

## **BFSC Goalkeeper Training Session#1: Handling and Footwork.**

Overview: This session is designed to provide players new to the goalkeeper position with basic handling exercises. The goalkeepers' hands, like field players' feet, are the key to his or her ability to control the ball. While these exercises are very basic in nature, advanced goalkeepers can also benefit from refining their basic handling on a regular basis. The goalkeeper sessions as a group can be fitted to just a pair of goalkeepers or a larger group, and this session in particular is well-suited to younger teams that rotate all players through the goal during their season.

### **Exercise 1: Team handball.**

Area: ½ field; two goals.

Equipment: Soccer ball; vests.

This game is a standard warm-up for both teams and groups of goalkeepers. Divide the players into two groups, placing one team in vests. Assign each team a goal to defend. The rules of the game:

- three steps (or fewer) with the ball.
- three seconds (or fewer) with the ball.
- any time the ball hits the ground, the defending team gains possession.
- the defending team may intercept the ball or knock it down to gain possession, but may not take the ball out of the hands of any of the attackers.
- the ball must be thrown (no feet) from player to player to advance the ball up the field and also must be thrown into the goal to score a point.

Use this opportunity as a coach to assess the players' ability to catch the ball in particular. Play for five minutes.

### **Exercise 2: Basic handling technique and individual handling foundation.** Area: 18-yard box.

Equipment: One ball per goalkeeper.

Overview: The key to this sequence is emphasizing two points at the outset. The first is proper catching technique. The key to catching the ball is the "W" formed by the thumbs and pointer fingers on each hand on the back of the ball as the ball is received. This "W" is used to catch all balls received above the base of the goalkeepers' rib cage and the basis for many critical saves. The second key point is to emphasize that this entire opening sequence is purposely designed to allow the goalkeeper to train on his or her own. Like juggling or shooting for a field player, the goalkeeper must master control of the ball with his or her hands, and this foundation should be performed by young goalkeepers on a regular basis.

Arrange the goalkeepers in a circle with each player holding a ball. Demonstrate the "W" catching position and have the goalkeepers hold their ball and look at the finger position as well. Then have the goalkeepers perform each of the following handling exercises for thirty seconds.

- bounce and catch. Goalkeepers push the ball at the ground and then catch the ball as it rebounds. As they get comfortable, encourage the goalkeepers to bounce the ball with more force. Each time they catch the ball, the goalkeepers should check their hand position (confirm the "W") and also to take a second to be sure they have the ball before continuing. The catch phrase here is, "Catch it and look at it." The idea is that many drops occur because goalkeepers get impatient and lose concentration as they receive the ball. Therefore, this practice is designed to set good catching habits.

-bounce and catch with angle changes. In this second exercise, encourage the goalkeepers to bounce the ball to their sides and even behind each of their ankles to add catching from different angles. Again, be sure they catch the ball and look at it each time.

-fingertips. Goalkeepers hold the ball in front of their faces and push the ball back and forth from hand to hand. Emphasize that the purpose is not to bat the ball back and forth but rather to work to soften their receiving with their fingers. Each toss should be followed by a brief catch and no sound. Players should hold their hands relatively close together to start and then further apart to challenge themselves and also create more realistic training. Finally, players should vary the height at which they work from eye level to up above their heads.

-ball cup and stretch. The goalkeepers hold the ball in one hand and stretch that arm to the point where the arm is straight. Then, cupping the ball by pressuring it between the fingers and inside of the forearm, the players reach the ball back on the near side of their bodies and behind their back, raising the arm to provide a stretch as they twist. Then the ball is brought forward and transferred to the other hand and the stretch is performed on the other side. Younger goalkeepers with smaller hands will find this exercise difficult, but can manage by using a smaller ball and also by not reaching up at the end of the stretch. This exercise is both a stretch and also an opportunity to challenge the goalkeeper's ability to control the ball in a position where it is not easy to manage.

-leg stretch with handling. The goalkeepers spread their legs to just beyond shoulder width and hold the ball with both hands near one knee. This exercise requires them to move the ball in a circular motion around the knee, exchanging the ball from one hand to the other. As they work, the ball is slowly held at an increasingly lower level until the ankle is reached. At the ankle, the direction that the ball is moved is reversed and the player works the ball back up to knee level. Then, goalkeepers work the other leg.

-finger tip ball work. Goalkeepers place the ball on the ground. With their legs set just beyond shoulder width apart, players use their fingertips to roll the ball around their feet in a figure eight pattern, changing hands as the ball passes between their feet. After twenty seconds, they reverse the direction of the ball.

-handling challenge #1. Players stand with their feet shoulder width apart. Goalkeepers hold the ball between their knees with both hands in front of the knees. The ball is lifted slightly and then the goalkeeper quickly moves his or her hands behind his or her knees and tries to catch the ball before it falls to the ground. Then the challenge is repeated in the other direction. For goalkeepers who struggle with this exercise, encourage them to "sit" down a bit (bend their legs) and also to get their hands underneath the ball and cradle it to make a more consistent catching surface. In addition, good goalkeepers perform this exercise with both speed and also with no clapping sound with the catch. Again, the purpose here is to encourage goalkeepers to understand how to catch the ball with mild pressure.

-handling challenge #2. This exercise is identical to handling challenge #1 with the exception of the fact that the starting position for the goalkeepers' hands is altered. One hand holds the ball in front of the knee, while the other holds the ball from behind the knee. The goalkeeper lifts and releases the ball and then reverses his or her hand position before catching the ball again.

-bike ride. Goalkeepers are seated with a ball. Instruct the goalkeepers to lift one leg and pass the ball beneath the knee from one hand to another. Then the process is repeated with the other leg until the player can create a "biking" motion with their legs while continuing to practice their handling as well. Be sure players keep their legs up off of the ground throughout and also instruct them to keep their upper bodies relatively upright (i.e. they should not lean back any more than necessary as they work).

**Exercise 3: basic stance and footwork.**

Area: 18 yard box.

Equipment: Soccer balls for each player.

Set-up: Create a zigzag course of cones twenty-five yards long and eight yards wide.

Overview: This exercise helps goalkeepers establish their basic stance and also their footwork back and forth across the goal.

Start with the goalkeepers standing in a circle. Explain to the players that their basic stance is both their ready position when the ball enters a dangerous area and also their set position when they are about to receive a shot. The following are the major elements of a good ready position

- feet shoulder width apart. Younger players will want to keep their feet further apart, and the coach should explain that placing the feet further apart will make it more difficult to adjust the feet should the need arise. If the feet are too close together, balance is diminished and movement is also hindered.

- heels off of the ground. The players' heels should be raised. The common analogy is to pretend there is a magic marker under their feet. This adjustment helps to maintain readiness and also prevents the goalkeeper from falling back onto his or her heels when a shot is taken (when goalkeepers are blocking shots with their feet this is a cue that their heels are not raised in their ready position).

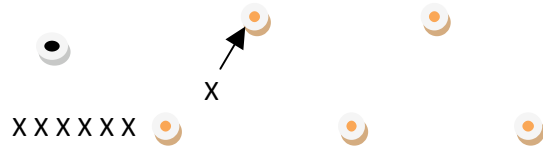
- draw an imaginary line from the shoulders to the feet. Again, this adjustment assures that the goalkeeper will not settle back into a position that is less than optimal for shot stopping. The goalkeeper's head should also be forward and upright.

- hand cuffs. The goalkeeper's hand position is also critical. Some goalkeepers like to have their hands out at their sides. There are two major drawbacks here. First, there is a marked tendency to chase balls with only one hand (especially with younger goalkeepers) when they are struck to the sides of the goalkeeper. This can lead to more tipping, rebounds and mistakes. The second difficulty is that high shots at the goalkeeper will lead the player to fall on to the heels and there will be more mistakes and rebounds due to the hand movements coming together and also the tendency to fall back. The preferred hand position is often referred to as "hand cuffs." In essence, this involves keeping the hands side-by-side with the thumbs two inches apart and angled down. The hands should be held a comfortable distance (ten to twelve inches) in front of the body at waist height. Keeping the hands together creates a stronger likelihood of clean handling on both sides of the body (the hands go together) and also on hard, high shots at the goalkeeper. The only exception to this starting position is in shot situations (including breakaways) in tight to the goal, a subject dealt with in detail in a later session.

Each goalkeeper should practice bouncing and catching the ball while standing in their basic stance.

Line up the goalkeepers at one end of the cone zigzag. The first goalkeeper steps up and stands inside the first cone. Explain that the zigzag is set up to guide the goalkeepers' movement across the face of the goal. The goalkeeper's footwork in the goal must prepare them to both create the proper angle and also always be ready for a shot. Accordingly, the goalkeepers' footwork involves shuffling, with the feet never crossing and also avoiding the heels coming together (which creates a window of poor balance and a temporary inability to adjust the feet to changing circumstances). Also, the feet, hips and shoulders must always face the ball. This orientation is critical to remaining in good condition to react to a sudden shot or deflection. The first goalkeeper, facing the ball placed at the near end of the zigzag, shuffles across from the first cone to the first cone on the opposite side. Upon reaching the cone, the

goalkeeper pivots by dropping the inside foot (the foot farthest from the cone) and changing the angle of the shuffle to prepare to move back across the zigzag to the next cone on the opposite side.



Explain to the players that they are to shuffle (demonstrate shuffling one's feet, with no cross-over) their feet to move about the area and at all times be prepared to receive the ball. Players with a ball can keep the ball for only a few seconds before throwing it to one of their teammates. Emphasize that the goal of the exercise is to keep all balls from hitting the ground. Allow the players to move about and interchange the balls, taking the opportunity to compliment solid catching.

After the first goalkeeper reaches the cone, the next goalkeeper enters the zigzag. Each goalkeeper should work through the zigzag twice. Emphasize the importance of quality footwork over speed.

Explain to players that it is important to switch from footwork to ready stance when they suspect a shot is about to be taken. As it is impossible to move forward and also to the side simultaneously with any power, and the best way to prepare for a shot is to be stopped, under control and ready, goalkeepers must recognize the moment to prepare to receive a shot. Accordingly, the coach now stands with the ball at the near end of the grid, in full view of goalkeepers shuffling through the grid. This exercise is identical to the previous exercise except that when the coach places his foot behind the ball, the goalkeepers must stop and get ready to deal with a shot. When the coach is satisfied that all goalkeepers are stopped and ready, he or she shouts, "Go!" and the footwork is resumed until the coach simulates shooting again. The goalkeepers should work through the zigzag twice.

#### **Exercise 4: Catching and low balls.**

Area: 18 yard box.

Equipment: Adequate soccer ball supply.

Goalkeepers work in pairs with one soccer ball for each pair. The pairs stand facing each other with approximately three yards between them. Demonstrate pushing the ball at chest height from one partner to the other, with the point of emphasis being quality catching. Play for one minute. Now, demonstrate catching a ball in the air between the shoe tops and the base of the rib cage. The only difference here is that the goalkeeper, starting in the ready position, turns his or her palms upward and tucks his or her elbows together behind the ball as it is received. In this case, the analogy that is often used is that the goalkeeper wants to absorb the ball like a sponge, wrapping his or her body around the ball. It is also important to emphasize the importance of receiving the ball with the weight remaining forward on the feet and even taking a step or two forward after making the save. Finally, the goalkeeper must keep his or her eyes on the ball as it is caught and then get an immediate look at the situation (i.e. for protection and also to begin to think about distributing the ball). Have the players throw the ball underhand to their partner, varying the height of the pass so that their partner can practice catching the ball with proper technique. Play for two minutes.

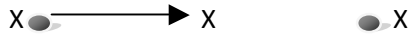
#### **Exercise 5: Kick and catch.**

Area: 18 yard box.

Equipment: Adequate soccer ball supply.

Put goalkeepers in groups of three. The players should create a line, with players on each side of a goalkeeper who stands in the middle (leave about five yards between the central players and the middle player). Each of the players on the outside has a ball. The players on the outside punt the ball for the central player to catch (if this is not possible, they may throw the ball). For the outside players: if the

ball sails high, they need to contact the ball at a lower point and follow through with their foot lower. If the ball is served too low, then they need to contact the ball later and follow through higher. For the working player in the middle, the keys are to adjust positioning using proper footwork and to focus on good catching technique. When the player in the middle has received a ball from one server, then he or she returns the ball and then turns around to receive a ball from the other server and play continues. Rotate the working player every minute and play two rounds. Challenge each group to see which goalkeeper can make the most saves in that time.



**Exercise 6: Keeper wars.**

Area: 18 yard box.

Equipment: Adequate ball supply.

This game is the most popular way to allow goalkeepers to both enjoy shooting at each other and also to maximize their opportunities to train on the various types of saves they have learned. In this case, divide the group into two teams and place extra balls in or near each goal. The two goals should be 18 yards apart and the coach should drop a cone line midway between the goals (two cone lines six yards from each goal can be used to extend the no-play area to twelve yards for older goalkeepers. This restriction may be necessary to create sufficient opportunity to make the required saves). The players in the goals (one in each goal) may throw, kick or punt the ball, but must do so from behind their cone line. The coach can choose to rotate the player in the goal each time they give up a goal or after a given interval (usually one or two minutes). There are also several ways to keep score. In this case, require that all goals be scored in the air (as the opportunity to work on catching the ball is most important). Award one point for a goal and one point (or two) for a clean and technically-correct catch save. Play for fifteen minutes.

