things. I think if you take that approach and work hard and well with others, you'll impress your coach more than with any flash drill I could give you.

Warm ups for goalies

Wondering if you have any drills for warming up goalies and training drills that involves the goalies.

Jon's reply

Rachel has a good tip on warming up on file with the web site. I don't have any great drills, every keeper has different philosophies about what they want out of their warm up. I'll do two laps of the field, and stretch out of pads. I work our keepers through some footwork drills (pattern grids) out of pads, short distance, lots of changes of direction, no one distance over 5 yards, no more than 40 yards total. If I have a couple of keepers, I rotate them through, if not, the rest is time off for time on, five sets. Then they're in pads. I like keepers to warm up in pairs kicking. Five minutes over 15 yards. If I have a third keeper, I'll have them kick in a V pattern, see kicking drill coming next week, with the two keepers kicking straight on to the keeper at the base of the V, who has to change the angle of their clear. If it's a game, I'll then take the starting keeper and work balls to her around the circle and expand it out so that he/she is also taking balls from the sidelines, like crosses. Finally I'll do 3/4 pace shooting from the top of the circle before we build our way up to finishing from the field players, 15 minutes before the game. All in all, our warm up takes 70 minutes. Every keeper is different though. Your keepers might not take that long. Try different warm ups and judge your keeper's effectiveness in a game. That's your best warm up.

Good goalie drills

I really enjoy your tips on the OBO website. I am coaching for the first time this year and was wondering if you might have some good goalie drills? I have some pretty

basic ones down so far, but I figured it wouldn't hurt to ask. Out of three of us that are coaching, none were goalkeepers, so any help you might be able to offer would be much appreciated.

Jon's reply

A couple of quick things about drills for keepers, there's nothing too simple when it comes to drills. Depending on the level of your keepers, prioritise the skills you want to develop. I think kicking is the most important skill they can have, check out the kicking drill ideas in my tips section. I think that will explain a lot. Big thing for drills, develop a philosophy for training that anything (i.e. shots) that goes towards goal, must go out (i.e. cleared out of the circle). Give keepers the time to clear. Nothing develops bad habits faster than rapid fire shooting drills where there is no consequence to not clearing a ball. Encourage your keepers to try to clear first time wherever possible. It may be frustrating at first, but the sooner they get on to the concept, the quicker they'll advance. Hopefully that gives you some ideas to start with.

Training junior keepers

I was wondering if you could give me some ideas on training junior keepers?

Jon's reply

I don't know how junior your junior keepers, but I'm going to assume that your dealing with players under three years experience and working on basic skills. Obviously saving is important, so shots are definitely in order. I like to work specific technique with a keeper when doing shots, so we'll do sets of 10 shots at a pace where the keeper is going to have success saving to an area like low, right foot, then do left foot, then mid-pad right, etc. Depending on how much time I have with keepers, that could be anywhere from 100 to 100 balls. Typically we'll work on skills in groups, like a session for feet, a session for hands. Philosophically, when we do any kind of shot work, we want keepers getting in the habit of clearing the ball to a space. I'll set up spare keepers as outlet players for the keeper in net to clear to. Kicking and having range in the circle are important skills for a keeper to develop. Typically early on, most drills for keepers end up with a skirmish three yards in front of the goal. If you do any kind of keep away drill with your field players, let the keepers play as a defender in pads using their equipment. This is good for getting the moving around and working on things like slide tackling. If I'm doing stuff that doesn't need a goal, I'll work them in areas of the field away from the circle. Depending on the number of keepers (you can also use field players) I have for training, I like to do a lot of kicking games. If you have three, set them up in a triangle or a big circle. I'll do things like see how many kicks they can put together to each other. Once they get good, we'll put conditions on, they have to call the person they're kicking to, the foot the person has to kick with, things like that. The important thing with any beginning keeper, is reinforcing proper technique. Bad habits learned at this level take a long time to unlearn. As far as basic fundamental principals go, I really believe in keepers developing the mindset that they play the ball, the ball doesn't play them. I haven't given you a lot of drills, but rather things to think about when you're doing your drills.

Training technique books

I'm looking to get a hold of information on training techniques (from basic to advanced) for goalkeepers. I've been out of hockey for almost 2 years due to injury and to a location change and really want to get back into it. I really would appreciate it if you could point me in the right direction. Books that I can buy and read, tips on training etc.

Jon's reply

On the informational front, I would say read as many of the tips from the OBO section. Rachel has got a ton of good information. On the book front, I have a book distributed by a company called Longstreth Sporting Goods in Parkerford, Pennsylvania. The book is called Keeper To Keeper. There is a good goalkeeping section in David Whittaker's book THE HOCKEY WORKBOOK and Kathleen Partridge has a book called THE REBOUND REVOLUTION. Those are the best I know of.

Coaching

Keeping your place on your team

I live in South Africa. I play for my schools under 14A team. So far I have missed only 2 goals when we went on tour but the B team's goalie is a threat for next year I don't want to lose my place and I feel I have a good shot at playing for the provincial team. What should I do in the off-season so I come back better next season?

Jon's reply

As far as your preparation for next season, there's only one thing you can control and that's yourself. I think you might find some useful information in the two tips I have on off-season training and training programs. In regards to competition from other keepers, you can't do anything about what they do. You can use it to motivate you in your training, but at the end of the day, all you can do is make sure you've done everything you can to put your best case forward for the position. At the end of the day, if you've trained hard and enjoy what you're doing, that's all you can expect.

Regaining confidence

Five years ago I was hit in the head during training (through the helmet) and since then I have been struggling with my confidence when facing an attacker close up when they're taking a shot. I never had that problem before. What can I do to get back my confidence?

Jon's reply

I think all keepers hate to admit to problems with fear from the ball, but realistically hockey can be a dangerous game and goalkeeper a dangerous position. I think we've all been hit in bad places. The things to think about are the things we can control and what gives us confidence. As a keeper, I have confidence in my ability to stop a shot and I have some control over that. I equally need to have confidence in my equipment. I need to know that when hit with a hard shot, my equipment, and especially my helmet, will protect me. If I'm not sure of that, I have doubts, and when I have doubts, I have fear. My own experience has been that when I play with fear, that's when I get hurt. When I flinch, or shy or turn away from the ball, that's when I get hurt. It's also important to realise when a drill is a dangerous drill. Forwards taking full hits from ten yards out are not goalkeeping drills, they're shooting drills. If you're faced with those situations, talk to your coach about using a bench in the goal, rather than a keeper. Goalkeeping drills should require you to do a skill. Getting hit from close range is not a skill. If you do want to work on your reflexes from close range, use tennis balls. There's a difference between courage and stupidity. Bottom line, there's no instant cure for regaining confidence. It's kind of like falling off a horse, the best thing you can do is get back on.

Choosing to face the sun in the first half

At our last game, in the afternoon on a very sunny day, I asked my captain, on winning the toss, if we could face the sun in the first half, as it would be worse in the second half. One of the forwards criticised this, and said that we should always have the centre pass! I have been taught that the GK should be able to choose in sunny conditions, which end he, or she would like. What do you think?

Jon's reply

If your forward can guarantee that you'll take the centre pass and score immediately then I say take the pass. If he can't and you're faced with being in the wrong end of the sun for the game, then you might want to rethink the strategy. I do think consensus is a good idea between the team, captain and coach.

Coaching beginners

I am currently taking my level one coaching award and have been asked to carry out a 10 minute session on the coaching of goalkeeping. I will be taking a group of outfield players and I need to teach them about goalkeeping fundamentals - I was recommended to visit your site but your site is for established goalkeepers. Could you send me any information you may have on the coaching of goalkeepers to beginners. I have already thought about doing something in the region of doing some foot work with a tennis-ball/hockey ball around the 'd' but would like any information you may have to make my session more interesting.

Jon's reply

I don't know that the site is intended for established keepers, as much as it is for keepers. In any case, the kicking drills and training program tips have good basic information you can use. I think the big thing for coaches who aren't typically keeper coaches is for them to have some experience being keepers and perform basic skills. Tennis balls are great for that because you can do some small kicking drills. You can also use tennis balls for moderate shooting situations without having to fully kit up the coach. Anything you can do to make it active for the coaches is likely to be of interest to them. Check Rachel's tips also.

Lacrosse vs. field hockey

I love playing goal but I have never played Field Hockey before. You see I'm a lacrosse goalie by heart, and I am a sophomore on the JV Lacrosse Team at my school. Next year I will be a junior and if I try out for any sport I could only be on Varsity, and the thing is that I would love to play goal. I'm not sure if I'm explaining this correctly, but do you think I should try out next year or not. Oh I almost forgot, even then it would be hard because I will be at a camp during tryouts. My friends are encouraging me to try out as soon as I get back, but how do I solve the problem of knowing how to play Field Hockey.

Jon's reply

If you want to play goal in field hockey, you should play goal. I would recommend that you speak to the field hockey coach now, if you're interested in trying out for the team next year. Find out what her expectations are and definitely let her know if there's the possibility that you might miss part of tryouts. My advice would be, that if all possible, you be there for all of tryouts. It sends a message to the team what your commitment is. I was a lacrosse goalkeeper in college and didn't start playing field hockey until after University. There's no doubt in my mind which I prefer (Field Hockey if you can't guess). Whatever you do, you can't do it because of your friends, you have to do it for yourself.

Nerves

I have just been selected to go on tour with my school team to participate in a tournament. I have a huge problem though and that is that I am so nervous. I don't know how to calm myself down. I know that I have skill as a goalie and each day I progress upon that skill but I just can't stop this nervousness from getting the better of me. I need advice.

Jon's reply

As far as being nervous. I think every player who has played the game has been nervous. I think the more you play, the less nervous games become. Still, you play in a big game, there's going to be nerves. It's how you treat that anxiety or nerves that changes. As you become more confident in your skills, the more you look forward to making a play on the ball, and not making a mistake. When you can do that, then this game becomes fun. Stay with it and enjoy it.

Switching from ice to field hockey

I, myself am a goalkeeper for first grade but have not had much experience with coaching. This Tuesday I agreed to teach some new goalkeepers the basics of goalkeeping and I was just wondering if you had any easy drills to do in mind and also just a few pointers into what to say to them. Your advice would be greatly appreciated.

Jon's reply

Take a look at all the tips on the site. Between Rachel's tips and mine, there's a lot of good basic information. A lot of basic stuff has also come up on in the Q&A. I think the biggest thing you can instil in your keepers from the very start is the principle that they are more than goalkeepers. They are circle keeper/defenders and can be active in the situations they have plays in. Keeping can be pretty simple -make the right decision and execute the appropriate skill and voila. OK, maybe it's not that simple... In any case, good luck.

Switching from ice to field hockey (2)

I am a player with a team in Trinidad and Tobago and I play for fatima hockey team we are the current defending champions of our championship league but our goalkeeper used to keep for ice hockey so he has a tendency to stay in his goal when a lot of the times he should approach the player coming to him to cut down the angle. How can we get him out of this habit we need your advice please.

Jon's reply

The biggest thing you need to do is to get him more comfortable with the skills associated with coming out and then reinforcing that with drills where he's got to make a decision to come out and sees where he's successful. Start off with a lot of balls that he's got to come off his line to play with no pressure, just getting comfortable moving. Players hitting in to the circle from the 25. Ice hockey keepers aren't as active as hockey keepers coming up to clear up loose balls. Let him see how he can play those balls, with him having a target to clear to. As he becomes more comfortable clearing loose balls, interject a forward receiving and shooting, or just putting his clear under pressure. You should mix the balls between forward and keeper, forcing the keeper to make the decision to step up, or back off and play the shot. You can mix these situations so that sometimes the forward receives out of the circle and the keeper has to take him on high. Don't completely try to reinvent his technique if he's making saves. Sometimes it's result rather than classic technique. Put him in situations where he's got to make a decision and then evaluate the play he made on the ball.

From the 4th to 2nd team

At the moment I'm facing a dilemma, I have been chosen to play for Northampton town's second team, but, I have only had experience with the fourth team, so I'm a little nervous. For starters the speed of which they hit the ball is so much greater and then the speed in which the game runs at is also greater. So I was wondering whether I should change anything I am doing at the moment, positioning etc.

Jon's reply

Obviously there will be differences between the levels, especially in regards to ball speed, but don't go changing everything about your game. Things happen faster at higher levels of play and the biggest adjustment for younger keepers typically comes in making faster decisions. Technically the game is the same, so your skills should be the same. It's difficult to develop faster reflexes as a keeper, you're either fast or you're not. You can become smarter, and that comes with experience. I think the biggest thing you can do to improve with the opportunity you're getting is to really evaluate the decisions you make in the game, the results and what you might do differently. Be patient.

Switching from defender to goalkeeper

I'm a 20 year old female goal keeper for a club in Indonesia. I was a defence player before my club's goal keeper quit her job (she said she didn't have the guts to move on!) and I got chosen by my coach. I have no idea why he chose me...my height is only 156 cm and I don't even know whether I have a good reflex or not. The problem is it's getting harder to learn all these skills...and every time there's a big match...I always get freaked out first!! Is there something wrong with my guts?

Jon's reply

Welcome to the goalkeeping club (I hope). The important thing is, "Do you enjoy goalkeeping?" If not, then it's probably not going to be a good experience. The thing I would ask, though, is that you give it a fair chance. If you were a forward, I think you'd have a harder time making a move to goal, but as a defender, the philosophies are the same. A good save is just like making a good tackle. As a defender, you need to communicate, the same is true as a keeper. There are a lot of new skills that you have to learn, but I don't think anyone can realistically expect you to master them in a short time. The biggest thing you can start off by doing, is setting small goals for yourself. Don't compare yourself to other established keepers. In fact to compare yourself to anyone. I think it would be good for you to speak to your coach and sit down with him. Ask him to explain to you what he expects. I think he's probably the best person to address your concerns to. Finally, it's alright to be nervous/freaked out. I don't know that keepers ever completely get over being "freaked," but they do learn to deal with it better.

Reaching your keeping potential

I'm in the 11th grade. I attend Lindenhurst High School on Long Island. I was wondering what I can do to reach my best potential?

Jon's reply

Small world, I grew up on Long Island. Potential is a big word. It implies finding your limits and making the best of your abilities. To do that, you have to challenge yourself. Obviously, you've been on the internet and have found the OBO website, that's good place to start. I think to find your best potential it's important to think about the game and the position, the internet is a good way to get new ideas. Physically

and athletically, it's important to think about your strengths and weaknesses. Good keepers build their game around their strengths while they develop their weaknesses. I think as far as reaching your best potential, great keepers never reach it. There's always something they want to get better at. The great thing about goalkeeping, is the position and the skills are always changing. That makes for a lot of work, but work that can and should be fun. Training isn't always done on a hockey field. A lot of training can be done in the weight room and on the track. Successful keepers are good athletes. Work with your coach, set goals for yourself and set your limits high. Not every keeper can play on a national team, but no one ever made a national team by settling for second best.

Is there such a thing as a hockey school?

I'm a goalkeeper. I'm in the National under-15 team. I'm the second choice keeper for that team. So, I feel left out. I've not started in the first team before and have not played a game for them. So I feel that I want to go and polish my skills. Is there such thing as a Hockey school, and if I were to graduate from there we'll considered professional, you know what I mean? Is there any camp that I can participate in so as to gain experience? Are there such schools in NZ or Australia? If there is, can you tell me where it is and how I can enrol in that school.

Jon's reply

Different countries have different systems for developing hockey players. In Australia there is an Institute for Sport that is run by the government. Top players are selected for scholarships to the Institute. In other countries, clubs are responsible for developing players and then the best are selected for elite training. I'm not familiar with the system in Singapore. I don't know of any international schools for developing keepers, though there are a number of private camps and coaches that will work with players. Though you are still very young, many players with aspirations of playing internationally will play in established hockey countries with clubs that will allow them to develop. If you're interested in pursuing something like that, I'd suggest you contact different National Hockey Associations and try to make contact with clubs. There is list of contacts to a wide assortment of clubs and associations on the website

www.fieldhockey.com

Coaching books

I have just been reading your coaching tips whilst on line and found them to be very useful. The hockey team I play for RWB St Lawrence (Jersey Channel Islands) has just lost their goalkeeper, and because I am a brave soul, have offered my services. I am a complete novice, so this will be a very steep learning curve for the whole team!! Yes they are that desperate. I'll keep reading your tips, but if there were any coaching books you could recommend, I would love to know about them. Looking forward to your reply, a very nervous goalie!

Jon's reply

Most of the good books on goalkeeping are out of print. David Whitaker's Hockey Workbook has a good goalkeeping section. I think if you go back and read mine and Rachel's tips as well as the Q&A, you'll find some useful information. Good luck and enjoy yourself.

Making the national team

I wrote to you about four months ago telling you about how I just started playing Keeper infield hockey and then I was asked to go to the Namibian national trials...I was unsuccessful. After their first tour they approached me and asked me to practice for the national squad, I have ever since but I feel that I am not quite experienced enough for the national squad. If you could please forward me some tips I will much appreciate it.

Jon's reply

The biggest thing I'm going to tell you is to be patient. It shouldn't be a shocker that after a year you're not playing on the National side. In the meantime, enjoy the experience. If people don't want you at training they'll tell you. If you've been asked to train with the side, you should go. Stay tuned to the tips on the website, more are on the way.

Advice for a junior keeper playing in senior teams

I am a goal keeper for several junior teams and Motherwell Mens' 3rd team. I am 13 and quite often find playing in the mens' team quite difficult!!

Jon's reply

It can be a good experience to play up levels if you're not overmatched. The biggest thing I can tell you about playing senior hockey is to make sure your basic skills are solid. Great saves are good to make, but a bigger goal should be not to let in soft ones. Ball speed will be different, you need to read the game quicker, but that comes with time and experience. In the meantime, you keep yourself on the field by not making mistakes. Be patient with yourself and stay tuned to the tips.

Nobody wants to be the goalie!

I have a team of middle school girls who are playing great! Problem is nobody wants to be the goalie so I have to draft someone every game! Makes it really hard. Any suggestions for making the goalie position more appealing? This is a winter indoor league (we live in New Hampshire) with no practice time and once a week games. All eighth graders.

Jon's reply

It's really hard if you don't have someone who wants to be a keeper. You say your girls are playing in a winter indoor league. Is it real indoor with boards or outdoor rules played indoor? That makes a difference. I think it's really hard to sell a field player on being a goalkeeper. You might want to think about athletes from other sports, especially soccer field players since they're usually good athletes and are familiar with kicking a ball, or ice hockey keepers (familiar with stopping pucks). I think indoor hockey is a lot easier to sell to a keeper candidate since they're so much more involved in play than outdoor, but the big thing you have to have is willingness on the participant front. The big things I look for in candidates is agility, intelligence, courage and desire when we look for new keepers.

Regaining confidence

I would like some help please. I am 16 and was playing for my local mens' team on Saturday and had a ball drilled into my face from 4 yards. This shook me up loads but I wasn't hurt. I then played in a national cup match on Sunday and played so badly. I was always on my line and wasn't committing to take the ball and control my D. I knew what I was doing wrong but still I didn't want to correct it. I was just

wondering if you've had any experiences like this and if so what you did or if you have any advice for me?

Jon's reply

Welcome to the position! I can tell you I've had experience with your sensation. I started playing back in the day before head gear was required and can tell you, I was one of the idiots that played without a helmet or mask for my first two years. I thought that was the brave thing to do. First off, don't ever do it (play without head protection), even just knocking around in practice. The good news is your head gear works, you weren't hurt. Still, it can be very unsettling. One of the first lessons I was taught as a keeper is "you've got to take the knock, son." If you get hit, get back in goal and don't let the last experience you have being injured. Sometimes that's easier said than done. I think you've learned one important lesson, that when you play afraid, you don't play effectively. Not only do you not play effectively, my experience has been that when I play afraid, that's when I get hurt. Hang in there, if your equipment is good, you may get shaken up, but you won't get hurt if you play with courage.

Communicating with your coach

I was playing for a team and then I changed to a new one cause it lost all of it's life (because of the money) and in the new team, the coach is an international player who happened to be a goalie, I was very happy at first cause I thought I'd learn a lot but it's a year from that and he refuses to teach me anything by making himself as a fool so I've begged him to teach me and I don't know what to do and I'd think I can improve my skills if he does, so have you got any ideas?

Jon's reply

If you haven't already, ask to sit down and talk to him away from practice and your teammates. I think one of the biggest obstacles to getting good coaching is communication. If you can express to him your frustration and that you look at him and his knowledge as an asset, he may be more willing to share his experience.

Communication

I am a goalie on the junior varsity team, and my sweepers do not know what to do, and my team does not listen to me. I went to camp this summer at UCONN and that was a big thing I learned, talking to my team-mates, and directing my sweeper. But, I have a position to play too. I cannot just tell my sweeper where to go the whole time, I must concentrate on my position. How do I help my sweeper and still be in the game? Also, my team does not listen to me. The varsity team is used to me and me yelling "Drop back!" but the jv does not like to listen to me. I don't know how to get them to listen to me, because them not listening to me is the reason we don't always win, when we are perfectly capable of beating almost every team in our league.

Jon's reply

We get a lot of questions about communication and there isn't a right or wrong way. The biggest thing is not so much "what" is said, but "what the result" is. In other words, it doesn't do you any good to say all the right things if nobody's listening. I think it's a really good idea to sit down with your coach and team-mates and talk about roles and responsibilities. In most teams, as a keeper you are responsible for organising the defence. As the deepest player on defence, the keeper has the best view of the big picture. The keeper is also the player most impacted by what goes on in front of her. For that reason as a keeper, I WANT to organise my defence. It's important that defenders understand what you're trying to get them to do and why. That's why it's a good idea to sit down with your coach when you work out things.

Realise when you play with two teams, like a jv and a varsity, that you might have to talk to them differently to get the same results.

While I don't think you want to be a cheerleader, it's important to recognise what motivates people and encourages them to do what you want. If all you do is tell players not to do something, or to do something by screaming, they're likely to tune you out pretty quickly. If you're calm and composed and praise them when they do something well, my experience has been that defenders are a lot more likely to do what you ask. Every keeper has their own style when working with a defence. It's important that style is natural. You need to work on it. I can't promise you what will work, but I can promise you what won't if you don't work on it.

Coping with glare and the bad keeping days

I am in my first year of goalkeeping - playing for my club and English County (Under 14s) I played on Sunday and had a great deal of trouble from a low afternoon sun - and lost sight of the ball on one or two occasions. I wear glasses normally - but contact lenses for sport. How can I deal with the dazzle? I did let in one or two (or three/perhaps four) goals too many - it wasn't my best performance how do you cope with the bad days? I've had plenty of good days - feeling good about my performance and my teams', this is the first time the game went from bad to worse.

Jon's reply

Depending on the kind of helmet and cage you wear, there are a couple of things to try. First off, sunglasses if you can fit them under your helmet. Second, there is something called eye black that American footballers apply under their eyes that cuts glare. When the low sun is really bad, you might try white adhesive tape applied to the top part of your cage. Not so that it covers your eyes, but so it shields them. You should also get used to using your stick or glove to shield from the glare when you can. As far as bad days, know that they can happen. The biggest thing I try to do is go back out and work with a plan to make sure they don't happen. That starts with a journal. Keep track of goals, saves and different game situations. Assess what happened, what you did and what you might do differently. In the course of a game, I try not to think about what happened, particularly if it was a mistake. The last thing my team-mates need to see is me reacting to something I can't do anything about. I need to keep playing and I need to keep my team-mates playing with me. Get back on the horse!

Pre-game meals

A have a few questions regarding goalkeeping. 1. Do you have any tips regarding what a goalkeeper should eat and drink before a hockey-game? (e.g. no sugar - lots of sugar.) 2. When I am playing an indoor game I have this little problem: When I have just made a save and standing still my heart is beating like hell and I get a bit dizzy. Are there any things to prevent this?

Jon's reply

I think each person is different in terms of pre-game meals. A lot depends on what your body is used to and what time you're playing. For myself, I don't like to eat less than two hours before a match. I try to avoid eating fried or fatty foods as they are hard to digest quickly. I think the biggest guideline for eating anything before a game or training session is moderation. If you want sugar before a game, fruit is a good source and is easy to digest. More important than what you eat, is what you drink. I think more keepers suffer from what they do or don't drink before games. Beverages like coffee, soda and alcohol are all diuretics. They dehydrate your body. If you have any of these before a match, make sure you also take in plenty of water. If you are

dizzy and light headed during a match, what you are or are not drinking or eating can have a big effect. Try adjusting what you do as a pre-game meal. If you continue to have problems, I'd recommend seeing a doctor.

Training keepers to be aggressive

I was wondering if you had any drills or simply advice on how to train my keepers. They are young, freshman (college) and they have some basics. They are definitely improving but they are not very aggressive or quick...mostly not aggressive. I was a keeper myself and was a natural. They are not. How can I teach aggressiveness? Can I? Do you have any suggestions? I have tried to talk with them about the mental aspect but talk doesn't seem to be doing it. Help!

Jon's reply

Aggressiveness is a problem, especially if it's not natural. I think the best way to develop it is to put keepers in situations where they see a reward to being aggressive. We use a lot of man down situations, 2v1, 3v2, etc where we encourage the keeper to try defend passes as well as shots. There are a couple of things that encourage keepers to be aggressive, one is making sure that they're adequately protected. A keeper isn't going to be very aggressive if she's afraid of getting hurt. In addition, make sure your keepers are athletic enough to play an aggressive style. The biggest thing that will draw a keeper to a more aggressive style is having success playing that way.

Improving keeping mentality

I have a question about the mental aspect of being a goalie. I am a very competitive player who takes my game seriously. I get myself really psyched up, and sometimes this is a bad thing because after letting a ball in I get mad at myself and basically psych myself out. I let it affect my play too much. I must admit I have a bad mentality for a goalie - in all the other sports I play, I play offence, so this is much different for me. Anyway, I let myself be affected too much by the score. My coach has talked to me about this and I need to improve in this area, especially if I want to be the starter! This even happens in practice. I was wondering if you have any ideas on how I can improve my mentality. What do you personally do to keep yourself in focused during the game? Also, I recently read an article in Sports Illustrated for Women about game preparedness and visualisation and relaxation, that sort of thing. What do you do recommend to do before games so, instead of psyching myself out too much, I can concentrate on my play and stay focused? Thanks so much!

Jon's reply

First off, look at my reply to maintaining concentration, another question that I think touches on part of your question. For your particulars, I think it is important that you be "mentally aroused" for games. I think your problem maybe from being over-aroused. It's one thing to be psyched up for a game, it's another to get taken out of your game because of it. Sometimes it's ok to be worked up, but recognise your state will affect your team. As a younger keeper, I think it's important that you develop the ability to internalise your reactions. As an opponent, if I see a keeper react, I think I've got them. On the other hand, if I see a keeper, get on to the next play without reacting, my impression is that the keeper is composed and confident. That also gives your team-mates confidence. Hopefully some of this is helpful.

Maintaining concentration

Can you recommend any ways of maintaining the high level of concentration required in a game? Often a keeper can be called upon to only make one save in a game, but if you fail to save it, it can cost you dearly. Are there any training methods to improve your level of concentration, so you are 'in the zone' when called upon to make that all-important stop?

Jon's reply

I don't know that there's any way to ensure being in the "zone." When it comes to the mental part of the game, there are a lot of factors, but I think the biggest thing is confidence. For me, confidence comes from preparation and experience. Preparation is key in that when you have trained hard on your fitness and your skills, you know you can physically perform the "big play." Experience is a bit different. Until you've played in the big game and made the big save, you don't really know that you'll make the play. You can simulate pressure in games and training. Sometimes in training, I'll make one situation the money ball, the ball that if I don't make the save on, there are consequences; maybe an extra sprint, push-ups, sit-ups, something like that. Mental imagery can be very helpful for visualising success. Think about the time of the game,

visualise the flow of play and think of a shot and a save. See the clear, the ball exiting the circle. A quick note about being in the "zone." Be careful not to put so much emphasis on being in it. There are times when your reflexes are almost in an unconscious state in that you can do no wrong. There are other times, when I feel off my game. When I do, I need to pull myself back in. As a keeper, I try to strive for consistency, physically and mentally. If I don't make the big save this time, my confidence isn't shot and it's not a personal tragedy. No one tries to let a goal in. I move on to the next situation. Enjoy being in pressure situations, it's part of the position, but know that as a keeper, it's only a matter of time before your next save.

Becoming varsity goalie

Well, school just got out so that would make me an upcoming sophomore. I have loved field hockey ever since we learned how to play it in gym in the sixth grade. So I signed up for tryouts the summer before my freshman year and before I knew it, I was the starting JV goalie. I loved every minute of it. Eventually the coach advised the other goalie on JV to think about playing the field, since she was not receiving much playing time, making me the only goalie left besides the senior Varsity goalie. It didn't even dawn on me until two weeks before the season ended that I would be the Varsity goalie next fall. That thought scared me to death. The Varsity goalie this year was "elected" the Western-Mass goalie. I have no idea how I'm supposed to follow up someone like that. Plus, to make matters worse, during the last week of the season, the Varsity coach asked me to practice with them so that if they needed me in the finals I'd be there. It was then that I realised that all my friends were on JV, and not to be pessimistic, but it's very unlikely that they will make the team next year. I feel as if I just won't belong with the rest of them. I would never quit because I love the sport too much and I wouldn't leave the team without an experienced goalie. Any words of wisdom?

Jon's reply

I hope you are still playing this fall. The thing that you talk about is loving to play and I think that's the most important thing to remember. Goalkeeping is a different position. You talked about your friends not necessarily being able to play as you moved up and leaving them behind. Unfortunately that's something that happens as sport becomes more competitive. As a keeper, sometimes you as an individual move up and the rest of your team-mate friends don't. They're still your friends. As far as the

"Western Mass," keeper, the only thing you can control is you. Don't worry about anyone else. If you like the game and the position, enjoy it. I hope some of this is helpful.

Incorporating keepers in practice

As a high school coach and there only being one of me, my goal keepers get pushed to the side! This is such an important position and does deserve all of my attention but there's 15 field players I must attend to as well. Can you give any good suggestions to better incorporate them into the practice?

Jon's reply

There are a number of ways to incorporate keepers into your practice effectively. First off, if you're not going to work with them directly in a practice, make sure they have a practice plan for themselves. Give them a schedule of what you have planned for them and make sure they are staying on task for that. If they have a plan, they feel included and have some ownership for their results. Kicking drills and technical work, anything where there is repetition, are things keepers can be doing on their own. Obviously a ball machine is great for this type of work, but is not something that everyone has access to. If you don't have a ball machine, improvise. If you're working on aerials, have keepers toss balls to simulate flicks to each other. Whatever drills you do, make sure that there is measure of success to it. Most of the save work we do, we track a number of things, first the save, then the clear. We'll set up targets for the keepers to clear through and things like that.

In addition, many of the drills you do with field players can incorporate keepers. If you're having players pass from point A to Point B, a keeper should be able to perform that same skill with her feet. Your keeper is a defender, not simply someone who stands on the goal line. Also check out Rachel's tip.

Help with a new keeper

I am looking for a few pointers, specifically because our very young team is without a goalkeeper this coming season, and will be converting a freshman field player to fill the spot. She has emailed me that she is playing this summer, but is having difficulty with the foam equipment (from the sounds of things, directing clears and keeping the ball on the ground). She also is in need of breaking the habit of hoping at the ball to stop it. Any ideas for drills that will break the skill set down to the basics without causing too much frustration?

Jon's reply:

Philosophically, it's crucial how you handle confidence with a new keeper. The hop you're talking about making to the ball sounds like the "double leg stop" which is fine when someone cracks a ball straight at you mid shin, otherwise it's a bad technique as you leave bad rebounds. Big thing is to get your keeper thinking about clearing and saving in the same technique. Instep clearing is the way you do that so please see the kicking tip on the site. To encourage your keeper to kick, rather than save, do drills out of the goal so the keeper doesn't have the negative reinforcer of everything she miskicks ending up in the net. It's better for her to get used to kicking things anywhere near the goal then getting locked in to being a keeper who never strays from her goal line. To get your keeper used to working in pads, any drill you do with a field player, have the keeper do using her feet where a field player would use their stick.

Materials

Body armour

I am about to go to an Australian National tournament and I have a feeling my new Robo body armour hasn't been fitted properly. I did not receive any instructions with it, and I'm not quite sure how it's meant to be fitting.

Jon's reply

Body armour will be bulky and restrictive to start off with. First about fitting, look at the technical diagram of the pad on the web site, that should give you a good frame of reference. Especially important are the elbow and shoulder joints. The pad should flex when you move, but obviously that's going to be tough in the first couple of days. See the tip section attached to the body pad on the website for speedy break in info.

Breaking in kickers

My daughter is entering her senior year of high school and has been playing with TK legguards & kickers for 3 years. She plays practically year round indoor and out. Her kickers have no rebound left in them. We recently purchased a set of Robos for her. They are very stiff and she doesn't seem to move well (upright) in them, although her slide tackles have improved. Is there a way to break them in quicker? She has some important camps this summer with college coaches attending. Also she has been kicking the ball up which she never did before. Is there a different "sweet spot" on the inside of her boot than with the TK's? Thank you and I have really enjoyed your articles.

Jon's reply

I think your daughter is experiencing the breaking in the kickers blues. The Robo kickers are shipped flat, obviously your foot isn't. You can accelerate the curving phase to kickers by wrapping them in an ace bandage, or just push them together. Anything to round them to mould your foot. You can and do need to make technique adjustments while your equipment breaks in (see my past tips for equipment: kickers). If your clears are coming up, focus on your leg angle as you contact the ball. Your daughter should really focus on getting her head forward and making sure her foot is even with, or slightly behind her knee when she contacts the ball. If her foot is even with or in front of her knee, the ball is going to take off. The Robos are great once they break in, but they're definitely different than the TKs as far as break in and use. The sweet spot is in the instep, just in front of the ankle.

Protecting kickers on sand-filled pitches

Howdy, I've just bought new Robo kickers and how can I protect them from wearing away on sand based pitches. I have huge feet size (US 14) and is it a good idea to cut the knobs on the kickers off to make my feet better fitted.

Jon's reply

Given the abrasive qualities of sand-filled pitches, putting duct tape along the bottom of the kickers is a good idea. Probably the same is true for trimming the bottom studs of your shoes as to accommodate the straps.

Sore legs when wearing legguards

I have recently purchased new Robo OBO gear. Previously I have always used Gryphon equipment but have been happy with my new choice. However I am having one major problem with the legguards. I have had the gear for some time now and I

am still getting really sore spots just below the back of my knees. I have the comforters on but it still hurts quite a lot. The only way to ease the pain at the moment is to loosen the straps quite a bit but this is making the pad too loose. Has this been a common problem and is there any solutions to it. Any advice would be much appreciated.

Jon's reply

Part of it is just getting used to the pads, but I've found wearing long socks also helps. You're right, the pads should be snug. I think given time, you won't notice the discomfort as you get used to the pads.

Cleats vs. flat soles

Lately, I was talking to some other goalies about what kind of shoes to use and how to prepare them for use with kickers. For myself, I am using normal astroturf shoes with straight lines of pins. I cut away two lines so my straps can pass through them (reduces wear, increases grip of your shoes and the front straps don't slide off so fast). I heard that some goalies use shoes with flat soles. The reason that they would do this is for improving the speed of turning their foot in a standing position. With pins your foot sometimes sticks to the ground if you have too much weight on it. Is it a smart move to have flat soles or is it better to have much grip on your toes?

Jon's reply

The type of shoes you wear greatly depends on the surface you play on and your playing style. If you're playing on a water-based turf, I think turf shoes are ideal. I play up on the balls of my feet. I find when I play with some turf shoes, they are too grippy and I do get stuck when I extend to make a save. For that reason, I like a shoe that's more flat. Other keepers play more flat-footed and don't have that problem. The surface you play on can also effect the life span of your kicker straps. Sand based turfs eat kicker straps up, and for that reason a lot of keepers who play on that surface regularly cut the pins or cleats of their shoes so they're not in direct contact with the turf. Bottom line is, you shouldn't change the way you play because of your shoes, you need to find shoes that fit the way you play. I hope this helps.

Threading Robo, Cloud 9 or Yahoo legguards

The straps on my pads are all twisted, and some are so twisted that I can't twist them back. If you take out the straps, how can you put them back?

Jon's reply

Yours is a timely question. On the OBO website, there is a tip on threading legguard straps. That should give you a pretty good idea of how to do it. If you're having trouble making a tool to thread the strap through with, I used a long piece of thin cardboard cut to 1" wide with a pointy tip. I taped the strap so that it overlapped on the tail piece of the cardboard and then gently slotted the strap through. If you're strap was really twisted, you might want to take a hot iron to it and straighten out the curls and twists before putting it back.

Reader feedback: repairing legguards; converting from ice to field hockey; regaining confidence

I was reading your Q+A and I noticed there was a section about the legguard straps cutting into the foam. I have had this problem, and what you say is true, you cannot repair them. I tried to glue them with a hotmelt, as I have had success with this before on my LHP and kickers, but the strap just cut a new channel next to the one that had been filled in. Eventually I got mine replaced, after e-mailing Mike at OBO about the problem. Converting from ice to field hockey: I played ice hockey in goal

from 12 to 15 years old, then switched to field hockey and stayed in goal. I had the same problem with staying deep in the goal, because at ice hockey I would have had the angles covered. So the 1st X1 goalie set cones up about 2-3 yards from the goal line and about 5 yards out to the side of the goal. The rule was that I could only make the save OUTSIDE the box these cones created. If I stopped it inside the box I got to do 5 push-ups. Nasty, but effective. It taught me to come off my line and dominate the 'D'. That was 3 years ago, now I am playing in the Midlands Premier 2nd X1 League, the highest league I can play in for my club's 2nd team. Regaining Confidence: I have had this happen to me too, but this was in a practice! The lights where we play had been vandalised, and it was quite hard to see the ball. We were doing a drill where 2 players come from the 25yard line, one peels off to the base line and gives a pass to the other who is running in. I set up for the shot from about 10 yards, maybe less and that was the last thing I could remember. The player hit the ball one time, caught me under the left eye, the cage was destroyed, but the force of the shot was transferred to the bolts holding the cage to the helmet. These twisted and sheared off, shattering the forehead of the helmet! A shard of plastic cut my forehead open in the centre about an inch long and travelled horizontally towards my left eye. I got 4 stitches and mild concussion. The next day I went and bought a new helmet and cage and went to the next practice, not in goal, as the doctor said to have a week off, so I just did some light kicking drills, in full kit but without a helmet. I would have played that weekend, but I also got whiplash from landing on the back of my head, so I had about 2 weeks off. I had absolutely no problem getting back in goal, probably because I went straight back to a practice and didn't think about what had happened. I just forgot that there is a chance that I might get hurt and got on with it, I think I too would have lost confidence if I had not carried on playing immediately. I find the Q+A section very interesting, keep up the excellent work.

Jon's reply:

That's funny, I think we've all shared common experiences. I don't pretend to be an expert, the only thing I can provide is my experience.

Can I keep my legguards looking new?

I would just like to make an inquiry. I have recently purchased some acid Robo pads, I have had them for +4 weeks now, they are starting to go fairly dull and it has not helped when I cleaned them, what should I use or is there nothing that I can do about it. P.S. thank you for the tip you gave me last time it has really helped.

Jon's reply

Unfortunately the hard fact of life is that your pads will lose that brand-new lustre with use. Turf is an abrasive surface, even when it's wet. Acid is definitely the colour to have for dirty pads though, as you've got all the colors there anyway. You can clean pads with a plastic scrub brush and mild detergent, but it sounds like yours are wear marks. Well done.

Repairing legguards

I have a little problem with my OBO legguards. The straps are "cutting" into the legguards, and I can't stop it. Do you have any ideas? I've tried with glue, but it doesn't work. Should I talk to the person who sold the legguards to me?

Jon's reply

I've never had great success repairing legguards once they start to tear on the inside. You can use Shoe Goo and try to build a hard slot up for the strap to carry through, but usually when it rips it's hard to fix. Check with the person you got from them. It's

really important that the strap is properly slotted through when you fasten your pads. If the strap is twisted, it will tear into the pad.

Robo vs. Proform legguards

I'm currently looking into purchasing new legguards and kickers, and have been wondering about OBO legguards. First of all, I play at the college level in the US (Div. III). We play mostly on grass (1-2 turf games a year). I've been looking at the Robo as well as the Proform legguards (in catalogues) and a few questions have arisen. First, how does the smooth surface of the Robo legguards compare with the ridged surface of the Proform? Does it impact rebound? Second, we play more upright (forming a wall with the guards, feet together) than those who play on turf. Does the fact that the Robo legguards have a slight gap impact this sort of play i.e. the guards don't fit together when side-by-side, can shots sneak through? In essence, which set of OBO legguards would you recommend for us?

Jon's reply

I don't look at one set of pads being a grass set and the other being turf pads. The Robo legguards are designed for mobile keepers regardless of the surface. I highly recommend them. While the Robo legguards are contoured, I think you have just as much chance of a ball going between your legs with the Proform. One of the problems that many keepers have on grass is trying to stop, then clear shots on the ground. While it may be more difficult on grass, I think it's still in a keeper's best interests to clear the ball first time when they have the chance.

Strapping OBO kickers

We just bought OBO goalie equipment, and I can't figure out how the four straps go over the kickers. I realise the equipment is new and the straps will help it conform to her foot. Camp starts tomorrow and our daughter does not want to go in with the equipment in five different pieces. Any pictures that I can look at to figure out how this goes?

Jon's reply

There are horizontal and vertical straps that need to be slotted on to the kicker to hold it in place. Your kickers should have come with a piece of paper that diagrammed this, but if not, the vertical straps wrap around the bottom of the kicker to keep it down. The horizontal straps hold the vertical straps in place and pull the kicker back. If you look at the different kickers on the OBO website, the photos should give you a good idea of what I'm talking about. Hopefully, you've already figured this out.

Front kicker straps

My sister and I are both goalkeepers for our club and for the first time in 5 years they have provided some gear for my older sister (I have my own gear). They bought her a set of Yahoo legguards and kickers which she is pleased with. We are having some problems however. On the kickers the straps keep sliding off the front of the toe. The strap system is very different from the Robo gear and it doesn't seem to work very well. I had a look at the picture of them on your site and we have them set up just as you have, but when I clicked into kickers off the Yahoo page the setup is slightly different. Have you got any tips or ideas to help us with this problem, we would be extremely grateful.

Jon's reply

I think the difference you're talking about between the set of the Yahoo kickers is some have internal straps (like the Robos) and others have external straps. It sounds like the Yahoos you have use external straps. That's not a big deal and actually if you're having a problem with the front strap slipping, can make things easier. There is one of two things you can do if you're having trouble with the front strap slipping. First, you can tape the front strap to the rear strap along the bottom of the kicker. Use duct tape (a vinyl covered cloth tape available at most hardware stores). Tear the tape into about a 1" strip (typically duct tape comes in 3" width) and tape the two straps together. The shoes you wear and type of surface you play on effect how your kickers stay on. If you play with shoes with a narrow last and a flat sole, you'll probably have a problem with the front strap. Wider shoes with some cleats seem to do better. I have had keepers write me who have cut some of the cleats out of their shoes so that there is a slot to hold the front strap in place. If you wear really flat shoes (I do when I play on dry turf or indoor hockey) you can do something a little different with the external straps. You'll keep the straps in the same place that secure the kickers around the back of your foot (horizontal straps). However, the change you'll make is with the straps that wrap around the bottom (vertical straps). I've taken the two vertical straps and linked them together to make one long strap. I start it through the rear horizontal strap take it around the bottom of the kicker (so that the buckle is on the non-kicking side of the kicker), and bring it around through the front horizontal strap (kicking side), take it over the top so it slots back under the kicker on the non-kicking side horizontal strap. You'll then take the long vertical strap, and bring it back up through the rear horizontal strap (kicking side) and buckle the strap. In effect, the one long vertical strap makes an "x" on the bottom of the kicker that should make it difficult for your foot to slip out. You may have to play around to get your kickers properly fitted and the buckles in proper place, but the time spent is well worth the inconvenience of having your foot slip out. If you have any questions about this, please get back to me. It's not as complicated as it sounds.

Do I need Robo legguards and kickers?

I'm thinking about buying new pads because mine are dying on me. I was wondering what kind I should get. I'm 16 and playing a lot of indoor and outdoor hockey with a very good older team year round. I'm also planning to play in college. My coach recommended the Robo kickers and legguards, but my parents don't think that's necessary and are looking for something cheaper, do you have any advice on what I should get?

Jon's reply

Obviously you need to think about what you can afford, but I also think when it comes to pads, you also think about the level you want to play at. If you have the opportunity, the Robos are great pads and wear well for both outdoor and indoor. Equipment can limit you and if your goal is to play at the highest level, your pads should support that.

Cleaning OBO legguards

I've had my pads for about three years and I play lots of indoor and outdoor hockey. I was just wondering how I could clean them.

Jon's reply

My best experience has been simply taking the pads in a shower or bath tub, running hot water over them and scrubbing them with a plastic scrub brush. If they're really nasty, I'll use dishwashing detergent and scrub them a couple of times. That should take out just about everything.

Repairing cracks in legguards

I would like to know if there is a special glue or repair-kit that can mend cracks in OBO pads.

Jon's reply

I use something available in the US called SPORT GOO or SHOE GOO, and they both have worked well. Get a spare set of straps for your kickers and a couple of spare buckles for your legguards. The investment now is well worth it, having the stuff during the season, instead of after.

Toe straps

When I'm in goal I find that the front toe strap on my kickers comes off and sits on top of my toe rather than underneath it. Is there anyway that I can fix this?

Jon's reply

Make sure your kicker is pulled all the way back and secured with the back strap. Then make sure the front strap is tightened snugly. If you still have a problem with the front strap slipping, try using a small loop of tape to keep the front and rear strap together. The other thing you can do is make sure the front strap is behind the front cleats on your shoes (if you have any).

Painting white equipment

I have some of your OBO cloud 9 kickers and they are white. I was wondering what sort of paint I could use to colour them, some paint that wouldn't rub off on sand turf but also wouldn't come off when it got wet, and some that wouldn't destroy the kickers.

Jon's reply

If you are painting your equipment because of the recent rule change, make sure it applies in your league. The recent modification to FIH rules was written specifically for internationally televised tournaments like the Olympics or World Cup. They do not apply to most local leagues unless your association has a specific rule, but all you have to do is ask. If you do want to paint your pads, you've recognised an important thing - sand-filled pitches will scuff and eat whatever you paint. Use enamel paint, preferably spray. Be prepared to paint frequently and heavily. Sometimes you can put a clear coat on top when you paint, but sand pitches will wear anything.

Elite Pro legguards

I am 14 and going into high school. I already bought OBO Elite Pro pads, and I know this sounds dumb but does the smooth side go on the outside or on the inside. I am also wondering about how high the pads should be. I have had very little experience playing, but I did a goalie camp at my school, but all they had for me to use are old canes, so I have very little knowledge with foam equipment. One last question should the legguards feel loose at the top, or once they mould to my leg will they shape to my leg. I know this is a lot, I hope that you can answer me.

Jon's reply

The legguards should go about three or four inches above your knee cap. All straps should be tight. If they're rubbing your legs, try wearing long socks. I'm not sure about the smooth side on the Elite Pro pads, but the buckles should go on the outside of your legs so that the pad wraps around the inside of your legs. They definitely will shape to your leg when they start to break in. I hope this helps.

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Best glue for repair work

I have had my Robo pads and kickers for about a year and a half, and they have started developing tears in the foam. The two spots that are suffering are the inside of the tongue on the kickers, as well as the seam between the inner and outer part of the kicker. Also the inner foam of the legguard is beginning to tear. I was wondering what can be done to repair the pads i.e. what glues work best.

Jon's reply

In my experience, something called SHOE GOO is particularly effective for bonding kickers along the seams and filling wear spots in foam equipment. There is something called SPORTS GOO that works well also. Basically, they're both used for repairing running shoes, but work well on OBO pads.

What OBO gear should I buy on a budget?

I am 14 years old and I play under 16s for my team in Ireland. I was saving up for a set OBO kickers, legguards and hand protectors. The problem is I only have \$400. What good OBO equipment could I buy for that much money. Should I buy Cloud 9 kickers, Yahoo legguards and Yahoo hand protectors?

Jon's reply

I think what you've proposed given your budget is very reasonable. The one thing I would say is that if there's an area you might want to spend a little more money, it would be on kickers and I would recommend going up to the Robo Hi Control kickers. However, if you're really stuck with funds, the Cloud 9's are a good choice.

Painting white OBO gear

I presently own a full set of OBO pads & kickers, they are now white. Can I colour these to make them Black or any other colour. If so, with what and how?

Jon's reply

I've had a few questions about this before. to reiterate, you can paint the pads. Use a spray paint that is designed for plastics (most enamel paints fit the bill). Realise that unlike the coloured pads available through OBO, the colour is only on the surface and will wear with contact on an abrasive surface (i.e. turf). You can somewhat work around that by painting over the colour with a clear coat like a lacquer. A lot of people have made a big deal about a rule saying that keepers can no longer wear white pads. I'm not sure that they realise that the rule only pertains to Olympic, World Cup and other televised international tournaments. To the average keeper, this rule has no bearing unless your local association has specific rules that forbid white pads. If for creative purposes, you want to paint your pads, go ahead. I've seen a wide arrange of decor on OBO pads. The only thing you want to make sure of, is that the paint will not be corrosive on the foam pads.

Curved pads - a users observation

I've played in ROBO curved pads for two seasons at Division 1 here in Alice Springs, Australia (about to go into my 3rd) and I thought I'd share with you some observations about them. 1) The curved pads do not have a hole big enough when "stacking" for the ball to go through. I have noticed that in less experienced or keepers who are not used to saving those balls which are hit extremely hard that there can be some that sneak through. 2) With the shape of the pads I have not had one goal scored as a result of hitting the pad and deflecting in from a laying position

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from a corner hit. This is even so when it hits the top edge of the pad - it tends to deflect up and over or around the post. Maybe I've just been lucky. 3) We use a sand-based turf here which is notorious for being sticky. I find that one of the biggest problems with sliding for me (and especially younger players) is that it can be difficult to build up enough speed over the short time you have to get to the ball. To combat this I practice 6-yard and 15 yard sprints at 100% in both no kit and in full kit.

Jon's reply

Thanks for your observations. I think they're spot on. The biggest problem most keepers have when they slide is not generating enough forward momentum in to their tackle. Sand filled pitches only accentuate the problem. You may not always be able to get six yards in to a tackle, but if you don't get your weight forward and at least push off as you take on a player (as opposed to just falling), a prone keeper is too easy to pull the ball around.

What stick size should I buy?

I would like to know how to determine what size stick to purchase. Is there some quick and easy method so that you don't end up with a stick that is too long and gets caught up in your padding?

Jon's reply

Where you hold the stick when you play has the biggest impact on whether it gets caught up in padding. Keepers who tend to hold the stick closer to the end as opposed to the head have a greater chance of getting their stick caught up in their pads. To be honest, it's not a problem I've often seen. How long a stick you should use, depends on how tall you are. For keepers under 5'6", a 36" stick is fine. Keepers over 5'6" can play with a longer stick, but it's really a matter of what you're comfortable with.

Straight vs curved legguards

I am having trouble deciding which legguards to buy. I did try the Robo legguards for a week but they didn't work out. I actually felt less mobile. When trying to bend into the squat position, they wouldn't let me go very far. Running wasn't much of a problem though. My performance in goal was not nearly as good, but maybe what I needed was more time. It is a hard choice between the straight guards of which I have been using my whole sports career and the Robo.

Jon's reply

It may seem that you are less mobile with the Robo, I say seem. They are a different shape and they do take getting used to. The thing I'm going to say is they are much more mobile when moving forward, which is the movement you use when you step up to take on forwards and play balls. Keepers who are used to playing deeper in the goal have much more side to side movement as opposed to forward and backward. If all you do is move side to side, the Robos will feel a bit clunky. Be patient. I think if you do any footwork drills in the Robo as opposed to the straight legguards you'll see how much easier they are to move around in. The other complaint with the Robo legguards is that keepers say when they put their legs together with the Robos there's a gap. The thing is, a keeper rarely makes a save with their legs together. You usually end up making a save with one leg, one in front of the other. I do recommend the Robos. Be patient. Like anything new, they do take a while to get used to, but they're worth the effort.

Helmets for younger keepers

I need a helmet for young persons between the age of 16-19. I looked at the promite, the price is right but it may be too small. Do you have anything in the same price range? I need them for competition starting in 3 weeks.

Jon's reply

I would recommend looking at ice hockey helmets with wire cages. They stand up to hit balls and are adjustable to fit a range of head sizes. Depending on where you are, you can get a good helmet and cage for around \$100 US. The Promite is designed for younger players and is probably going to be too small for an older keeper. Whatever you get, make sure it fits as any facial protection that doesn't fit is useless.

Buying the right kit

I play for an Under 16 team in Zimbabwe. The kit that I have now is Mercian, County level 4. My legguards and kickers cost me R845. To buy OBO Cloud 9 kickers and legguards would cost me R2000. I have read what people have said about OBO kit (on the OBO website.) I

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would just like to know whether OBO kit is twice as good as my current kit, and if it will last twice as long. Living in Zimbabwe with it's weak currency means my budget is rather small, but if OBO is twice as good it would be worth the extra money in the long-run if I were to buy it.

Jon's reply

There are a couple of things to think about when buying pads, especially at your age. First off, is how much are you likely to grow. If not, then buy the pads you want to play in as you move along. I can tell you the OBOs do wear well. I'm not familiar with OBO prices in Zimbabwe, but the one thing I would consider is getting the Robo Hi Control kickers. They are very durable. If money is an issue you can do them and Cloud 9 legguards. The thing I tell keepers to think about is what level they want to play at and to use the equipment that performs at that level.

What shoes should I wear?

There is one answer I need to know. What kind of shoes should I wear?

Jon's reply

What kind of shoes you should wear depends on the surface you play on and the conditions you play in. If you play on grass, a cleat is usually the best shoe, but not one that is too grabby. Those are the kind that have 8-10 big, long cleats on the bottom. Those are only really good when you play on long, wet grass. If you play on astroturf, the shoe will depend on the kind of turf and whether the pitch is dry or wet. If the pitch is dry, or sand-filled, you can wear flats, either like a basketball shoe, tennis shoe or cross-trainer. If you play on wet turf, look for hockey shoes designed for wet turfs. They're multi-cleated shoes with small cleat and lots of them. The big thing you don't want to have is a shoe that you're going to slip in when you move or stick when you extend to make a save. Here's a suggestion from Chris Howes in the UK: "Just a point about "what shoes to wear" - on sand filled astro, I suggest that the multi-studded (cleated?) shoes are best as the kicker straps will either fit between the

studs, or the studs can be removed (with a sharp knife) to allow this. This then protects OBO's wonderful, but rather expensive, straps from abrasion."

Glue

Can you please advise on a suitable glue for a pair of old pads that are coming apart at a glued joint (used for training).

Jon's reply

I've also used something called SPORTS GOO with good success, but that may not be available where you are. In a pinch, I have used SHOE GOO but it doesn't seem to work as well. Whatever you use, make sure that you let the glue set for the recommended time before using them. My temptation has been to use them before the glue sets and the pads come apart again.

Best tape for protecting equipment

Which kind of tape can be best used to protect your kickers and hand protectors from wearing to fast?

Jon's reply

You shouldn't have to use tape on your kickers if you're using OBO kickers. They are very durable. Having said that, if you are very hard on your pads and are playing on a surface like a sand-filled pitch duct tape is very good. Duct tape is plastic coated cloth adhesive tape and is available in most hardware stores.

Glue to use on kickers

I'm using white OBO pads. This is the second year of use. Both kickers are coming apart at the seems near the top. It's hard to explain, but do you have any suggestions on how to repair the foam. This is affecting how secure the boot stays on.

Jon's reply

There is something called SPORT GOO, put out by the same people who make SHOE GOO. I've had good success using it to repair foam equipment. If the kickers have split, put it between the layers of foam and then bead it along the seam. Give them a good day to set before you try to use them again.

Front cloud 9 kicker straps that slip

I recently got a set of cloud 9 kickers there brilliant just the front strap keeps coming up over my runners, how do you stop it happening?

Jon's reply

Make sure they're pulled back as far as the kickers will go on your feet. This should pull the front toe strap back far enough that it doesn't slip. If the problem continues, you can use a thin strip of duct tape to secure the front and back straps so that your foot won't slip out. Here's an excellent solution from Athol Hill if you've got shoes that will work: "I noticed you made mention of using tape to tape the front and back straps together to keep them from falling off the boot. One method that I have used very successfully, and has removed a high portion of strap wear is to use a boot with a large number of little studs. (I think mine are Olympic, but there are a number in this design) I have now cut away the studs where the straps come across with the following results: 1. Strap wear is greatly reduced as the remaining studs extend beyond the straps reducing their friction on the ground/astro. 2. Boots must be left inside the kicker when removing. It sounds difficult at first, but becomes easier as you are putting on the boot and the kicker at the same time. 3. There is NO way in hell,

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that the front strap will slide off. 4. You have far more grip on your toes when running as the studs extend far enough to keep the grip levels high. The final result manages to remove problems associated with the strap slipping problem. I previously broke a toe because of it, and decided to take action to prevent it happening again...ever..."

Painting white OBO legguards

I have to compete in the nation club champs for premier league this weekend. I have just been informed that I can't play in white pads. At IPT I had to paint my pads and they looked terrible and just about all the paint flaked off before the first game, so I had to repaint after every game. I was wondering if OBO had come up with any effective way of painting the Robo pads and kickers, if so could you share with me the details?

Jon's reply

Keepers that I know that have had to paint their pads have had most success with a spray paint designed for plastic. Check with your paint or hardware store and see if they have suggestions. OBO's are the easiest to paint because of the material the foam is made of. If you do get a nice paint job that you want to keep, spray the pads with a clear lacquer. I know the Trinidad national keeper used automotive paint to do his pads and he had them painted like their national flag. That might be more than you want to do, but he's also had his paint stay on for a full season.

Curved legguards: does the ball get through?

I am considering getting Robo legguards, however, I noticed the curved shape on the inside of the pads, when stacking the pads do they fit together flush or is there room for the ball to get through?

Jon's reply

The Robo legguards are definitely contoured and realistically when you put your legs together there will be a slight gap. However, the Robo legguards are designed for ease in movement. Straight pads that don't have a gap when you put your legs together, often bang into each other when you make quick dynamic movements in the circle. Most shots that are straight on a keeper that might expose a gap when you put your legs together, can be more effectively saved by turning the instep of one of your legs square to the shot and playing it with that leg in front of the other. I can honestly say that in the two years

I've played with the Robos that I've never had a ball go between my legs because of the design of the pads. I have had shots go between my legs, but it wasn't because of the shape of the pads. They are different, but different is good sometimes.

Yahoo for high school goalies?

I am the varsity goalie on a high school field hockey team, but I am only 14. Can I use the Yahoo set of goalie pads or should I use a more advanced set?

Jon's reply

The Yahoos are a good value pad, but if you have the opportunity to buy your own pads, or aid in their selection, think about the level you want to play at. The higher the level you play at, the harder shots are, in games and in practice. When you think about the number of shots you'll face, I think you'll want a pad you're more protected in. If you've grown as much as you think, Robo are a good idea. If you're still growing, Cloud 9's could work also.

Rules

Stroke or bully?

Today I played a game which was umpired by volunteers rather than paid umpires. The opposing goalie got a ball stuck in her leg pads and the umpire not sure what to call and not sure who to believe as to whether it should be a stroke or a 16 yard hit called a bully (is that how it is spelt?) I have searched the internet and unfortunately I don't have a rule book to clarify this. I felt it was a stroke but the opposing goalie said she has been in training with the New Zealand squad all week and that when the goalie sat on the ball, taking it out of play, a 16 yard hit was awarded. Was she trying to avoid a stroke against her or was she telling the truth? And I say if she has been training with the New Zealand squad what is she doing playing social level hockey?

Jon's reply

That's a good question as to what she was doing playing social, but I'll leave that to you to ask. On the sitting on the ball issue, if the ball becomes lodged in the keeper's equipment, and it hasn't been done deliberately, a sixteen yard bully would be the right call. The ball being lodged in your equipment, and you covering the ball are two different things. If you cover the ball, it should be a stroke. If the ball does become lodged in your equipment, taking the ball off the field of play before someone tries to dislodge it for you can be a good idea.

Pushing a player in the way

I was wondering what the recommended method of sliding is? Is the technique of feet-first better or less effective? Is a keeper allowed to push a player in his way. In a match I played I pushed the opposing team's Centre Forward during a long corner and he fell. The referee awarded a penalty flick to the player. Is this correct?

Jon's reply

Pushing a player in the circle is usually going to result in a stroke. As far as slide tackling, there is a slide tackling tip on the OBO website. Whether you go down feet first or head first will depend on the tackle that you're trying to put on and how close you are to the ball. It also depends on how fast you are. I don't think there's such a thing as age group appropriate. I do think you have to find what your physically capable of doing.

New aerial ball rule

What is the new rule on aerial balls?

Jon's reply

There really isn't a new rule on aerial balls as much as there's been more latitude allowed to the keeper to redirect the ball with his hands as to account for hand protectors. I hope that helps.

Do I have to use a keeper stick?

I am going to be playing keeper for my college team in the States. I was wondering if I need to buy a keeper stick. Can I have just a regular stick or am I required to have a keeper stick? And if I do buy a keeper stick are they allowed?

Jon's reply

Collegiate rules in the States don't require you to play with a keeper stick or prohibit you from playing with one. There will be some differences in rules, but none as they apply to keepers and equipment.

The new short corner rule

I'm off to Italy in July for an u21 European tournament and I have no idea what the new short corner rule is. What is it? How does it affect us keepers? Will it apply to the tournament? I would really appreciate hearing back from you about this as it would definitely help me to prepare.

Jon's reply

The new rule is an experimental rule for a different short corner. It is not in effect in any international tournaments that I know of and is only being used by those countries helping the FIH rules committee out with the experiment. I'll have more about it up on the OBO site soon.

Trapping the ball

I read one of the questions on your Q&A page and it confused me a bit. As a goalkeeper are you allowed to "trap" the ball e.g. put your left-hand glove on the ball to stop it from being taken by the opposition? If you are not allowed to trap the ball, then what is the penalty for doing so? I always thought that it was illegal to trap the ball but maybe I was wrong.

Jon's reply:

If you're down and have a rebound close to your hand stopping side, keep your hand protector or glove as close to the ball as possible. In doing this, you're not batting the ball or covering it, but forcing the opponent to shoot into your hand or pull the ball back. You can never cover a ball when there's an opportunity for the ball to be contested. The penalty is a stroke. I hope this is clearer. The question I answered was from an Indian coach who asked about "trapping" the ball, as opposed to playing the ball first time. If that was the question you were referring to, he was talking about stopping the ball/shot dead with your foot or leg guards, and then clearing the ball. This was technique used in the days of leather and bamboo pads. The trapping that he's talking about is a keeper traps a shot, just as a field player traps a pass before shooting. Have I confused you any further? Let me know.

Trapping vs. clearing the ball

First let me thank you for all the tips on the OBO page. I have a small doubt. Now a days they say you don't trap the ball any more and kick it as it comes. Is it right?

Jon's reply

I think whenever possible, a keeper wants to clear the ball first time as opposed to trapping the ball.

New style short corners

I am a keen goalie from Ireland. In three weeks we have a national tournament which I will be competing in. During the tournament the new style of short corner will be tested (ball had to be hit to 5 yds outside the circle, does not have to be stopped etc.). Usually on short corners I go down on one knee, will dive if there is a straight shot, leap up for a flick etc. This is done with a 2:2 defence formation. What do you think a keeper should do for the new shortie and how should the defence best deal with it?

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Jon's reply

The good news is you should be the first one to figure out what works and doesn't work with the experimental penalty corner. Basically, the set piece becomes a free hit from the end line with a limited defence to challenge. I think the challenge, or goal, for the defence is to limit and control options. I think that starts by not over-committing. For the goalkeeper, I think that logging, or laying down, is out. My understanding of the new experimental rule is that once the ball enters the circle after being played outside the 5 yard arc around the D, the shot on goal can be scored at any height. The only restrictions concern danger in the crowded circle. If a shot can be scored at any height, it makes no sense to go down. It will be interesting to see the attacking options that develop, but my gut feeling is that because the ball doesn't need to be stopped, but does need to travel a farther distance to get into play, you'll see more hit balls. I think the same will be true going back in to the circle, with there being an emphasis on deflections or changes of angles to spread the defence. From the point of penalty corner defence, I don't know that I'd want to completely commit to where the ball initially goes. There are actually a few things that theoretically should work in the defence's favour. The ball still has to get into the circle before a goal can be scored, so a quick well organised defence has a chance to defend the circle first and then the goal second. In addition, the ball has to travel farther before it can be played at goal. That means more time for defenders to get back in to the play from the half line. A post player might become redundant with the new corner. That player is probably better used to play in front of the keeper, pressuring/marketing those players that are looking to come in to the goal area for close deflections or rebounds. Until teams have more experience seeing what routines and variations are used, it's key for defences to learn on the fly. You need to identify where players are setting up as the play is starting, and where players are going once the ball is in play. If roles and responsibilities are clear, then a defence has a chance to succeed. I'd be interested in hearing what yours and other keeper's experiences are with the new corners.

What's the correct way to measure a stick?

Jon's reply

Are you measuring length or diameter? For diameter, the stick must be able to pass through a 2" ring. For length, just measure from the end of the handle to the bottom part of the hook.

Penalty awarded after slide tackling

I saw your tips page on the Obo web page and would like your views on slide tackles. I play for Winchester H.C. in the UK. I have been playing as a club goalkeeper since 1982. This weekend I conceded 3 penalty flicks of which I saved 2. The Umpire awarded them everytime I did a slide tackle on the centre forward. As most centre forwards do near goalies, he fellover. The umpires comment was that because I was making contact with the player before the ball, I was committing an offence. I would be interested in your comments and tips as I have not had this "problem" before. Is my timing the problem or the umpire?

Jon's reply

As far as your "stroke" dilemma I'm a bit hesitant to pass judgement. If you do something and it's only a problem for one umpire, my temptation is to say that it's the umpire. On the technical front, apart from the umpire, it could be a timing problem. If you're too close to the forward when you make the tackle, the umpire tends to only see the contact.

Kicking outside of the circle; can a keeper use the wrong side of the stick; penalty strokes

I was just wondering if you can run out of the circle and kick the ball - as I got penalised for it last time and a penalty corner was awarded. Another thing, can a keeper be penalised for using the wrong side of his stick??? Lastly, can you give me any tips on penalty flicks please.

Jon's reply

You do have to be careful about playing the ball out of the circle with anything but your stick. The penalty for kicking the ball out of the circle is a corner and could also be a card, either green or yellow depending on the umpire and the effect of the foul. If you play the ball with the wrong side of your stick it is a foul. If the foul prevents a goal, the call is usually a stroke. As far as strokes go, The biggest thing I would tell you is to give yourself a chance to save the ball. Too many keepers get freaked out on strokes and forget that it's basically a flick from 7 yards. Make the shooter beat you. Unless you've seen the stroker before, know that he's got a great stroke and know where he goes, react. A good stroke should go in. The biggest thing for a keeper to avoid is allowing bad strokes to go in. Bad strokes usually go in when you guess.

'Batting' the ball

I'm a Goalkeeper that searches all the time for new skills. Can I turn my left hand in 90° when the ball comes? But only the hand, nothing more. I do this often when the players shot in the training, but I don't make this in the tournament because the referee can say that was a penalty. So can I do that?

Jon's reply

As long as you are not "batting" the ball, you are allowed a certain amount of freedom in deflecting the ball to safety. You are right to try to do that by angling your wrist and hand. The thing most umpires are looking for to determine if you are "batting" the ball is movement from your forearm and elbow. If you are very concerned that you might be called for a stroke, ask the umpire before the match what he thinks. I've been surprised by how much umpires have allowed as far as the keeper deflecting the ball over the end line by angling his hand, but I'm also not going to complain.

16 yard hits

Could you please reference the rule regarding keepers getting the ball in play on a 16 yard hit? Is it illegal to kick the ball to get it in play? I have always encouraged my players to get the ball rolling and take quick free hits in order to take advantage of gaps in the defence and improve our transition game. I have asked my keeper to do the same...get the ball rolling and take the 16 yard free when she has the opportunity. As long as she is in the circle, is she allowed to use her kicker to do so?

Jon's reply

Any restart, i.e. a free hit or 16 has to be started with a touch from the stick and the ball must travel one yard before it can be played by another player on his or her team. A keeper can start your 16s. In addition a 16 doesn't need to be taken from the 16 if you're concerned about getting the ball in play quickly. All you have to do is start it from the line that it went over the goal line, so your keeper can start a 16 with a quick push five yards from the goal line and get play going. A keeper can not start play with her kickers. I hope this clarifies things.

Defending players blocking keepers view 2

I am the goalie for my team and I have the grand final coming up and their forward always stands in front of me and when I move to see he move as well so he's always in front. Is there anything I can do to prevent this or work around it?

Jon's reply

There is a question that sort of covers that area in the previous page of Q&A (Defending players blocking keepers view 1), but the biggest thing is don't get caught up in a scrum with them fighting for position. If the player is sitting directly in front of you, you are allowed to step in front of him. If he moves up with you, he's trying to play you, not the ball. That's obstruction and mention it to the umpire. I've found it useful to try to see around the screen the way ice hockey goalkeepers do. You can see between legs, by getting low, or around bodies without necessarily abandoning the goal. The other thing you can do, is post your defender directly in front of the opponent. It does make a big screen, but it minimises the chance that he'll get the ball and probably lead him to think about moving.

Defending players blocking keepers view 1

I was wondering what a goalie keeper can do when a defending player stands in their way. And then when the keeper moves so does the player. Thus the keeper can't see what's happening. Is there anything a keeper can do??

Jon's reply

I'm unclear when you say defender whether you mean a team-mate or an opponent. In regards to trying to see around an obstacle, there are a couple of things you might try. One is to step in front of the screen. If it is an opponent that could lead to a physical situation which is distracting and undesirable. An opponent can not just stand in front of you, they need to be making a play for the ball. Speak to the umpire if the conduct is unsportsmanlike. A tactic that you can use which borrows from ice hockey is to get low and try to look around obstacles like players, or through their legs. Screens have become an unavoidable part of the game and you have to play though them.

Latest hockey rules

Do you perhaps know where I could get a copy of the latest hockey rules.

Jon's reply

Try contacting the FIH directly. You can do this through the internet.

<http://www.fihockey.org>

They do have a publication's office and should be able to help.