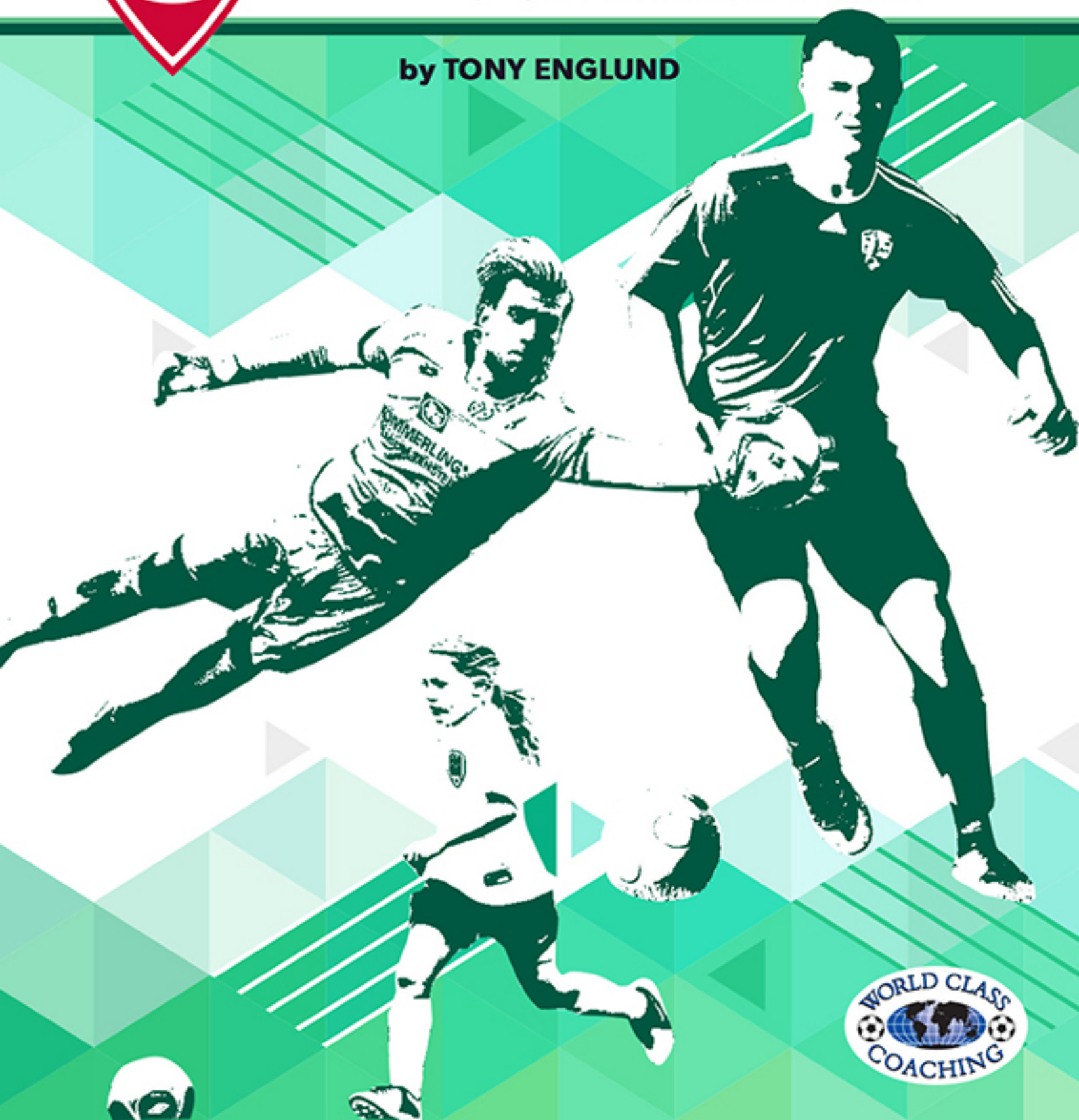


**CLUB CURRICULUM**



# **BUILDING A BETTER GOALKEEPER**

by **TONY ENGLUND**



# **Building a Better Goalkeeper**

*by*  
Tony Englund

*Published by*  
WORLD CLASS COACHING

# **Building a Better Goalkeeper**

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by Tony Englund

Edited by Tom Mura



*Published by*  
**WORLD CLASS COACHING**



## Building a Better Goalkeeper

A complete season development program for goalkeepers featuring 12 training sessions, and more than fifty diagrams and photos. The program also gives extensive descriptions and teaching points of all basic goalkeeping skills and dozens of variations to the exercises presented. This program is an ideal curriculum for goalkeeper specialists, team coaches and also parents looking to support their child's interest in the goalkeeper position.

**Tony  
Englund**





For LT, who taught her old coach that one can give all one has to the team and the game while still having fun (and spicing it up).

## **Building a Better Goalkeeper**

- 4 Introduction
- 4 Training Goalkeepers
- 4 How to use this Book

## **Training Sessions**

- 5 Session#1: Basic Stance and Goalkeeper Movement
- 9 Session#2: Introductory Handling: Proper Technique
- 22 Session#3: Handling and Distribution: Comfort on the Ball.
- 29 Session#4: Pairs Shot-stopping: Building Confidence through Repetition.
- 30 Session#5: Safety Diving: Proper Technique.
- 34 Session#6: Diving: Collapse Diving, Extension Diving and Blocking.
- 39 Session#7: Advanced Handling: Punching; Low and High Tipping.
- 43 Session#8: Dealing with High Balls.
- 48 Session#9: Reaction Saves.
- 50 Session#10: Angle Play and the Goalkeeper's Role in Team Defense
- 55 Session#11: Breakaways
- 59 Session#12: Defending Set-Pieces
- 65 Conclusion
- 66 Sources
- 67 About the Author

## **Introduction**

“Who wants to play goalie today?” How many younger teams’ pre-game discussions begin with this question? The goalkeeper position in soccer at the younger ages is a bit of a conundrum for parents, coaches and club directors. Although national associations rightly discourage children from specializing at the goalkeeper (or any) position until at least their U12 year, failing to train goalkeepers and goalkeeping into a team often leads to frustrating, confidence-shattering goals being allowed and an attitude that being put in goal is an act of temporary banishment from the team with potentially unhappy consequences (letting in a ‘soft’ goal).

This book is designed to bridge the needs of all concerned with goalkeeping at young ages:

- Club goalkeeper trainers. The exercises and variations in this book provide a full season of specialist curriculum, designed to be easily parceled out to trainers as needed.
- Team coaches. The curriculum is specifically designed to be easily combed into team training by theme and increment or to form distinctive goalkeeper training sessions.
- Parents. The detailed descriptions, numerous photos and diagrams all make it easier for parents of young and prospective soccer goalkeepers to learn about and instruct their young players to master the key concepts fundamental to successful goalkeeping.

## **Training Goalkeepers**

Whether a player will be playing in goal for a half or half a season at the younger ages, it is critical that they be surrounded by positive feedback from teammates, coaches and parents. Much of any stigma associated with playing goalkeeper comes from the isolation of the position from the others, both physically in the game setting and also technically and tactically in training. Making goalkeeping an inclusive, fun (especially and U9 and U10) part of training and then lauding the *efforts* of those playing in goal on game day is a great way to make playing goalkeeper a fun, valuable part of the team experience. Above all else, patience must be the watch word for those training young goalkeepers. The psychological and motor development of the children is far from complete and skills such as judging and catching a ball flying through the air will take time to master.

## **How to use this Book**

The sessions are designed to serve as a progressive and comprehensive curriculum for goalkeepers. The sessions will work very well as free-standing team goalkeeper training sessions. The team coach, club specialist or parent can also train goalkeepers in brief ‘keeper-only sessions (i.e. after team training) by picking and choosing within a theme to focus on desired development areas. Needless to say, the sessions are most effective when repeated multiple times to maximize players’ time on the ball and learning.

## **Training Session#1: Basic Stance and Goalkeeper Movement**

### **Introduction**

The goalkeeper's set position and ability to move efficiently in the goal area are the first items to introduce to young players learning about the position. This session introduces and demonstrates the proper techniques for 'keeper set position and basic movement through a number of informative and fun exercises.

### **The Zoo - 20x20 yard grid**

Players are 'animals' in a zoo (the grid) (for young players, let them choose which animal they want to be). The animals cannot leave the area, and they must mind the zookeeper (coach). Begin by having the players jog around in the grid. When the zookeeper calls out 'freeze!', the players must stop and get into their set position. Demonstrate the set position as shown below.



### **Set Position**

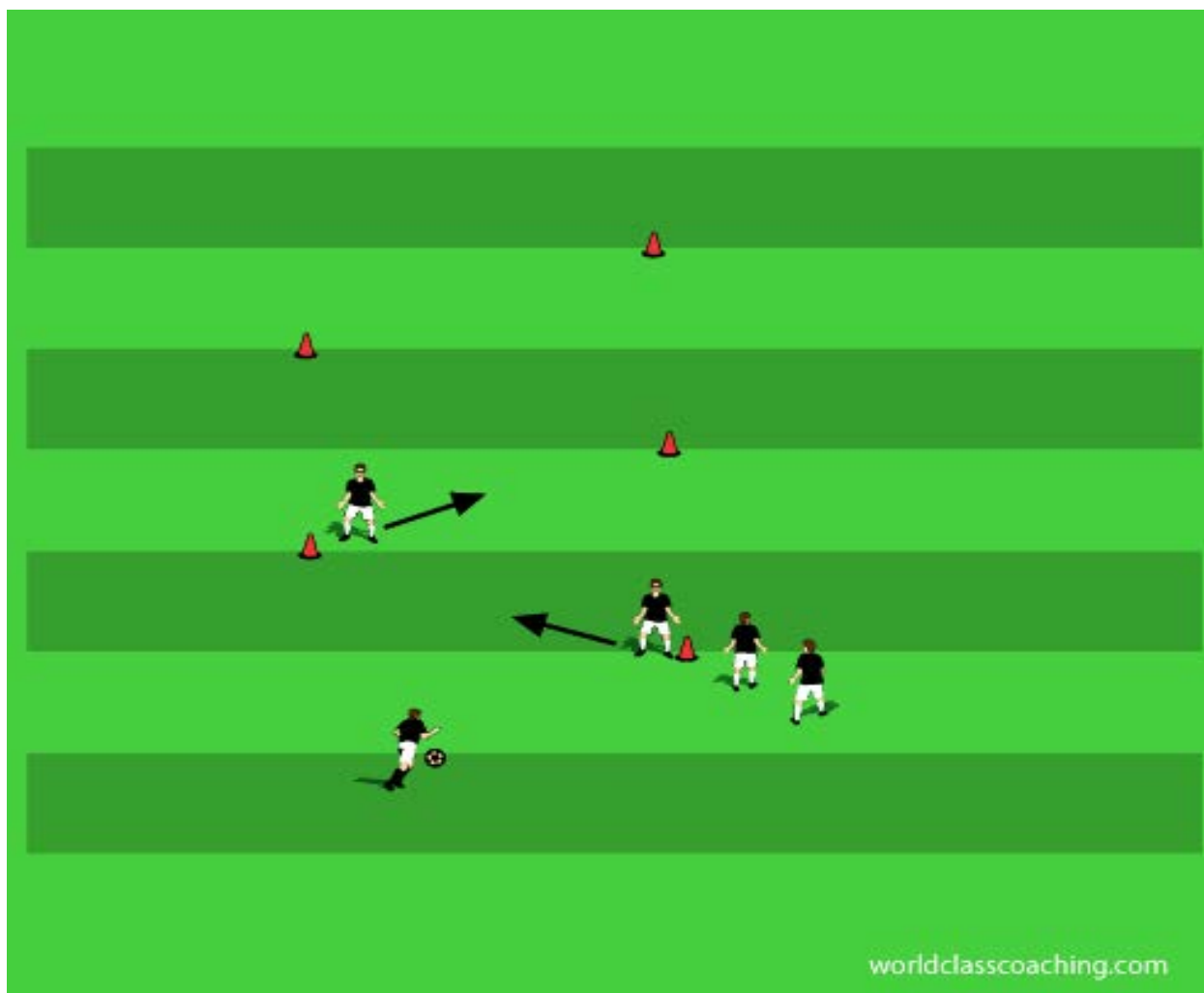
- Feet shoulder-width apart.
- Shoulders over toes (slightly hunched).
- Heels off of the ground (an inch or slightly more).
- Head steady with eyes up and forward.
- Drop hips slightly (not seated!).
- Hand position: Either with extended palms and hands at sides or with palms facing down and hands together in front of the body ('handcuffs on').

Who will be the first to get into the proper set position?

Explain that soccer goalkeepers always go to this set position when they expect to make a save.

#### Progression

- Players shuffle rather than jogging. Goalkeepers shuffle to move across the face of the goal. It is critical that players learn early on to keep their toes, hips and shoulders facing forward as they shuffle (the feet do not cross and the heels do not come together, as either of these occurrences leave the goalkeeper with poor balance and momentarily unable to change directions quickly).
- When the coach calls 'change' the goalkeepers alter the direction in which they are shuffling. Emphasize quality footwork over speed, explaining that the change of direction should result from a quick stop and a sharp step in a new direction.
- Players can shuffle, backpedal or move forward, but must keep their hands in a ready position throughout ('be a goalkeeper the entire time'). Once again, the coach should mix in 'change' and 'freeze' calls.
- Spread balls throughout the area. When the coach calls, 'ball!' the goalkeepers must hustle to pick up a ball.
- Players pick up balls and then set them down as they move (continue to insist upon goalkeeper movement and also mix in 'change' and 'freeze' calls). Who can pick up and set down the most balls in one minute?



### **Zig-zag - 10x30 yard area**

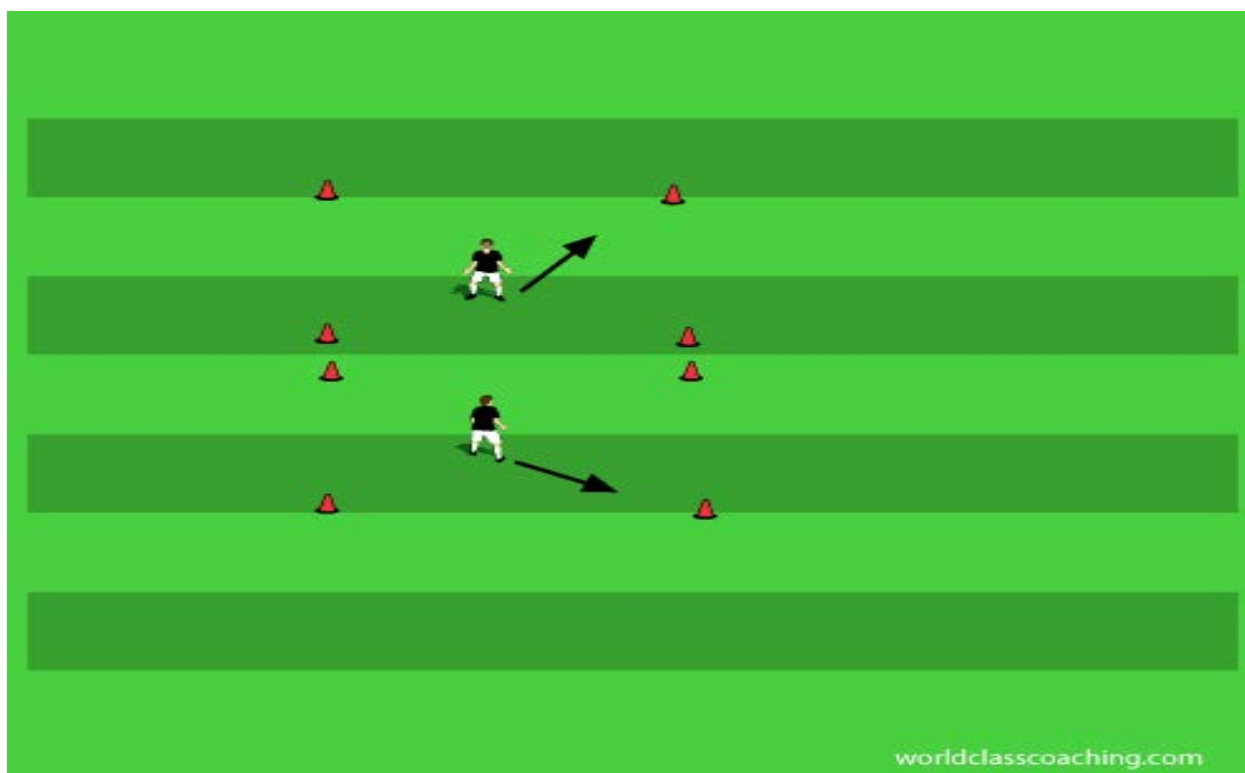
Spread cones in a zig-zag pattern as shown, with the two cone lines as far apart as the width of the goals in which the players will play on game day. The vertical distance between cones in the same line should be 6 yards (the length of the small goalkeeper box on the field). Players shuffle back-and-forth through the cone zig-zag, shuffling throughout and also being careful to sustain a ready position as they move. When the player in front of them reaches the second cone, the next player in line may begin. Note the single ball placed at the front of the exercise area. Players must keep their eye on the ball (as they would in the game) throughout their movement.

Young players tend to rush (and loosen their form) through the zig-zag, so the coach must consistently emphasize the importance of moving at a comfortable pace while checking one's footwork and posture.

### **Progression**

- The coach stands at the ball and periodically fakes to strike the ball. Demonstrate for the goalkeepers the importance of stopping their feet and getting into their ready position. A goalkeeper moving side-to-side when the ball is struck is often unable to properly react or push in the direction of the shot to save. Each time the coach fakes the shot, check to see that all active goalkeepers get stopped and properly set before continuing.





### **Mirrors** - 6x6 yard grids

Utilize two 6x6 yard grids. These grids are the same depth as the 6-yard box, and the exercise is designed to make the goalkeeper more quick, comfortable and aware in this space. One goalkeeper stands in her ready position in each grid. One goalkeeper leads and the other goalkeeper must mimic her every move. Stress to the goalkeepers from the beginning that all movements must be those that the 'keeper uses to maneuver in the 6-yard box. In other words, shuffling, backpedaling, closing-down and occasional cross-over steps (to cover a lot of ground quickly) are all acceptable. The lead goalkeeper should work hard in leading her partner, but should not try to lose her. Play for twenty seconds and then change roles.

### **Progression**

- For fun, allow the leader to mix in somersaults and other gymnastics to work on agility and flexibility as well.
- Add a ball. The player with the ball leads and the pair toss the ball back-and forth every few seconds. At this point, the focus is still on proper footwork and getting set before the ball is received.
- Use the back end lines of the two grids as goals and have the players play a mini game, 1 vs. 1. Goalkeepers cannot cross the center line (they must remain in their own grid...use larger grids or compel older goalkeepers to shoot from their own end line. To emphasize movement, compel both shooter and goalkeeper to touch a corner cone in their grid before each shot.



## **Training Session#2: Introductory handling: Proper technique**

### **Introduction**

The most intensive focus in training goalkeepers at any level is in the area of handling the ball. Young players are still acquiring motor skills and will develop the ability to handle and manipulate the ball at very different rates, but it is important that all prospective goalkeepers develop their ability to both react to and also control the ball. In this session, the emphasis is both on a large number of touches (goalkeepers need many touches with their hands on a regular basis just as field players need numerous touches with their feet to sharpen their skills) and also on the quality and technique of various catching positions. The session opens with a movement exercise reinforcing the footwork and basic stance introduced in the first session.



### **Shadow Goalkeeping - 10x10 yard grid**

One goalkeeper leads and one works. The lead goalkeeper gives hand *and* verbal signals to her partner, who responds quickly to the various cues. Examples: Point up: Go up and catch a high ball. Point right:

Shuffle left. Point Left: Shuffle right. Point straight ahead: Back-pedal. Point at self: Close down (move forward in set position). Point right and down: dive left. Point left and down: Dive right. If the leader calls 'set' the working player must get into her ready position. In addition to the footwork and technical shadow saves, this is a good environment to encourage the leading goalkeeper to be assertive, as they have complete control and they need to be decisive in their communication. Play for 30 seconds and then change roles.

#### Progression

- Add a ball for the working player. When the leader calls out 'ball' the working player must get to and pick up the ball as quickly as possible.
- Add a ball for the leader. Periodically, the leader shoots a ball *at* the goalkeeper for the working player to save and return.

#### Individual Touch Sequence - 20x20 yard grid

Each player has a ball. This series of handling activities give the goalkeeper intensive touches and increasing confidence on the ball. Perform each variation for twenty seconds. To challenge a group, check the number of touches each player achieves in each exercise to see which player gets in the most work.

#### Progression

- Pushing the ball back in forth between hands in the ready position (use the fingers and make the hands soft) and then above and in front of the head.





- Pushing the ball back and forth above head height. These first two variations are designed to increase the goalkeeper's ability to feel and control the ball.



- Bounce and catch the ball (focus on creating a “W” with the thumbs and pointer fingers of each hand on the back of the ball). Explain that this position is the ideal catching posture for all balls received above the base of the rib cage. Encourage players to bounce the ball in an arc, to their sides, behind one foot, etc. In every case, emphasize that the goalkeeper must both catch the ball and then take a moment to look at and secure the ball before bouncing again. If young goalkeepers get in the habit of receiving and then securing the ball before moving on, they will develop both good concentration on the save and also good catching habits that will limit the number of drops.
- Skip and catch.





- Toss a high ball and catch. Note the goalkeeper's posture and extension. The goalkeeper jumps from one foot, driving the opposite knee in the direction of the ball. She catches the ball at the earliest possible moment, both above her head and in front of her body.





- Sit down and “ride a bike” (in a ¼ sit-up position, work the ball between the legs while creating a biking motion)
- Work the ball in a circular motion around one leg (using both hands), working the ball from the knee down to the ankle and back up again – change legs).



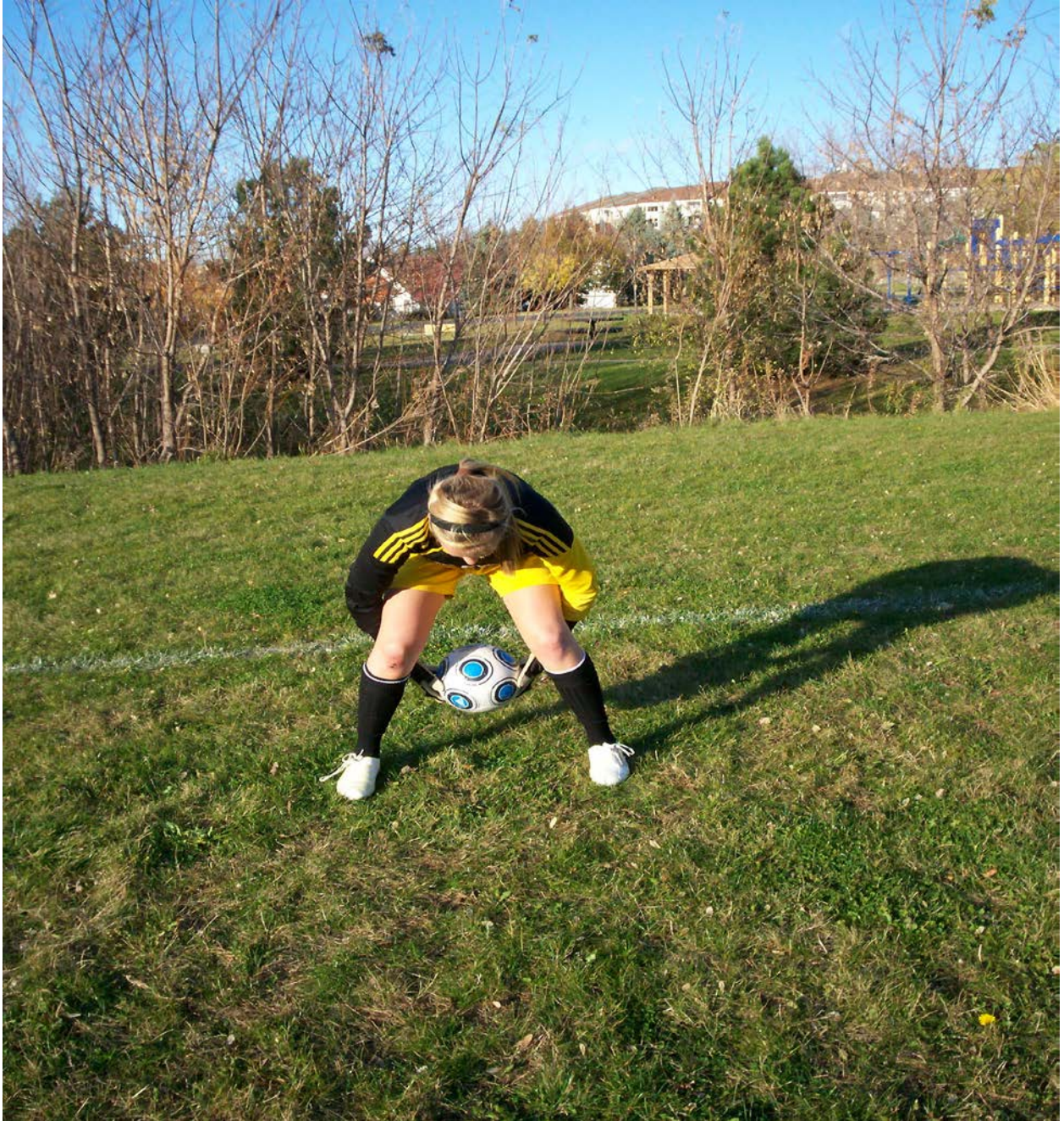
- Figure “8” working the ball around the legs at knee height.





- Figure “8” with the finger tips (ball on the ground). Emphasize that the fingers must be able to instinctively feel the ball for the goalkeeper’s handling to be sharp.





- Handling challenges – 1. Hold the ball with both hands behind the knees; flip the ball upward and forward and catch the ball with the hands in front of the knees.





- Handling challenges - 2. Staggered hands (one in front of one knee and one behind the other) hold the ball; flip the ball up and alternate the hand position before catching.





- Recovery handling – 1. The goalkeeper lays on her back, tosses the ball up in the air and gets to her feet before catching (do not let the ball bounce).



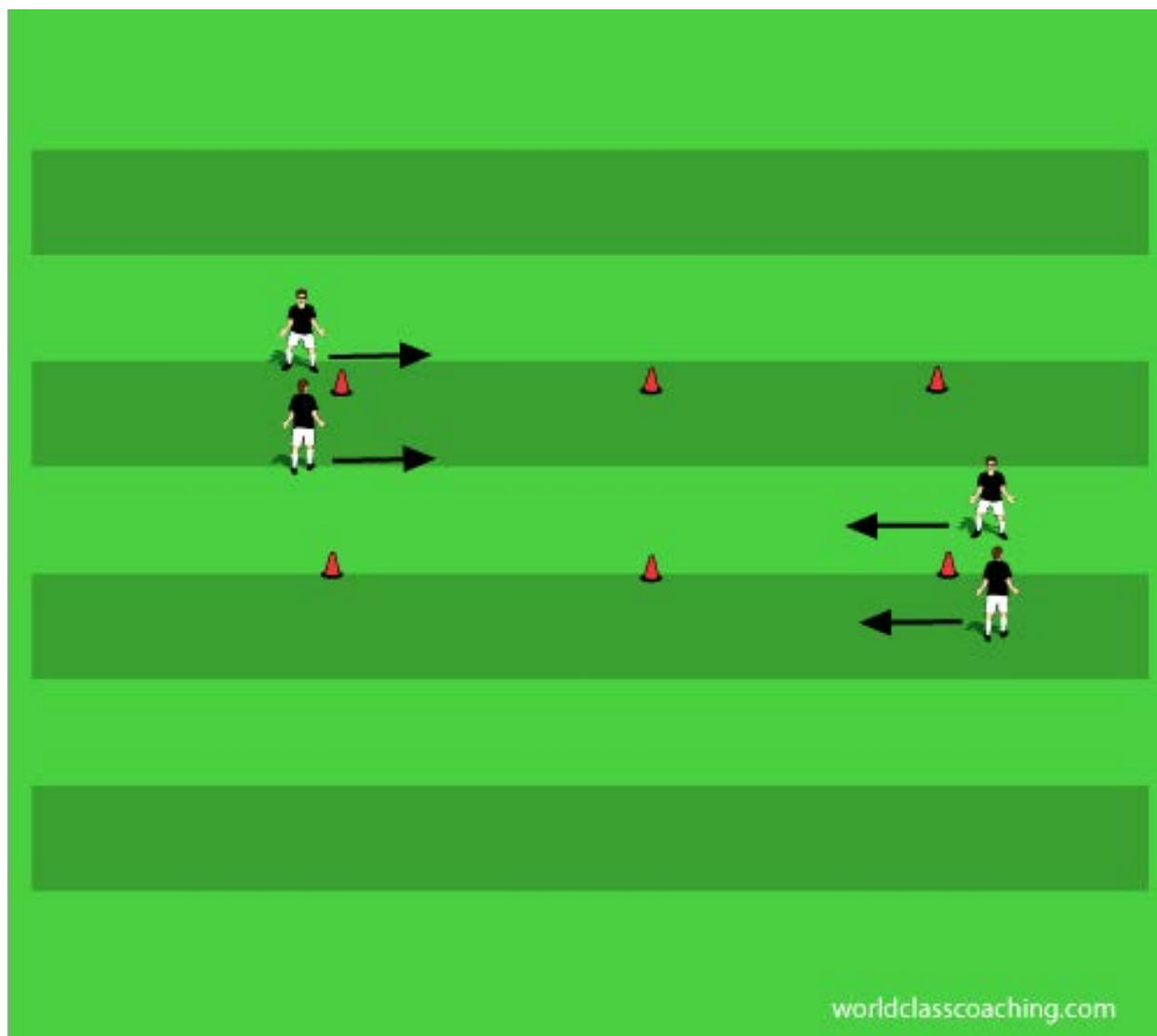


- Recovery handling – 2. The goalkeeper lays on her front side, tosses the ball up in the air and gets to her feet before catching (do not let the ball bounce).



### **One –Hand Catching in Pairs - 6x4 yard space**

Players work in pairs with one ball. The goalkeepers stand four yards from one-another and play catch. Instruct players to throw and catch with one hand and to alternate the hand that they use each time. The receiving player should indicate which hand is the target by raising that hand to shoulder height before the throw. Serves need to be shoulder-high to be effective. The most useful coaching points here are to emphasize the importance of concentration, balance, meeting and absorbing the ball with every save. Advanced goalkeepers benefit from this training in that they can learn to develop very soft touch on the ball through extending their hand out to meet and control the serve. After two minutes, the goalkeepers back up two steps and throw harder, with the same soft and clean receptions being the goal.

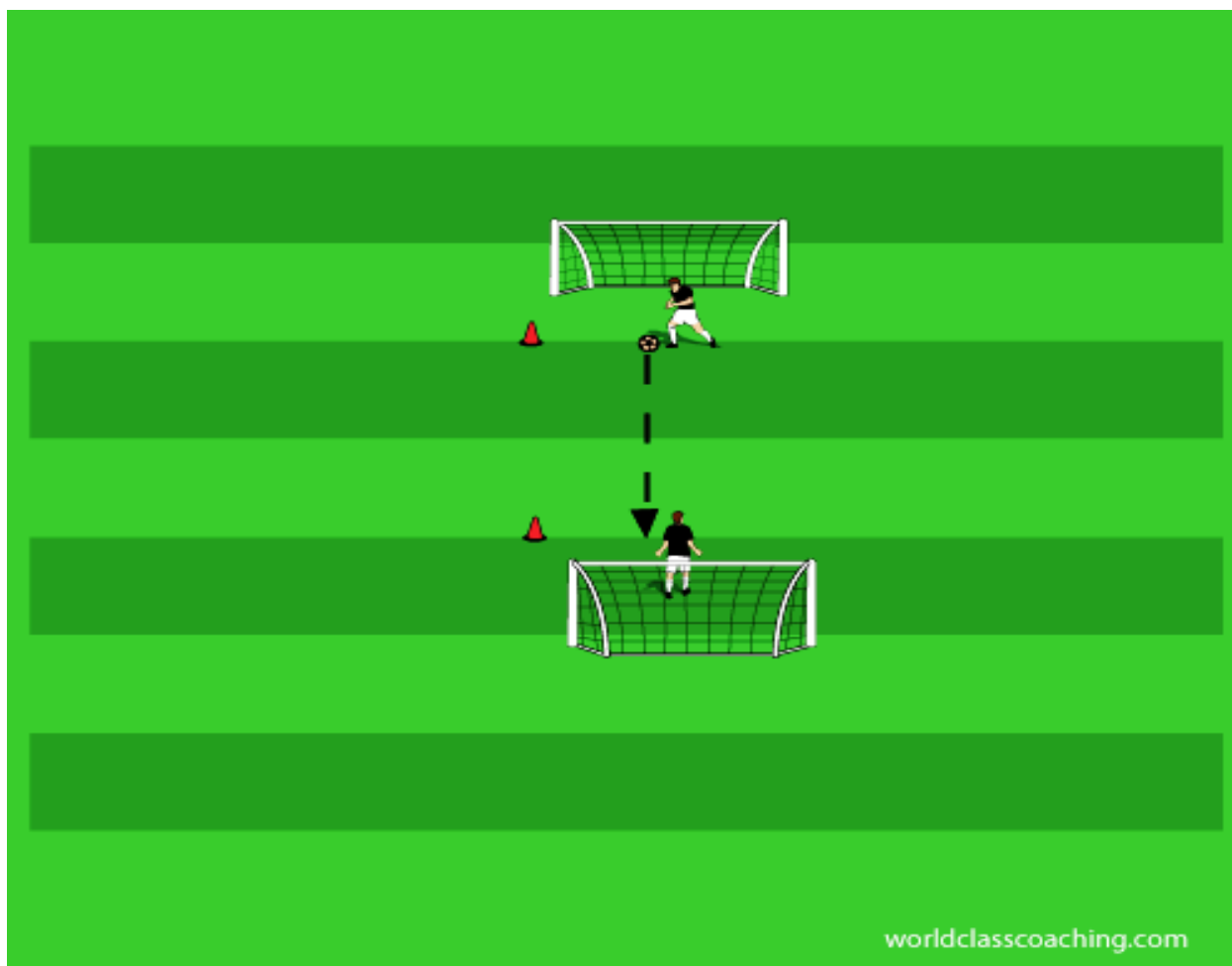


**Line Shuffle with Handling** - 15-yard cone lines 6 yards apart.

The partners face each other with one of the two rows of cones between them. First, they stand for 5 seconds in their ready position. Then they shuffle together the length of the cone line and then move to the other cone line and shuffle back (reverses footwork). This environment combines the concepts (stance and footwork) introduced in session#1 with the catching introduced in this session.

**Progression**

- Add a ball and chest pass throughout the footwork.
- Add a ball and bounce pass throughout the footwork.
- Add two balls (advanced): One partner chest-passes and the other bounce passes throughout the footwork. One partner chest passes and the other returns the ball at knee height.



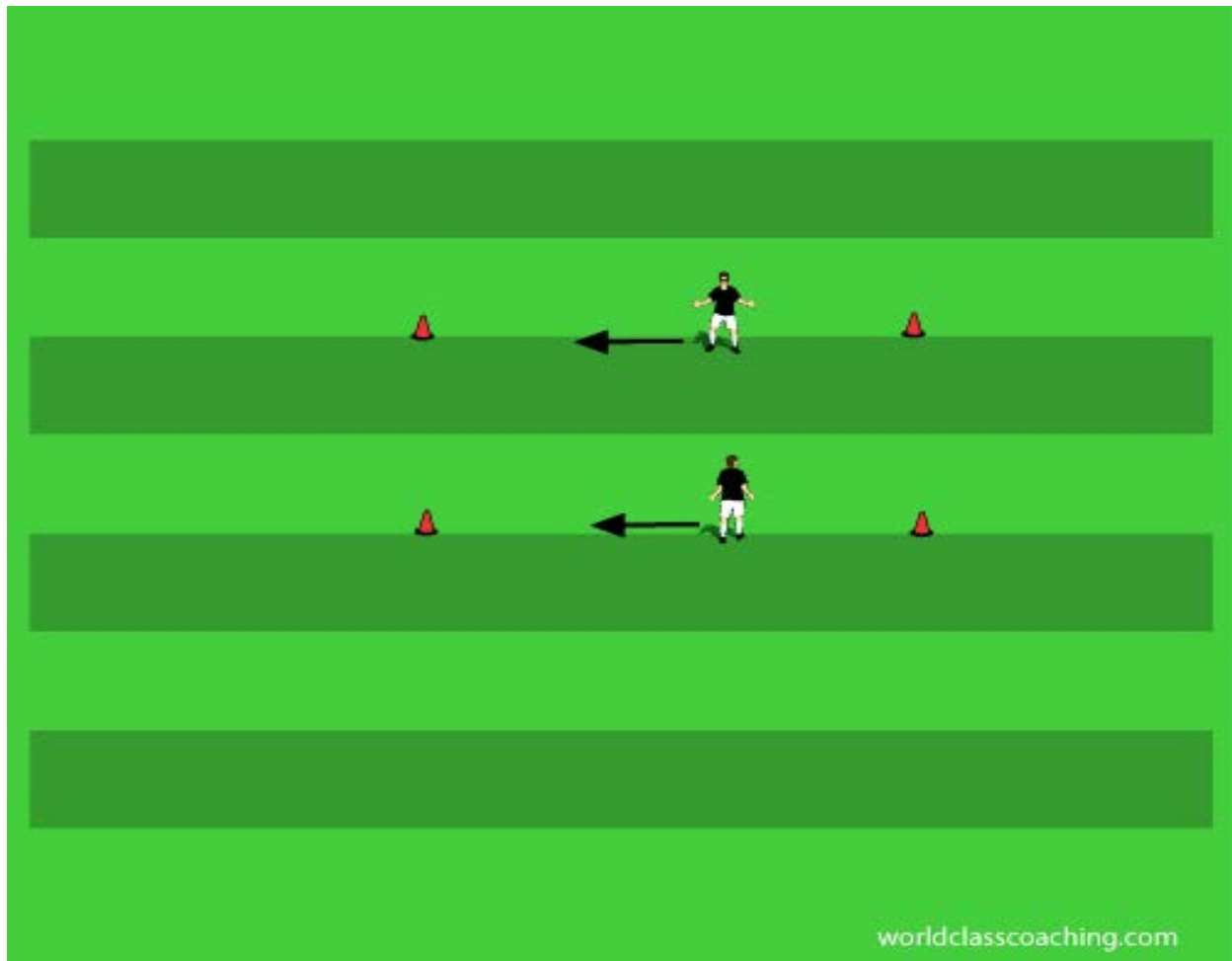
### **Goalkeeper Wars - 2 goals 14 yards apart**

This is the most popular pairs training game for goalkeepers, and it is a very good coaching environment as well, as the technical concepts introduced in many of the earlier exercises can be tested here without specific prompt. The general set-up involves two full-sized goals placed 14 yards apart (use age-appropriate goals and distance). Place two cones 3 yards from each goal line beyond which players cannot venture to shoot (they may go out and collect rebounds as long as they return to their area to shoot). Players alternate shooting opportunities. Award a point for a goal and also a point for good footwork and catching.

### Training Session#3: Handling and Distribution: Comfort on the Ball

#### Introduction

This session continues the theme of developing in players a thorough understanding of proper receiving. This practice also introduces distribution techniques and provides efficient, fun training environments that give players intensive repetition.



**Line Mirrors and Races** - Place two sets of cones 6 yards apart as shown

The work area is the width of the goal (for U11/U12). Goalkeepers face one-another. One leads and the other follows. To begin, only shuffling is allowed and goalkeepers must keep their feet, hands and shoulders facing their partner at all times. The leading goalkeeper shuffles back-and-forth, working her partner between cones. After 10 seconds, she attempts to touch either of her cones before her partner can touch her corresponding cone. If she is successful, her partner becomes the leader.



## Progression

- Allow a crossover step to quicken the pace. This exercise is designed to get goalkeepers to quicken their footwork and their ability to change directions across the face of the goal. Many goalkeeper errors are rooted in a need to get their feet going earlier and to get in line with the ball as it travels. The need to keep the shoulders, hips and feet facing forward is also paramount, as the only diving possible with the body facing the post is stomach diving, which is dangerous, produces rebounds and limits range. When the goalkeeper has to cover the width of the goal quickly, a cross-over step can be used, but should be followed by shuffling to make fine adjustments and align the body to receive the ball.

**Follow the Leader Individual Handling.** Each goalkeeper has a ball. One goalkeeper leads and the other mimics her handling and footwork. Change roles after 30 seconds.

- Pushing the ball back in forth between hands in the ready position (use the fingers and make the hands soft) and then above and in front of the head.
- Bounce and catch the ball (focus on creating a “W” with the thumbs and pointer fingers of each hand on the back of the ball). Explain that this position is the ideal catching posture for all balls received above the base of the rib cage. Encourage players to bounce the ball in an arc, to their sides, behind one foot, etc. In every case, emphasize that the goalkeeper must both catch the ball and then take a moment to look at and secure the ball before bouncing again. If young goalkeepers get in the habit of receiving and then securing the ball before moving on, they will develop both good concentration on the save and also good catching habits that will limit the number of drops.
- Skip and catch.
- Toss a high ball and catch.
- Sit down and “ride a bike” (in a ¼ sit-up position, work the ball between the legs while creating a biking motion)
- Work the ball in a circular motion around one leg (using both hands), working the ball from the knee down to the ankle and back up again – change legs).
- Figure “8” with the finger tips (ball on the ground). Emphasize that the fingers must be able to instinctively feel the ball for the goalkeeper’s handling to be sharp.
- Handling challenges – 1. Hold the ball with both hands behind the knees; flip the ball upward and forward and catch the ball in front of the knees. 2. Staggered hands (one in front of one knee and one behind the other) hold the ball; flip the ball up and alternate the hand position before catching.
- Recovery handling. The goalkeeper lays on her back (or front), tosses the ball up in the air and gets to her feet before catching (do not let the ball bounce).
- Roll the ball along with the fingertips at walking pace (to the side of the body), changing sides and then picking the ball up and bouncing and catching to add variety.

**Catching and Distribution Series.** This is the classic set of receiving and releasing options available to goalkeepers. The exchanges outlined here can be part of a warm-up or a regular rehearsal of involved techniques. Here is the progression, with a few key technical cues for each element:

- Chest pass and catch. The catch involved here is the standard form of catch for a ball received between eye height and the base of the ribs. From the ready position, the hands are extended and raised to meet the ball with the “W” position established behind the ball.



- “Gut” balls. From an underhand serve, the receiving ‘keeper turns her palms up to receive the ball between stomach height and the shoe-laces. In addition to a quick hand adjustment, the goalkeeper must also tuck her elbows in behind the ball to create a stable receiving area and organize her frame and balance behind the ball.





- Ground distribution. The serve is commonly referred to as a “bowled” pass, with the goalkeeper reaching down to the ground and releasing a ball that should not bounce. This pass is used for very short distances (i.e to distribute to the outside backs).





- Ground pick-up. On the receiving end, the standard save involves staggering the feet (forward and back) slightly bending the knees, and then getting the hands and elbows tucked in behind the ball. Where possible, this should be a standing save (no kneeling) and for advanced goalkeepers, receiving the ball as early as possible is a major point of emphasis.
- Skipped Distribution. The goalkeepers back off to 12-15 yards away from one-another. This is a middle-distance distribution where the goalkeeper drops the shoulder and pushes down with the fingers on the throwing hand to create backspin (reduces bounce – like a chip). The throw should travel about  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the distance in the air. The receiving goalkeeper focuses on collecting the ball cleanly and early.





- **Thrown Distribution.** Keeping the same distance, the goalkeepers practice full thrown distribution (this is for middle to long distribution). Emphasize cupping the ball between the wrist and fingers and a wind-mill motion (shift weight from back foot to front foot). Some goalkeepers like a more sidearm release, but this can be problematical, as it is difficult to control the height and sometimes the release point of the ball. Coming over the top allows for maximum velocity to develop and also assures the ball will be released in the proper direction. The target for these throws is the partner's shoulders, and the receiving player should focus on extending her hands for clean receiving.
- **High Ball Receiving.** This is the toughest save for most young goalkeepers. The service here needs to be underhand and in such a way that the partner can always come forward to receive. The key components to a clean save are proper approach and preparation; take off on one foot, driving the opposite knee forward and high to aid the jump; receive the ball with both hands *above and in front of* the head (minimizes the likelihood of a field player getting to the ball first and also of the ball getting in behind the goalkeeper); finish the save either by stabilizing the ball in front of the body or by pulling the ball down to the chest.





- **Punt and Catch.** The goalkeepers short-punt the ball three-to-five yards. This is an effective exercise both for keeping the punting motion and touch surface sharp and for reactions catching. The punting motion should be consistent (try to punt at the partner's chest) and release point should be such that the goalkeeper does not kick too low (release is too early) or punt high without any distance (late release, catching the foot at the end of the kicking motion).

#### **Goalkeeper Wars - 2 goals 14 yards apart**

This is the most popular pairs training game for goalkeepers, and it is a very good coaching environment as well, as the technical concepts introduced in many of the earlier exercises can be tested here without specific prompt. The general set-up involves two full-sized goals placed 14 yards apart (use age-appropriate goals and distance). Place two cones 3 yards from each goal line beyond which players cannot venture to shoot (they may go out and collect rebounds as long as they return to their area to shoot). Players alternate shooting opportunities. Award a point for a goal and also a point for good footwork and catching.



## **Training Session#4: Pairs Shot-stopping: Building Confidence Through Repetition.**

### **2-Ball Speed Work**

One method of applying a bit of pressure to handling sequences is to introduce a second ball. This compels the goalkeeper to manage receiving and releasing in a very tight time window and is a very good preparation for shot-stopping. In the first sequence, one goalkeeper chest passes and the other goalkeeper tosses the ball at knee level. Emphasize to the player making the lower pass that they need to catch the ball, lower it and push the ball straight ahead (to avoid balls colliding in mid-air). For advanced goalkeepers, one partner or the coach can call, "Switch!" (alternate the passing role) while the work is in progress to see if the players can keep concentration and maintain their rhythm.

#### **Progression**

- One player bounce passes and the other player chest passes.
- The goalkeepers stand at staggered points and toss straight ahead before shuffling sideways to receive their partner's toss. For younger goalkeepers, this last challenge can be carried out with rolled balls if they struggle to get to a tossed ball.

### **Classic Reactions Catching**

This series is useful for providing very quick repetition. The goalkeepers work through the progression below, alternating roles every 10 shots. In each case, vary serves – thrown, punted, drop-kicked, shot from ground. The major coaching points with this type of intense training work are enforcing the importance of good hand-eye coordination and extending the catching area to reduce the number of rebounds.

- Goalkeeper looks down; partner calls, "Shot!" and she reacts to save.
- Goalkeeper faces away from her partner. At the call of, "Shot!," she turns and reacts to save.
- Goalkeeper starts on the post, facing the corner flag. At the call of, "Shot!," she turns to deal with shot from her partner in the area.
- Goalkeeper starts laying on her front side and looking down. At the call of, "Shot!," she recovers and reacts to save.
- Goalkeeper starts laying on her back and looking up. At the call of, "Shot!," she recovers and reacts to save.

### **Balls and Strikes - Utilize an 8x8 yard grid**

Goalkeepers stand on opposite sides of the grid. The players throw the ball back and forth, attempting to force their partner to drop the ball. Each dropped ball is a strike and the first player to accumulate three strikes loses the game. For a throw to result in a strike, it must be thrown between the shoulders and between the chin and waist on the target goalkeeper – and be dropped. Any throw outside that area is a ball. Accumulated balls do not count in the scoring of the game. From a coaching perspective, this game is a good environment for getting goalkeepers to focus on reactions, controlling high paced shots, and consistency.

### **Long Shot Short Shot**

Here the sequence is a long shot from 15 yards (younger goalkeepers can punt this shot if need be) followed immediately by a short shot from 10-12 yards. For the first shot, the goalkeeper stays near her line and patiently handles the serve. As soon as she has handled this first shot, she must quickly move

off of her line to challenge the shooter's second effort. This is a realistic exercise that teaches goalkeepers to assess quickly their starting position and differentiate between the various distances from which a shot can come. Change roles/goalkeepers after three minutes.

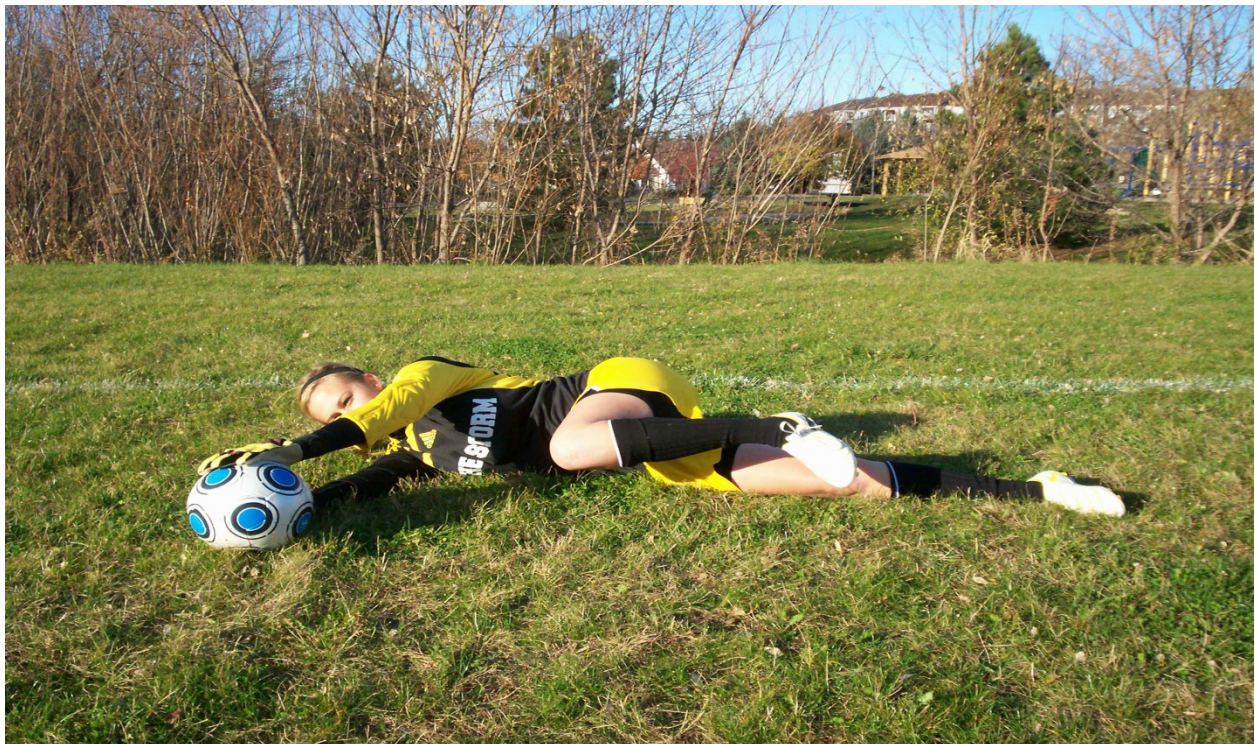
### **Training Session#5: Safety Diving: Proper Technique.**

Introduction: Young players typically are very enthusiastic, but not overly concerned with safety and proper form, when learning to dive. This session lays out key technical aspects (and safety considerations) for diving in simple, efficient training environments that also provide some fun for the goalkeepers as they learn.

#### **Pairs Diving Progression**

One goalkeeper begins on her knees on the endline. Her partner holds the ball. The server rolls balls to alternating sides for the working goalkeeper to save. The goalkeeper dives to save on either side.

Key technical diving considerations:



- Contact points for the body in the dive are the outside of the knee, the hip and the shoulder (do not land on the elbow!).

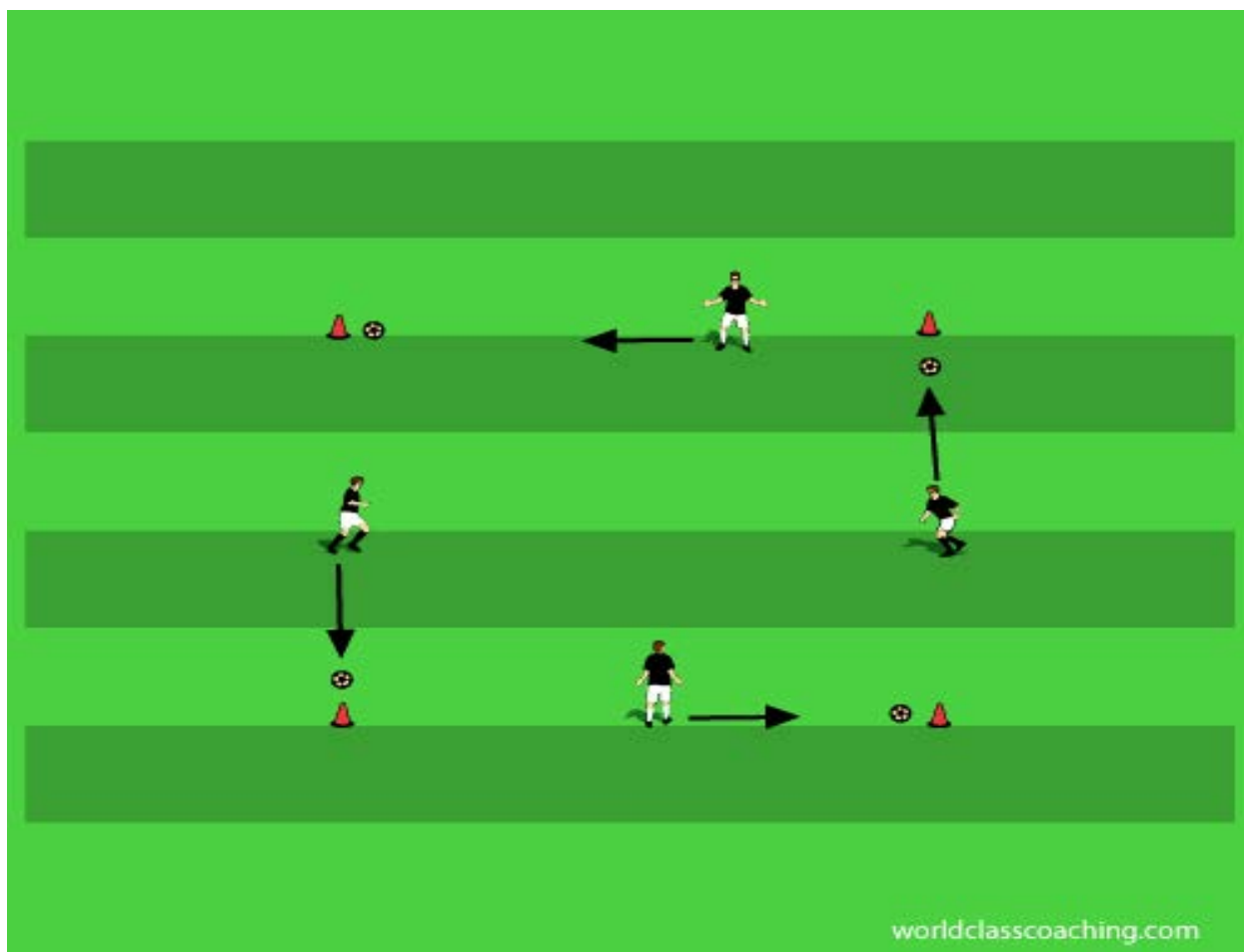




- Receive the ball with two hands and at eye level, with the near-side hand on the back of the ball and the trailing hand on top of the ball.
- Young 'keepers are taught to consider the ground to be a “third hand” with which to control the ball.
- The elbows should be slightly bent and act as springs to cushion hard serves and any attempt by an opponent to kick the ball.
- The head is raised off of the ground, with the eyes focused on the ball throughout. The trailing knee is kicked in front of the body and up to stomach level (the knee should not be any higher off of the ground than the hip). The recoil from this movement will help the goalkeeper recover to her feet after the save.
- The most common errors are stomach-diving (emphasize contact points); improper hand placement; and failing to bring the knee forward, which both leaves the goalkeeper vulnerable and often results in the goalkeeper rolling on her back at the end of the save); sideways or backward dive angle (work to get the shoulders and hands forward with each dive).

#### Progression

- Serves in the air.
- Bounced serves.
- Repeat the progression with the goalkeeper working from a standing position.



**Grid Races - 10x10 yard grid**

A ball is placed next to each corner cone. The goalkeepers start on the perimeter of the grid, face inward and move in the same direction. The goalkeepers must use footwork to close on and cover each ball on the perimeter. The first goalkeeper to catch (tag) her partner wins. This is a grueling fitness exercise that puts a lot of strain on the goalkeepers' technique, and should only last a minute or so. Play once in each direction.





### **Dive and Recover - 10x10 yard grid**

As the slide indicates, goalkeepers begin on opposite sides of the grid with balls located in the two corners on one end. The goalkeeper with the balls on her end is the attacker to begin, and she moves to one corner and sends the ball straight ahead for the goalkeeper to dive and save (leave the ball right at the cone after the save). The attacker then moves to the other side and strikes the second ball straight ahead for the goalkeeper to dive and save. Now the roles reverse as both goalkeepers move to the center of their respective ends of the perimeter before the restart. This is a very good environment for teaching recovery, as the time between the first and second shots can be very short if the attacker moves right away.

### **Goalkeeper Wars - 2 goals 14 yards apart**

This is the most popular pairs training game for goalkeepers, and it is a very good coaching environment as well, as the technical concepts introduced in many of the earlier exercises can be tested here without specific prompt. The general set-up involves two full-sized goals placed 14 yards apart (use age-appropriate goals and distance). Place two cones 3 yards from each goal line beyond which players cannot venture to shoot (they may go out and collect rebounds as long as they return to their area to shoot). Players alternate shooting opportunities. Award a point for a goal and also a point for good

footwork and diving saves. For the first phase of the game, compel shooters to play the ground to encourage diving by the target goalkeeper.

### **Training Session#6: Diving: Collapse, Extension and Blocking.**

Introduction: After young players are introduced to basic, safe, technical diving, it is useful to teach them that there are multiple types of diving saves, each designed to deal with a particular shot or situation. This session refines collapse (standard) diving by looking at dive angle. Then 'keepers learn about extension diving, which allows them to reach balls beyond the reach of collapse dives, and blocking, which allows the goalkeeper to increase her chance of making a save in a pressure situations close to goal.

#### **Pairs Diving Progression (revisit and reinforce)**

One goalkeeper begins on her knees on the endline. Her partner holds the ball. The server rolls balls to alternating sides for the working goalkeeper to save. The goalkeeper dives to save on either side.

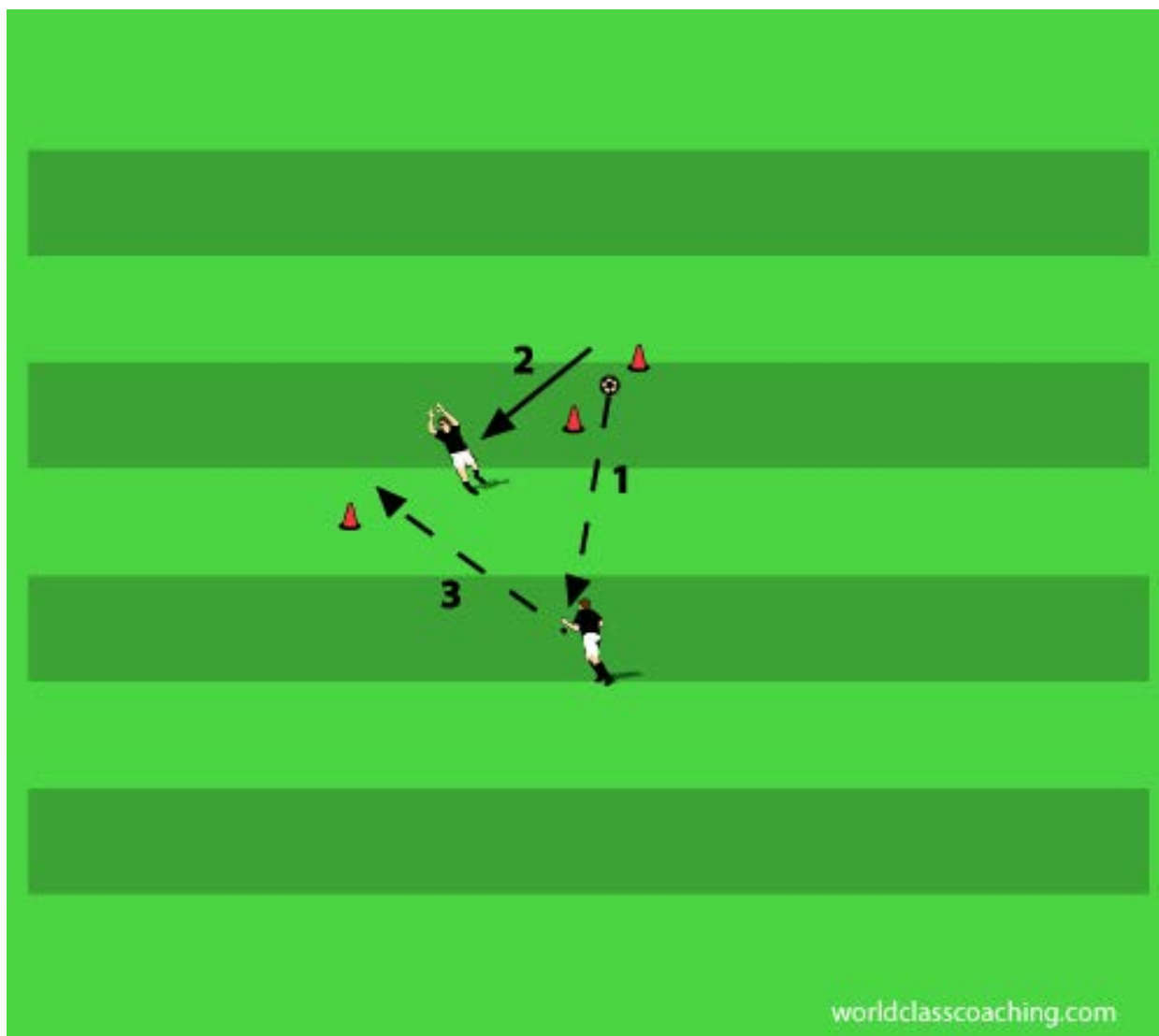
#### **Key technical diving considerations**

- Contact points for the body in the dive are the outside of the knee, the hip and the shoulder (do not land on the elbow!).
- Receive the ball with two hands and at eye level, with the near-side hand on the back of the ball and the trailing hand on top of the ball.
- Young 'keepers are taught to consider the ground to be a "third hand" with which to control the ball.
- The elbows should be slightly bent and act as springs to cushion hard serves and any attempt by an opponent to kick the ball.
- The head is raised off of the ground, with the eyes focused on the ball throughout. The trailing knee is kicked in front of the body and up to stomach level (the knee should not be any higher off of the ground than the hip). The recoil from this movement will help the goalkeeper recover to her feet after the save.
- The most common errors are stomach-diving (emphasize contact points); improper hand placement; and failing to bring the knee forward, which both leaves the goalkeeper vulnerable and often results in the goalkeeper rolling on her back at the end of the save); sideways or backward dive angle (work to get the shoulders and hands forward with each dive).

#### **Progression**

- Serves in the air.
- bounced serves.
- Repeat the progression with the goalkeeper working from a standing position.





### Forward Dive Angle

For intermediate and advanced goalkeepers, the concept of *forward dive angle* becomes very important. Specifically, if the goalkeeper can adopt a forward line in diving (look at a line between the hips and shoulders after the dive), she will cut more angle and also receive the ball earlier. Goalkeepers are taught to always be working forward in their progression. The relevant slide in this set shows a simple, efficient environment for training forward dive angle. The working goalkeeper passes to her partner and then moves quickly forward through the gate to save the subsequent shot. The server looks to push the ball to the far cone, which can be adjusted in the direction of the server to force a sharper forward dive angle. After both goalkeepers have an opportunity to train in this setting, reverse the angle on the gate cones to allow for left-side diving. For young goalkeepers it is useful to show this refinement so that the young 'keepers are aware of the benefits of diving at a forward angle.



### Extension Diving

A second form of diving (the standard diving outlined above is referred to as “collapse” diving) is extension diving. The purpose of extension diving is to reach balls that cannot be reached through collapse diving. In the slide shown, the goalkeeper starts with the ball three yards off of the post. She initiates the action by playing to her partner (1) and then backing off to touch the post (2) before moving across the face of the goal (3) and saving at the back post (4). The exercise is then repeated in the opposite direction. Because of the requirement to move across the width of the goal, this exercise is a useful means to creating extension diving opportunities.

### Focal points

- The footwork is crucial to setting up the dive. A cross-over step can be used to quickly cover the area, and very fast shuffling is required to both get to the post and also create momentum and explosive power in the dive.
- There is a tendency with younger goalkeepers to go running across the face of the goal and stomach dive (for younger ‘keepers, start this exercise in the middle of the goal to cut the distance and have them work slowly, focusing on technique).



- In the final push, the legs must be bent, and the leg nearest the post becomes the push point, while the backside knee adds drive to the effort. The most common error in this type of diving is the tendency to jump upward and overplay the ball.

It is important to emphasize that the guiding principal in this regard is, “make the simple save.” On a low shot, pushing along the ground increases the likelihood of holding on to the ball and decreases the likelihood of injury. In this exercise, most of the serves should be along the ground. Change roles after one minute.

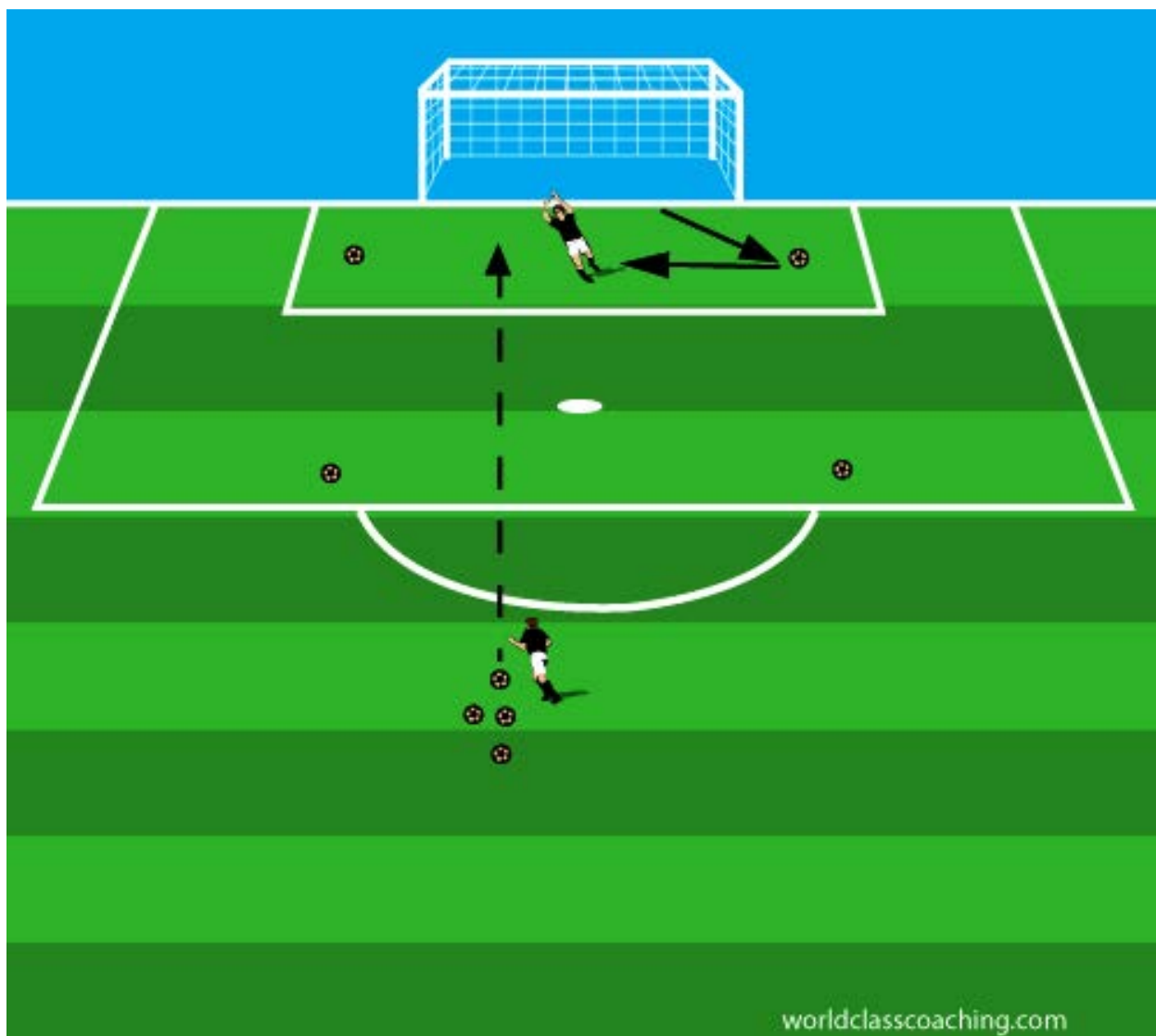


### **Blocking Line**

This is typically not a favorite for goalkeepers, but it is an exercise that highlights a very important skill for all netminders: Dealing with a ball that one will not get to in time to cover. The task then is to block the ball. The attacker moves through the line of balls, pushing each ball in sequence, with the goalkeeper either getting back to her feet or getting her feet in position to push on to the next ball. The purpose of the exercise is to familiarize the goalkeeper with going to ground in front of an attacker. Hand position is critical. If the goalkeeper cannot get to the ball first, her bottom hand is placed along the ground (palm facing the ball) and the top hand is held higher than in a normal dive in an effort to knock down a shot that would go over her. Alternate roles and work each ‘keeper in each direction.

### **Variation**

- The attacker allows the goalkeeper to get to some or all of the balls first and then pushes on the ball.



**The Pit** - Place four balls (no cones) to form a 10x10 yard grid.

The goalkeeper starts in the center of the “pit,” and her partner has a ball supply ten yards outside the grid. The goalkeeper moves to cover any of the four balls and then quickly recovers to deal with a shot from her partner. This exercise emphasizes both diving and speed in recovery. This exercise can also be organized in the area, as shown, with the pit set up in the large box and the partner’s follow-up shot being at goal. For purposes of this session, the follow-up shot should be on the ground and designed to force the goalkeeper to dive to save.



## **Training Session#7:Advanced Handling: Punching; Low and High Tipping.**

### **Introduction**

Although punching and tipping are advanced skills for goalkeepers, it is useful to show young goalkeepers how to perform these techniques, as it helps them understand their options when stopping shots. The cautionary note is that each of these skills is to be utilized only when catching the ball is not possible.



### **Punch Juggling**

The goalkeepers stand two yards apart. The goalkeepers use two fists to punch the ball back and forth between them (always start with a toss from one to the other). Have the pair keep track of their best



total over two minutes. Emphasize that punching is used to defend shots in high wind, wet conditions, in a crowd in front of goal or in an emergency.

#### Key technical considerations

- Placement of the hands (fists with thumbs resting on the pointer fingers – not tucked in! – and either together (best feel) or slightly separated (for advanced goalkeepers this creates a more broad surface).
- The fists should be set together early and close to the body, with the fists driving through the ball to punch.
- As virtually all punching needs to be upward in motion (to clear the ball and create time for the defense to react and adjust), this exercise is also useful for emphasizing the importance of punching on the back and underside of the ball to create proper lift.

#### Variation

- Play again, this time utilizing only one fist for punching (boxing). This is a riskier save given the smaller target surface, but it is also useful in emergencies and for improvisation to be able to box a ball out of trouble. Compel goalkeepers to alternate the fist they use to punch. Play for two minutes and check for the high score.





### Low tipping

This skill is utilized to deal with balls that cannot be held in a dive due to weather, deflection, pace, the goalkeeper seeing the ball late, or a ball that will get in before the goalkeeper can get both hands there. It should be noted that some goalkeepers prefer to utilize the heel of the hand (power) while others prefer the fingertips (more reach and control). Either way, successful tipping requires very good hand-eye contact. The most common error occurs when the goalkeeper turns her palm down and the ball gets trapped under the hand. To prevent this from occurring, the goalkeeper should practice moving her hand along the ground with the palm facing up-field throughout the save. For very young goalkeepers, the working player can start from her knees to ease the fall and simplify timing. Be sure to work both sides of the goal.

### Progression

- The server tosses low serves (knee high) for the working goalkeeper to tip.



### High Tipping

This is a difficult save that is often not well understood and there are consequently many mistakes that lead to goals out of high tipping opportunities. High tipping typically occurs when the goalkeeper has been off of her line and has to recover to deal with a ball that is headed for goal or when a ball is hit with pace and location that will not allow the goalkeeper to maneuver and catch. For young goalkeepers, it is useful to teach this skill in isolation. In the picture, the goalkeeper works from her



knees, with the server tossing balls from the foreground for the 'keeper to tip over an imaginary goal. This position removes footwork and thus movement from the execution, allowing the goalkeeper to focus on the tipping motion. The server should toss balls that have a slight arc, aiming for the goalkeeper's near shoulder. The goalkeeper shows the tipping hand early, with the wrist facing the ball (turning the wrist is the most common error and creates a downward arc that can throw the ball into the net). The ball is received on the high palm and base of the fingers and lifted over the goal. Practice dealing with balls on both sides.

#### **Goalkeeper Wars - 2 goals 14 yards apart**

This is the most popular pairs training game for goalkeepers, and it is a very good coaching environment as well, as the technical concepts introduced in many of the earlier exercises can be tested here without specific prompt. The general set-up involves two full-sized goals placed 14 yards apart (use age-appropriate goals and distance). Place two cones 3 yards from each goal line beyond which players cannot venture to shoot (they may go out and collect rebounds as long as they return to their area to shoot). Players alternate shooting opportunities. Award a point for a goal and also a point for good footwork and tipping or punching. For the first portion of the game, require punted or thrown serves to create high-ball saving opportunities.

## Training Session#8: Dealing with High Balls

### Introduction

One of the most commonly asked questions from young goalkeepers, their coaches and parents is, “How can we help her deal with high shots?” Indeed, the height of the goal, which is usually beyond what a U9-U12 goalkeeper can jump, and the fact that young players are still developing motor skills that allow them to track and control a flighted ball both mitigate against a rapid solution to this dilemma. That said, there are basic technical cues and simple tactical exercises that can maximize young goalkeepers’ ability to control high shots.



### **Team Handball** - 25x25 yard area with full-sized goals

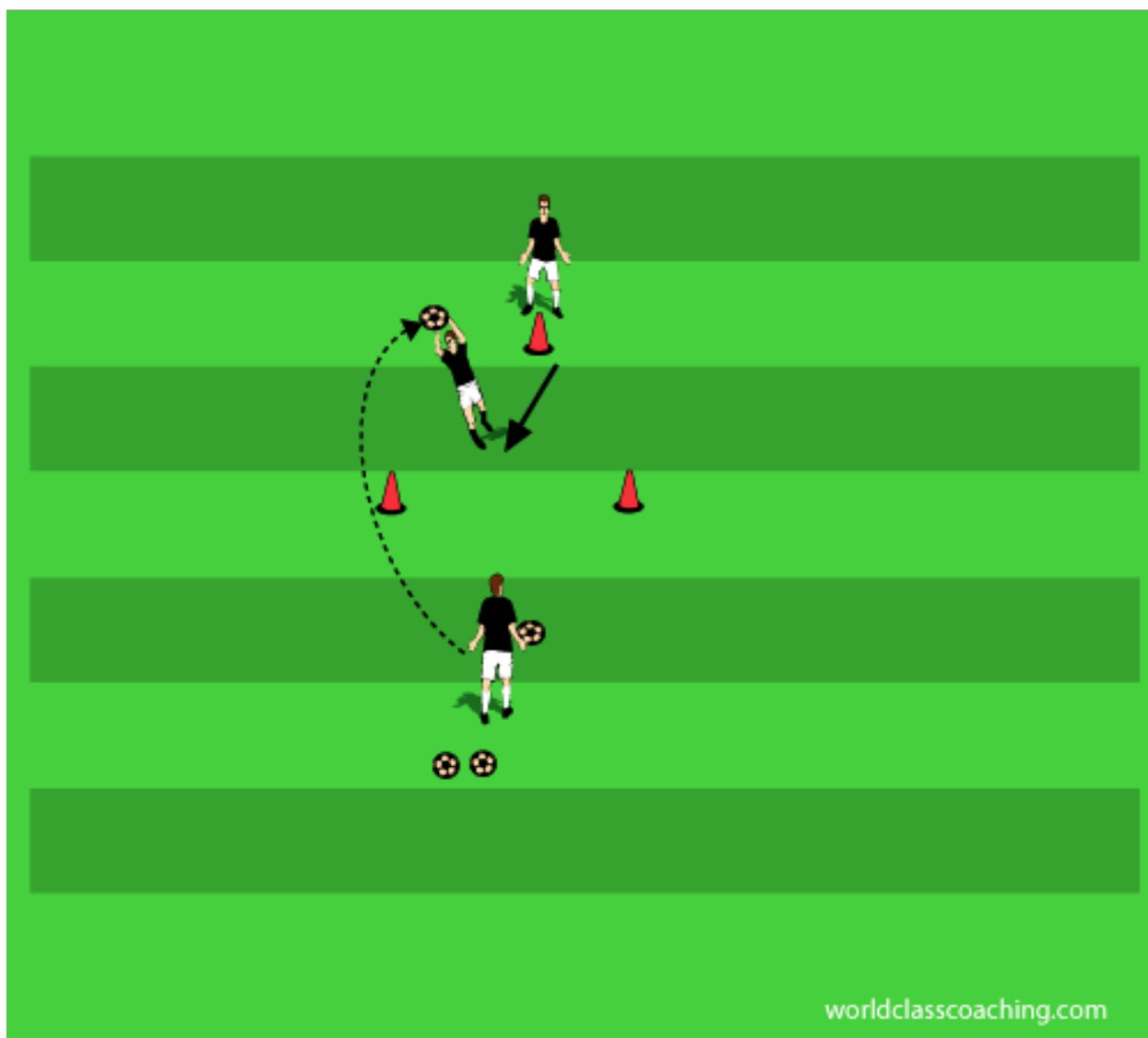
Divide the group into two teams. Players pass the ball with their hands and goals are scored by throwing the ball into the goal. Defenders can use their hands to block or intercept passes. Any ball that hits the ground is a turnover and play restarts from that point. Players in possession are limited to three seconds and three steps.



**High Ball Receiving in Pairs** - Two lines 7 yards apart

Serves always come from the same line. The service must be underhand and in such a way that the partner can always come forward to receive. Players change lines after each sequence. The key components to a clean save are proper approach and preparation; take off on one foot, driving the opposite knee forward and high to aid the jump; receive the ball with both hands *above* and *in front of* the head (minimizes the likelihood of a field player getting to the ball first and also of the ball getting in behind the goalkeeper); finish the save either by stabilizing the ball in front of the body or by pulling the ball down to the chest.





### Receiving High Balls

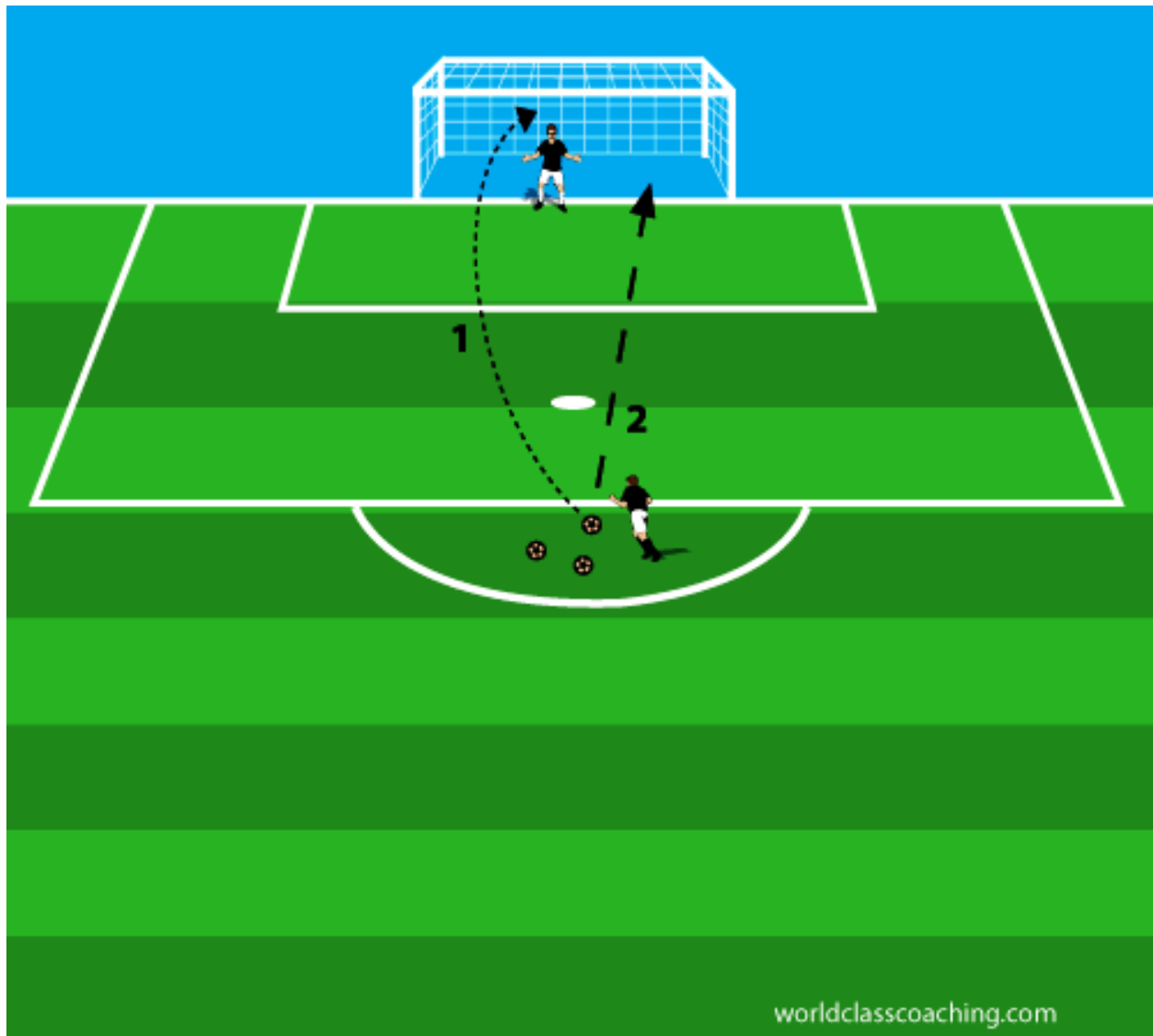
One goalkeeper serves to either of the side cones while the working goalkeeper must close and make the save as early as possible. She then returns to her starting point and their roles are reversed. One additional element that is useful in this environment is requiring that the goalkeeper utilize a particular foot for take-off on each side of the grid. It is generally preferable to use the “end line” foot for take-off in pulling down high balls, so goalkeepers must be adept at working off of either foot.

#### Progression

- Move this exercise to the goal. The coach tosses balls for the goalkeepers to catch under the bar. At first, the tosses should be straight on at goal. Emphasize to the receiving player that her best chance to save is to be patient and wait for the ball at the line (arc of the ball). The catch should be made with both hands and slightly in front of and above the head.
- The serves are tossed first to one side and then the other. The goalkeeper shuffles along the goal line and jumps (when necessary) to catch. Emphasize the importance of keeping the toes,

hips and shoulders facing the field throughout. Many young goalkeepers turn their hips and shoulders trying to reach the ball and when they do, it becomes extremely difficult to catch the ball.

- Allow punching or high tipping on balls that goalkeepers will not otherwise control.



### High Shot Low Shot

With one goalkeeper in goal and one outside the 18 large box, this exercise is a simple combination of types of shot for the goalkeeper to save. The attacker shoots in two balls in each sequence, with the first shot being a chip (or punt or throw from closer distance for younger 'keepers) up near the bar, and when the first ball is saved, she then drives a low shot at the goal. The goalkeeper has to adjust quickly to recover and save the second shot. A common use for this exercise is to allow the goalkeeper to measure her ability to play a step or two off of the line on a high shot. In general, younger goalkeepers should stay near their line when the ball is outside the large box to avoid being chipped. Older, taller, and more advanced goalkeepers can get several yards off of their lines and still recover.

#### Variation

- Low shot, high shot; occasionally, the shooter touches the ball inside the large box, which prompts the goalkeeper to step out and challenge. Change roles after three minutes.

#### **Goalkeeper Wars - 2 goals 14 yards apart**

This is the most popular pairs training game for goalkeepers, and it is a very good coaching environment as well, as the technical concepts introduced in many of the earlier exercises can be tested here without specific prompt. The general set-up involves two full-sized goals placed 14 yards apart (use age-appropriate goals and distance). Place two cones 3 yards from each goal line beyond which players cannot venture to shoot (they may go out and collect rebounds as long as they return to their area to shoot). Players alternate shooting opportunities. Award a point for a goal and also a point for good footwork and tipping or punching. For the first portion of the game, require punted or thrown serves to create high-ball saving opportunities.



## **Training Session#9: Reaction Saves**

Introduction: Goalkeepers tend to like to work on reaction saves in part because the training can be very lively and challenging and in part because these saves often end up being more spectacular. Just as field players work on speed of play, goalkeepers, even at young ages, work on their ability to adjust quickly to sudden attempts at goal. For young goalkeepers, this training sharpens their motor skills, agility and their ability to control the ball under pressure.

### **Classic Reactions Catching**

This series is useful for providing very quick repetition. The goalkeepers work through the progression below in pairs, alternating roles every 10 shots. In each case, vary serves – thrown, punted, drop-kicked, shot from ground. The major coaching points with reactions work are enforcing the importance of good hand-eye coordination and extending the catching area to reduce the number of rebounds.

- Goalkeeper looks down; partner calls, “Shot!” and she reacts to save.
- Goalkeeper faces away from her partner. At the call of, “Shot!,” she turns and reacts to save.
- Goalkeeper starts on the post, facing the corner flag. At the call of, “Shot!,” she turns to deal with shot from her partner in the area.
- Goalkeeper starts laying on her front side and looking down. At the call of, “Shot!,” she recovers and reacts to save.
- Goalkeeper starts laying on her back and looking up. At the call of, “Shot!,” she recovers and reacts to save.

### **Drop and Catch**

This is another traditional exercise for goalkeepers to practice their ability to suddenly save. There are many variations, but generally one goalkeeper holds the ball with both hands at chest height to begin (hands on the underside of the ball). Her partner stands facing her and places her hands above the ball. When the holder releases the ball, the goalkeeper reacts to catch before the ball reaches ground. Change roles after 30 seconds.

#### **Variations/Progression**

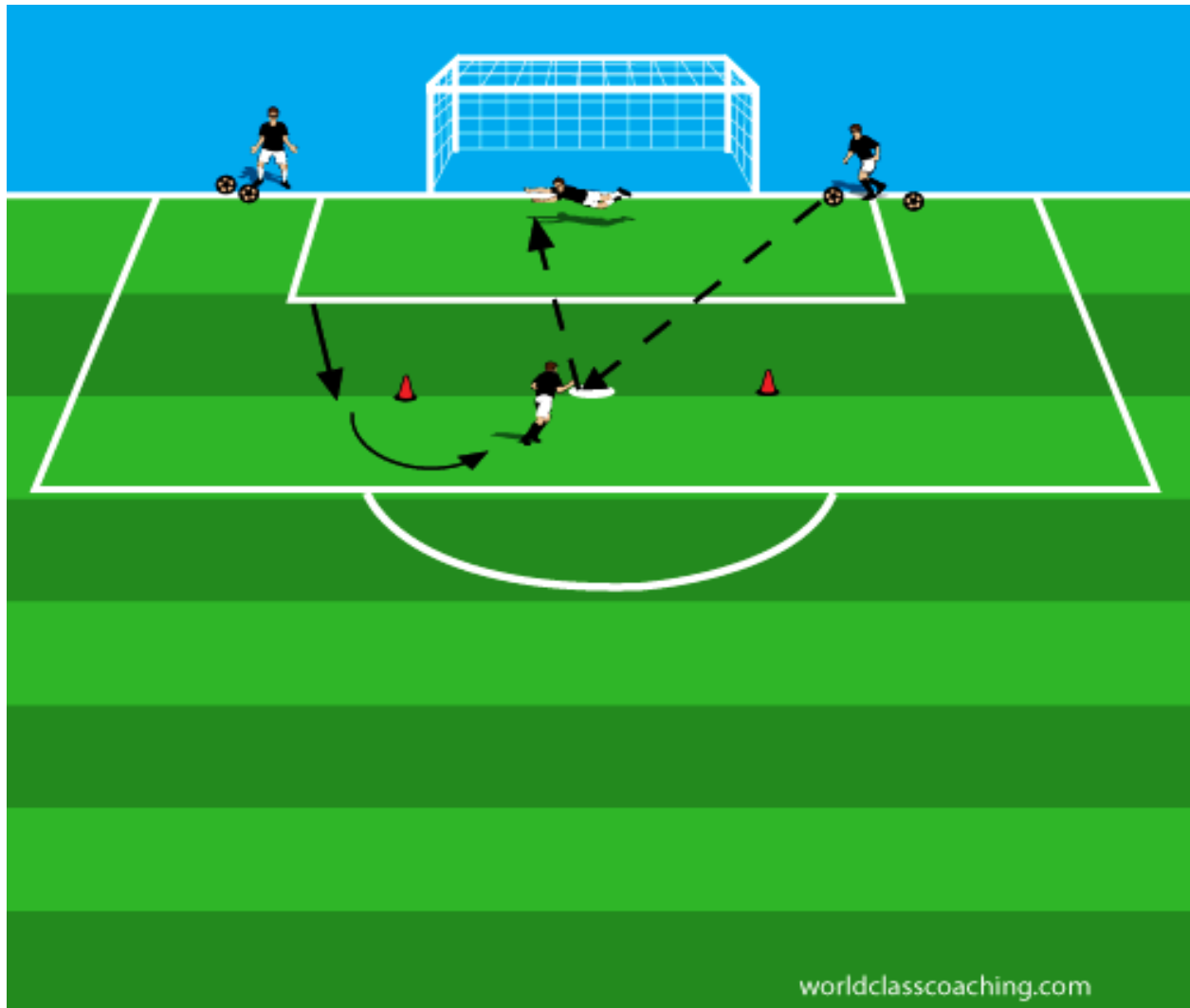
- The holder fakes to drop.
- The holder holds the ball at waist height.
- The active goalkeeper must begin with her hands behind her back.
- Utilize two balls (drop one).
- Utilize two balls and the server holds her hands straight out at her sides and shoulder high – as she drops one, the goalkeeper must dive to save before the ball hits the ground or to cover the bounce.

### **Toss-Save-Catch**

Each goalkeeper holds a ball. One goalkeeper tosses her ball in the air, receives a chest pass from her partner and returns, and then relocates and saves her original toss. Change roles after each sequence. This is a particularly useful exercise for younger goalkeepers in that it helps them learn to locate a ball in the air.

### Variations

- The server from the partner is a shot played with pace from the feet.



### **Pass-Shoot-Play Goalkeeper** - Goal and box area

Place one cone 12 yards from each post as shown. Divide the players into two groups. Players first pass to a player in the opposite line, then run around the cone and shoot first time at goal and finally play goalkeeper for the next shot before retrieving a ball and returning to their line. Because the shots are taken from fairly close in (adjust the distance to challenge but not overwhelm goalkeepers), goalkeepers will be able to sharpen their ability to make reaction saves.

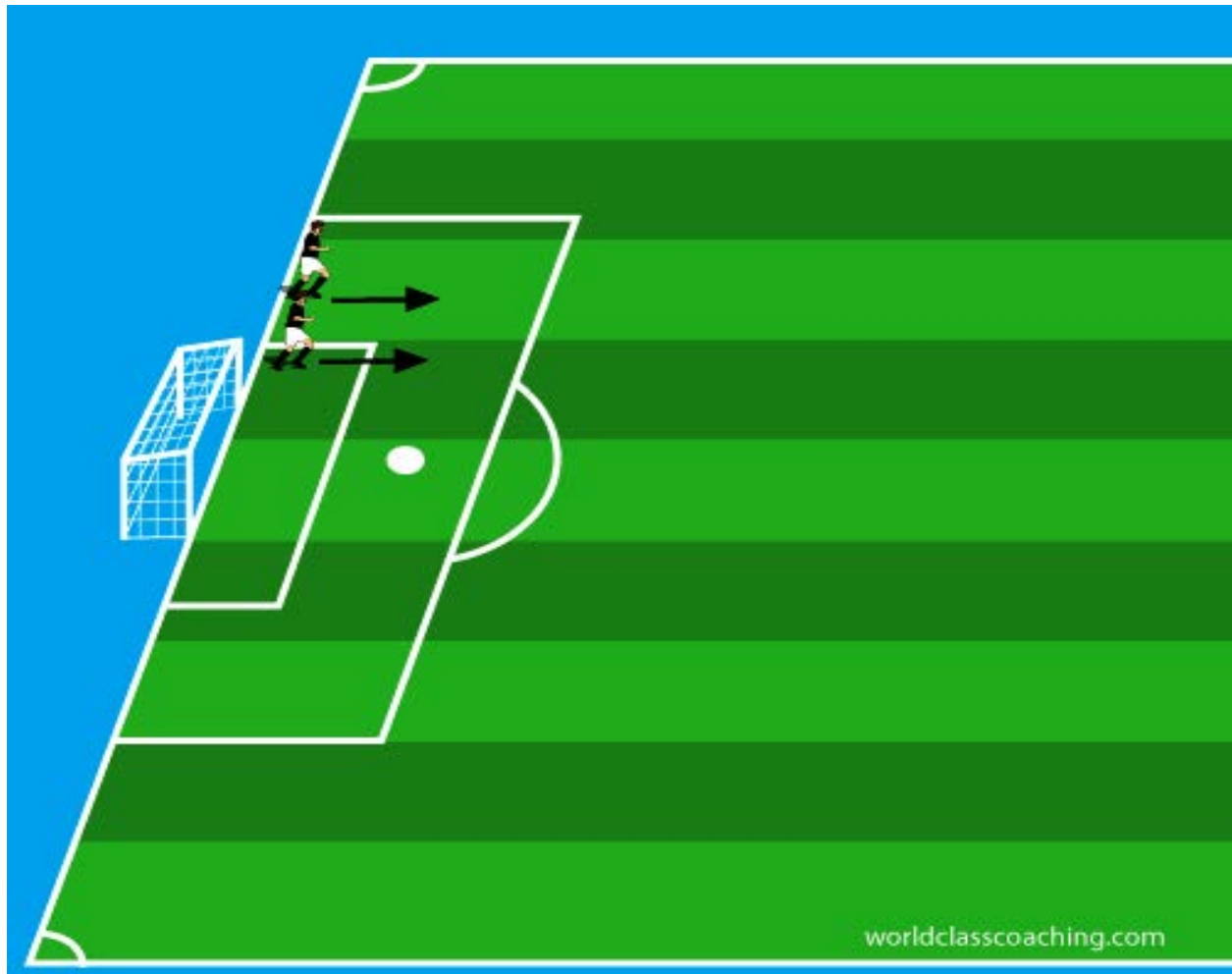
### Coaching Points

- Goalkeepers should be set (feet stopped, weight slightly forward) when the ball is struck.
- Encourage goalkeepers to challenge shooters by moving off or their line toward the shooter a few steps to cut down the shooting angles available to the shooter.

## **Training Session#10: Angle Play and the Goalkeeper's Role in Team Defense.**

### **Introduction**

Although the tactical role and the importance of angle play are limited for U9/U10 goalkeepers (small goals and fields), it can be useful to share the basic tenets of both areas with young goalkeepers because at U11/U12, the goal and field get much bigger and both elements are magnified in importance. This session presents easy ways to get young players to think about angle play and also their role in playing behind the defense if they're in goal.



### **Box Warm-up Runs**

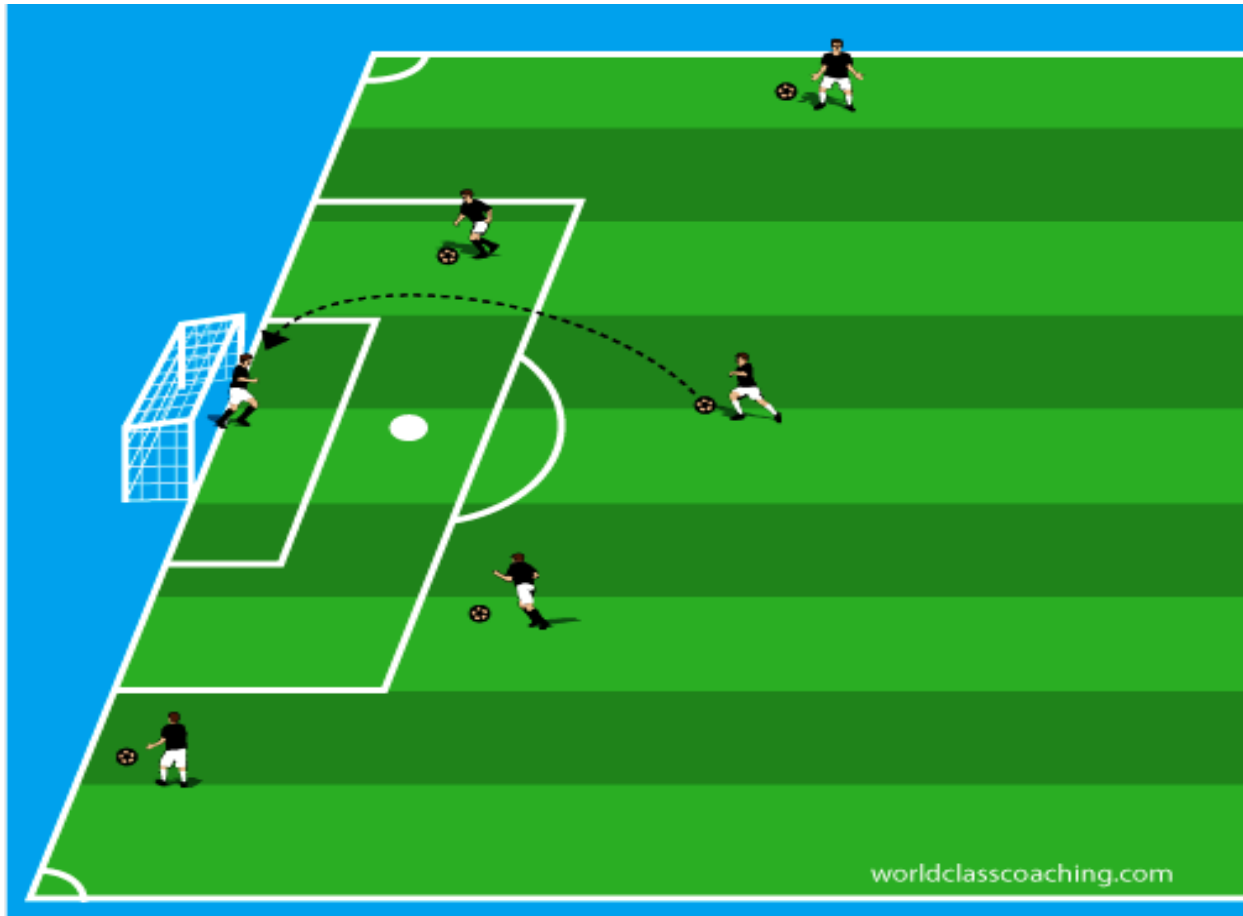
Footwork inside the large goal box. This is also a good foot work warm-up for the goalkeeper on game day. This warm-up offers the added benefit of allowing the goalkeeper time to get comfortable in the goal box area.

### **Progression**

- Jog out, jog back; jog out, jog back.
- high knees out, high knees back.



- High heels out; high heels back.
- Shuffle out, shuffle back..
- Jog out, backpedal back.



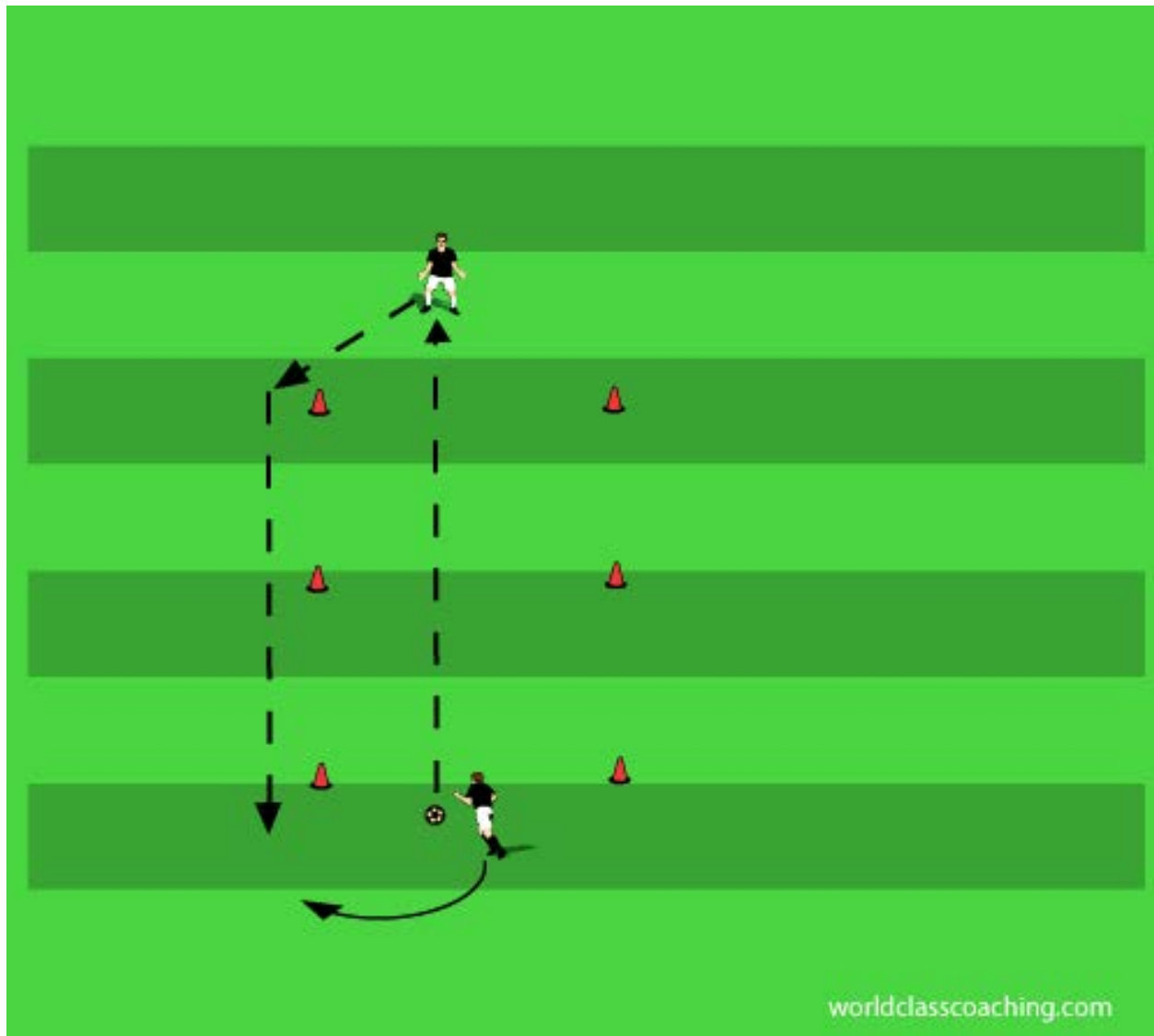
### **Angle Shooting - ½ field**

The goalkeeper is in the goal. All other players have a ball and are stationed randomly throughout the near end of the field (vary both distance and angle). The goalkeeper calls out names of players who take a touch and shoot. Players stationed beyond their shooting range can punt balls into the area for the goalkeeper to recover. Each time the goalkeeper gets set before a shot, the coach can help adjust her position.

### **Coaching Points**

- Goalkeeper recognition of distance. For U9/U10 goalkeepers, the likelihood of being chipped is minimal and they can play aggressively within their area. For U11/U12 goalkeepers, they need to stay relatively close to their goal if the ball is near the area (large box) or just inside the area, as the possibility of a high shot catching them off of their line is very real). For shots inside the area at U9/U10 and from within 12 yards for U11/U12 goalkeepers, the 'keeper must step out aggressively to challenge the shooter and cut angles to the goal.

- Goalkeeper recognition of angles. Again, the U9/U10 goal is small enough where angles, while useful, are not as critical as at the older ages. Encourage goalkeepers to step out of the goal slightly to remove the fear and danger of diving or moving into a post while making a save. Also explain that as a rule it is important to take away the near post while allowing oneself an opportunity to still save balls shot at the back post as well. Finally, from sharp angles (near the corners), U11/U12 goalkeepers should play nearer the middle of the goal (to deal with a long cross) on balls served from distance and then actually get beyond the post (to the ball) for shots in close.



#### **Back Passes in a Grid - 12x6 yard grid**

The most decisive change in the tactical role of the goalkeeper in recent years has been the evolution of the goalkeeper as a significant source of pressure release for the defense and an organizer for team possession. Consequently, the goalkeeper's ability to receive and play with her feet is now a mandatory consideration for coaches. For young teams, it is very helpful to add in the option for a pressured defender facing her own goal to pass to her goalkeeper (when it's safe to do so!) to relieve pressure. In

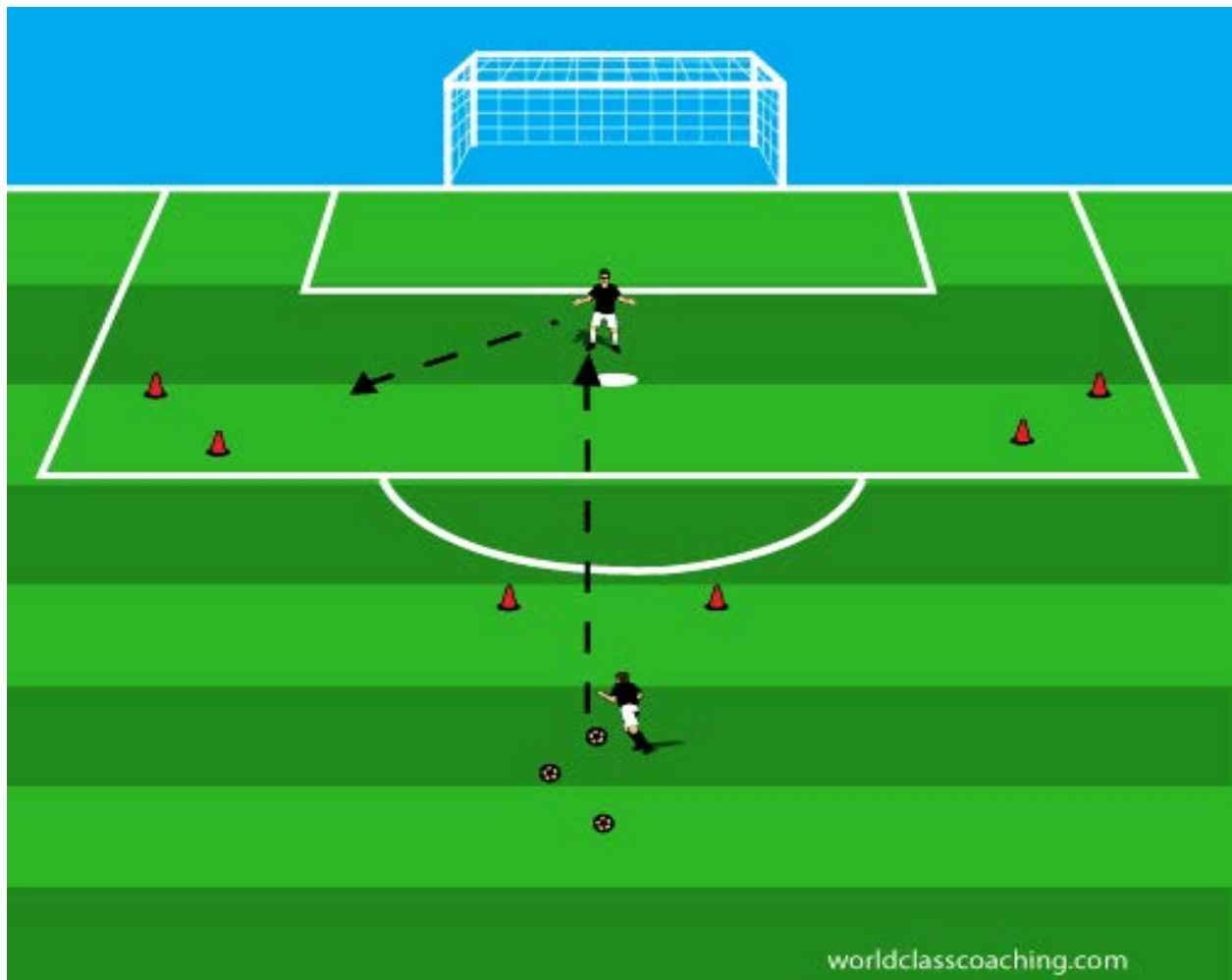
this exercise, the goalkeepers serve balls through the lane to one-another and the receiving goalkeeper focuses on changing the direction (sharply) of the ball with her first touch and distributing with her second touch.

#### Additional coaching points

- Utilize both the inside and outside surfaces (and alternate feet) to receive.
- Shorten the time between the first and second touches.
- Require the receiving goalkeeper to ask for (demand) the ball before it is played. This restriction both builds in the requirement that the pass be a safe one (the goalkeeper's prerogative) and also helps demonstrate the importance of goalkeeper communication.

#### Progression

- Serves in the air and on the bounce (no hands to receive)
- Tosses to be headed back (change the angle of the ball with the header and head high to clear).



#### **Back Passes and Pressure Clearances** - Edge of the large goal box

The server plays balls through the central cone goal and becomes a target for distribution through the



goal chosen by the goalkeeper. The working goalkeeper receives and distributes (2-touch) through either of the side goals. Once again, the goal is to play quickly and with a sharp first touch in particular.

#### Progression

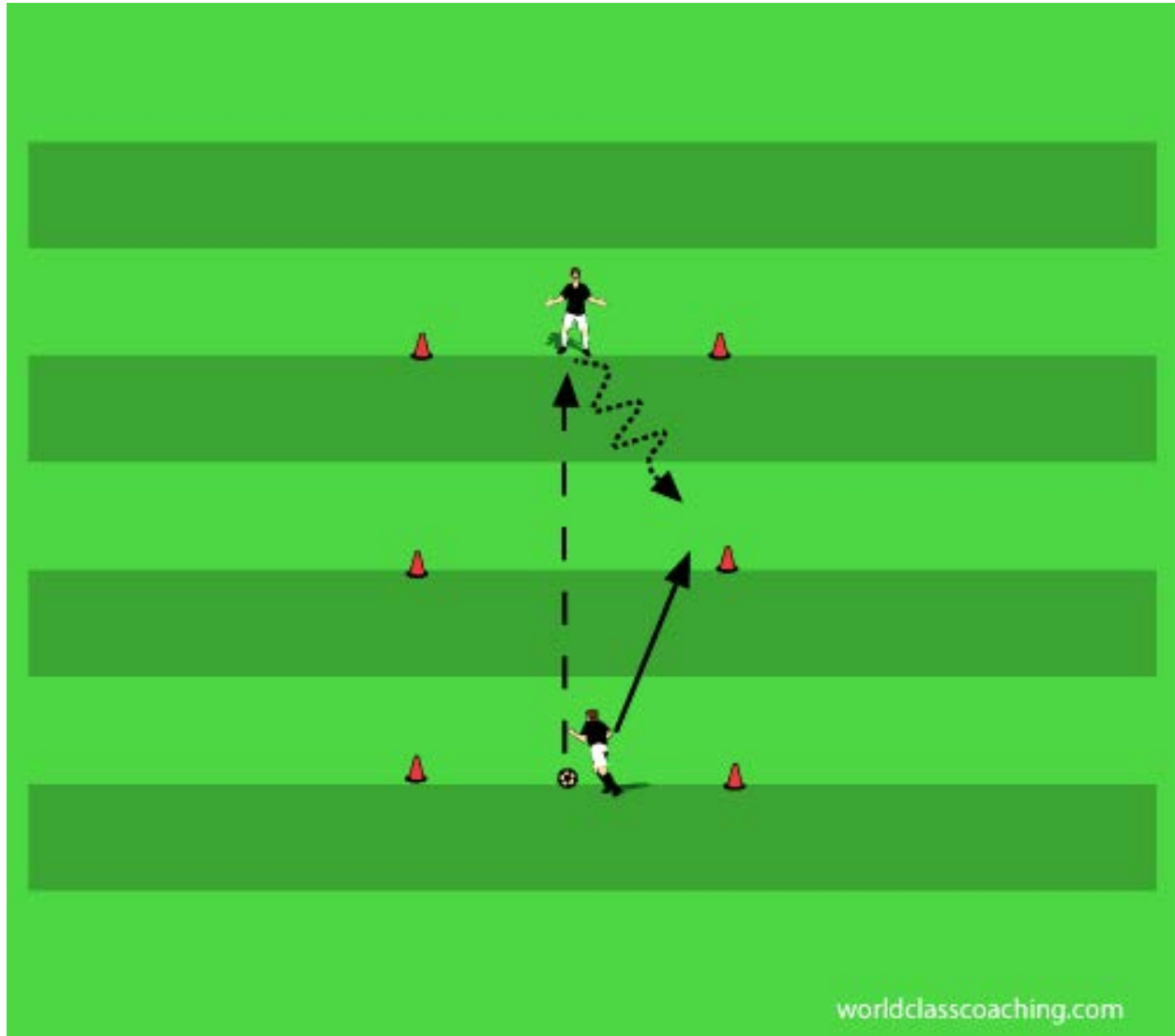
- The server indicates which side (hand signal) the working goalkeeper must receive and distribute to.
- The server plays through a side goal and the working goalkeeper must work all the way across to the far goal to distribute.
- Bouncing and flighted serves. Encourage the goalkeeper to work with the edge of the area in mind (if she plays outside that area, she cannot use her hands).
- The server indicates at the moment of the pass whether the pass is from the goalkeeper's team or from the opponents (if from the opponents, she can pick it up with her hands inside the area). Play some serves slowly and indicate that they are from the opponent (show that the goalkeeper can then dribble the ball back into the area and pick it up with her hands).
- The server follows her pass and pressures the goalkeeper. Play some serves slowly and do not press (show that the goalkeeper can then dribble the ball back into the area and pick up with her hands).

## **Training Session#11: Breakaways.**

### **Introduction**

The breakaway situation is one of the most challenging for goalkeepers of any age and by U11/U12 in particular, players need to be instructed as to how to deal with a single attacker in alone.

This session gives a buildup to and efficient training in dealing with the breakaway situation.



### **Closing Down and Smothering in a Lane - 6x12 yard lane**

An environment used to train goalkeepers to deal with break-away situations, the lane is used to limit the options of the attacker and allow the goalkeeper to refine timing and technique in these situations. The goalkeepers begin on opposite ends of the lane. The goalkeeper with the ball passes to her partner, who becomes the attacker, and then closes down. Adjust the size of the lane to reflect the ability and experience of the goalkeepers.



The goalkeeper should adopt a crouched ready position (with the hands out at the sides and low, as there is less concern about rebounds here and more focus on just blocking the ball), and use a couple larger steps to close the space. Then she switches to short steps (easier to adjust). Once in close, the goalkeeper looks for a touch by the attacker that would allow her to smother (block) the ball. Change roles after each save.

#### Coach blocking

- Similar to collapse diving. Goalkeeper gets close to the ball and then pushes down onto her side (outside of knee, hip and shoulder are contact points). Reach the hands to the ball (take the ball away from the attacker) with one hand well in front of the face and one reaching to get on top of the ball. Arms are bent (like springs) to absorb a kick from the attacker if necessary.

The most common errors here are

- Goalkeepers leaving their feet too early.
- Approaching straight on, which makes it difficult to get hands to ball while getting into a blocking position.
- Leading with the feet (creates rebounds, fouls and no chance for recovery).

To begin, the attacker makes it easy for the goalkeeper to take the ball.

#### Progression

- The attacker moves full speed but cannot shoot (must dribble past the goalkeeper if possible).



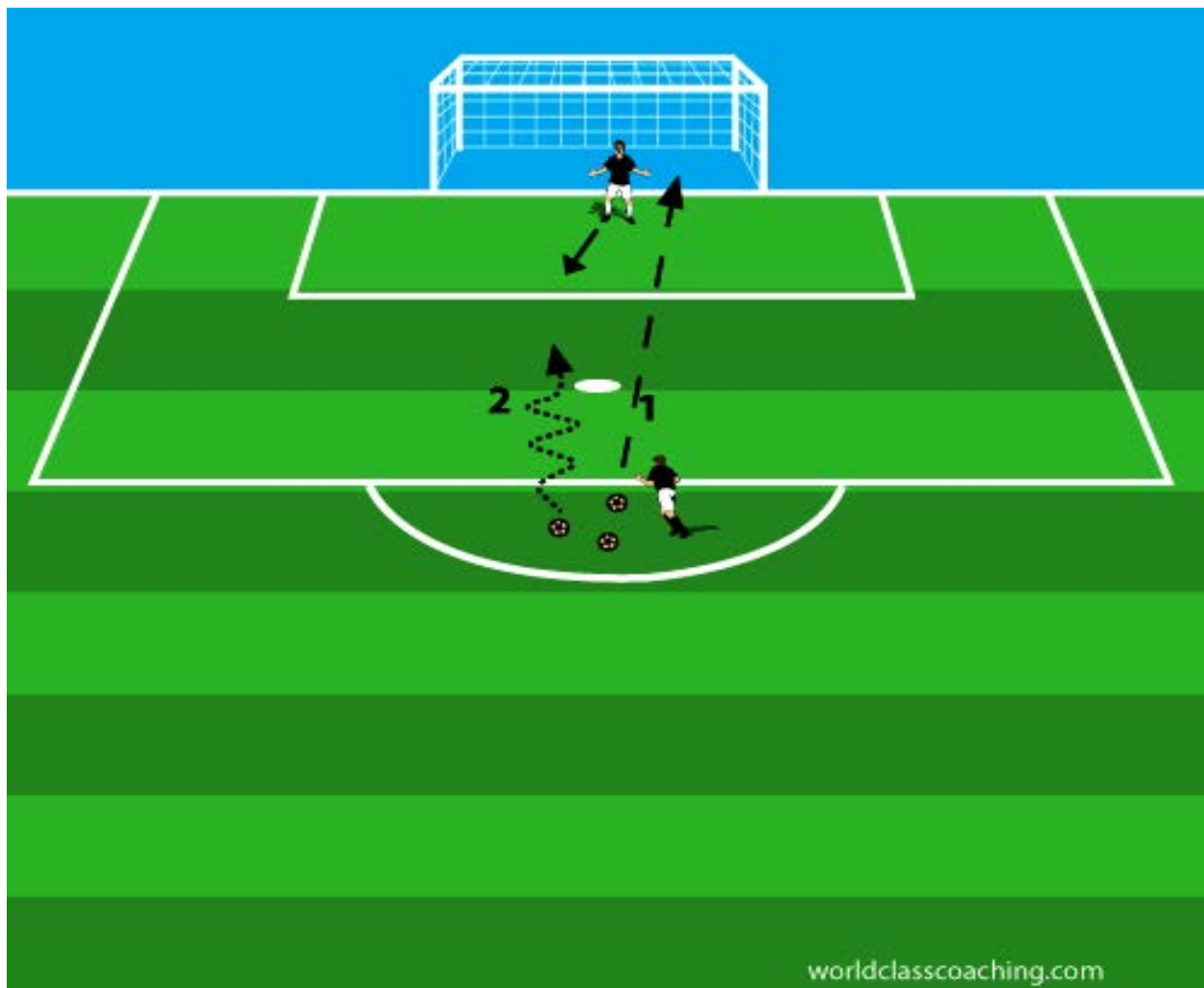
- Next, the attacker fakes a shot (forces the goalkeeper to set her feet to deal with the potential shot) and then returns to the attack.
- Finally, the attacker has no restrictions other than that she must play full speed and cannot stop or turn back.

### **Breakaway to Goal-1/3 field**

Attackers must run at full speed to goal, but otherwise have no restrictions. Goalkeepers are taught to expand their range and understanding in these situations by building on the lessons learned in the build-up exercise above. Because the distance is greater, it is important for the goalkeeper to recognize a breakaway situation immediately and start to close down the attacker immediately.

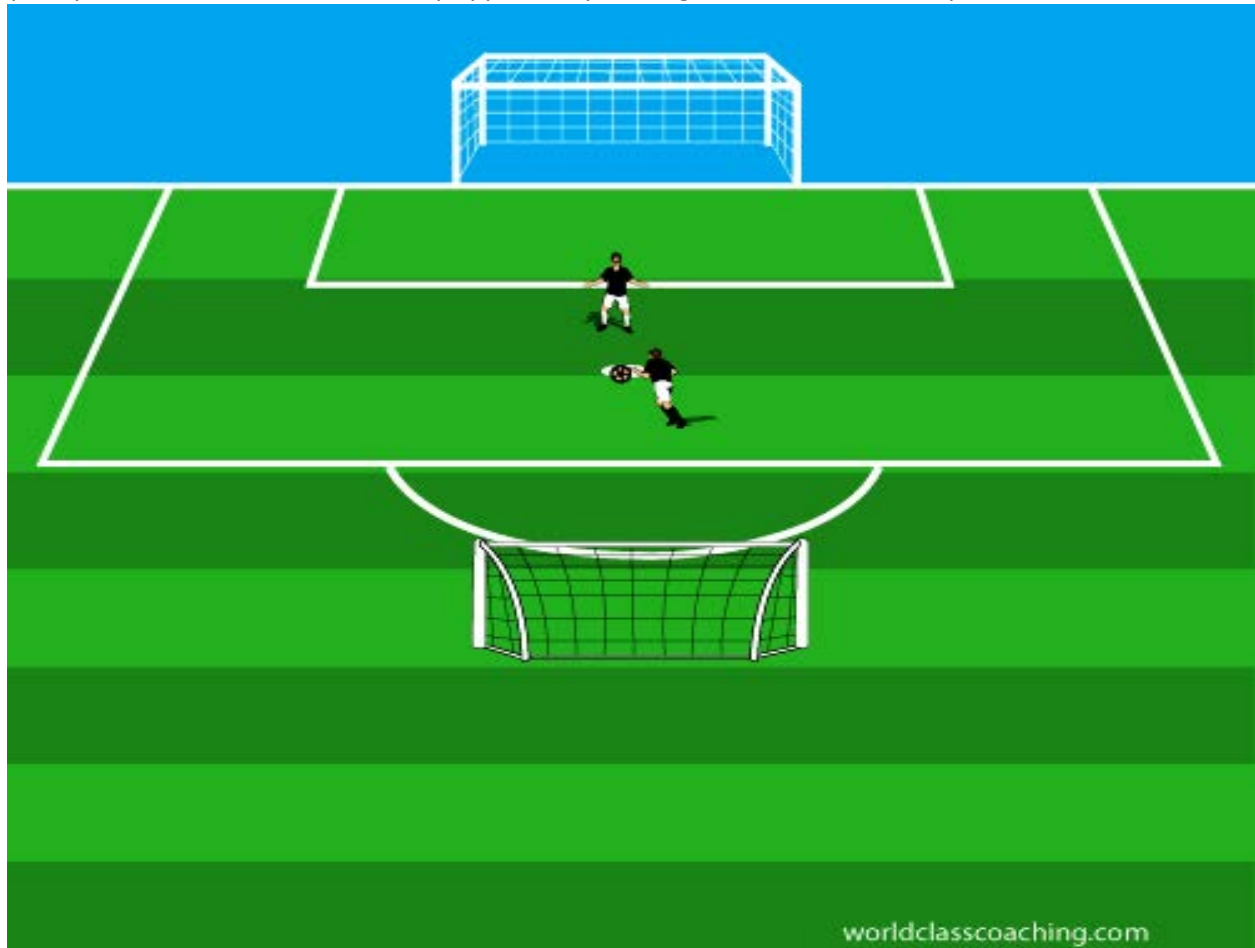
#### **Coaching Points**

- Long strides early to close distance.
- Short steps in close to allow for quick adjustment.
- If the attacker gives indications she will shoot (long touch, looks up and then down, raises heel of shooting foot), the 'keeper must set her feet.
- Close down and smother the ball, leading with the hands.



### Long Shot Break-Away

After shooting from distance, the attacker runs onto a ball at the top of the 18-yard box and a break-away situation ensues. The goalkeeper must remain near her line to thwart the long shot and then quickly close down on the breakaway opportunity. Change roles after three sequences.



### Goalkeeper Challenge

Using two goals (or smaller cone goals) placed 18 yards apart, this is an outstanding environment for goalkeepers to learn to deal with 1v1 situations. Each restart begins with the attacking goalkeeper with one hand on the ball at the center of the area and the defending goalkeeper standing two yards away. As soon as the attacker removes her hand from the ball, play is live, as the attacker attempts to score and the defending goalkeeper attempts to secure control of the ball. This exercise creates coaching and learning opportunities in the areas of angle play, closing down, blocking, covering, shot-stopping, recovery, fitness and more. Moreover, by playing the attacker, goalkeepers develop an advanced understanding of the attacker's mindset, options and challenges in these situations. When the ball leaves the area, a goal is scored, or the defending 'keeper gains control, a restart results with the goalkeepers changing roles.

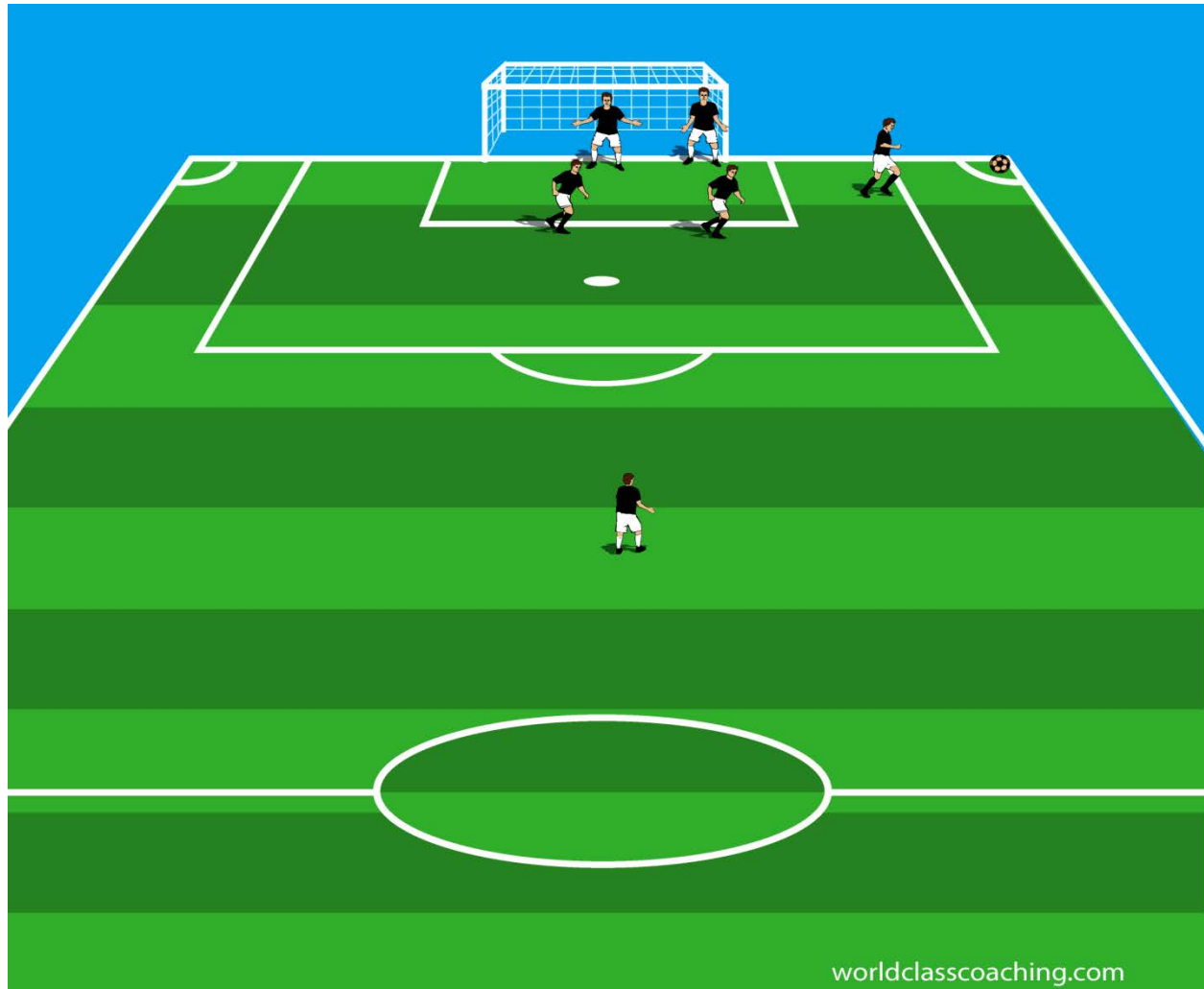
#### Variations

- Play is live off of turnovers. This rule change speeds up play but also detracts from the structure and focus gained through the set restart.

## **Training Session#12: Defending Set-Pieces**

### **Introduction**

The primary role of the goalkeeper at set-pieces (free kicks and corner kicks) is to focus on the ball and, if necessary, make a save. However, goalkeepers, by their position, have the best view of the field and they also, as they grow older, develop a leadership role. This responsibility includes motivating and organizing the team to defend the set-piece intelligently and aggressively. This session includes diagrams showing, both at U9/U10 and at U11/U12, recommended set-piece defending.

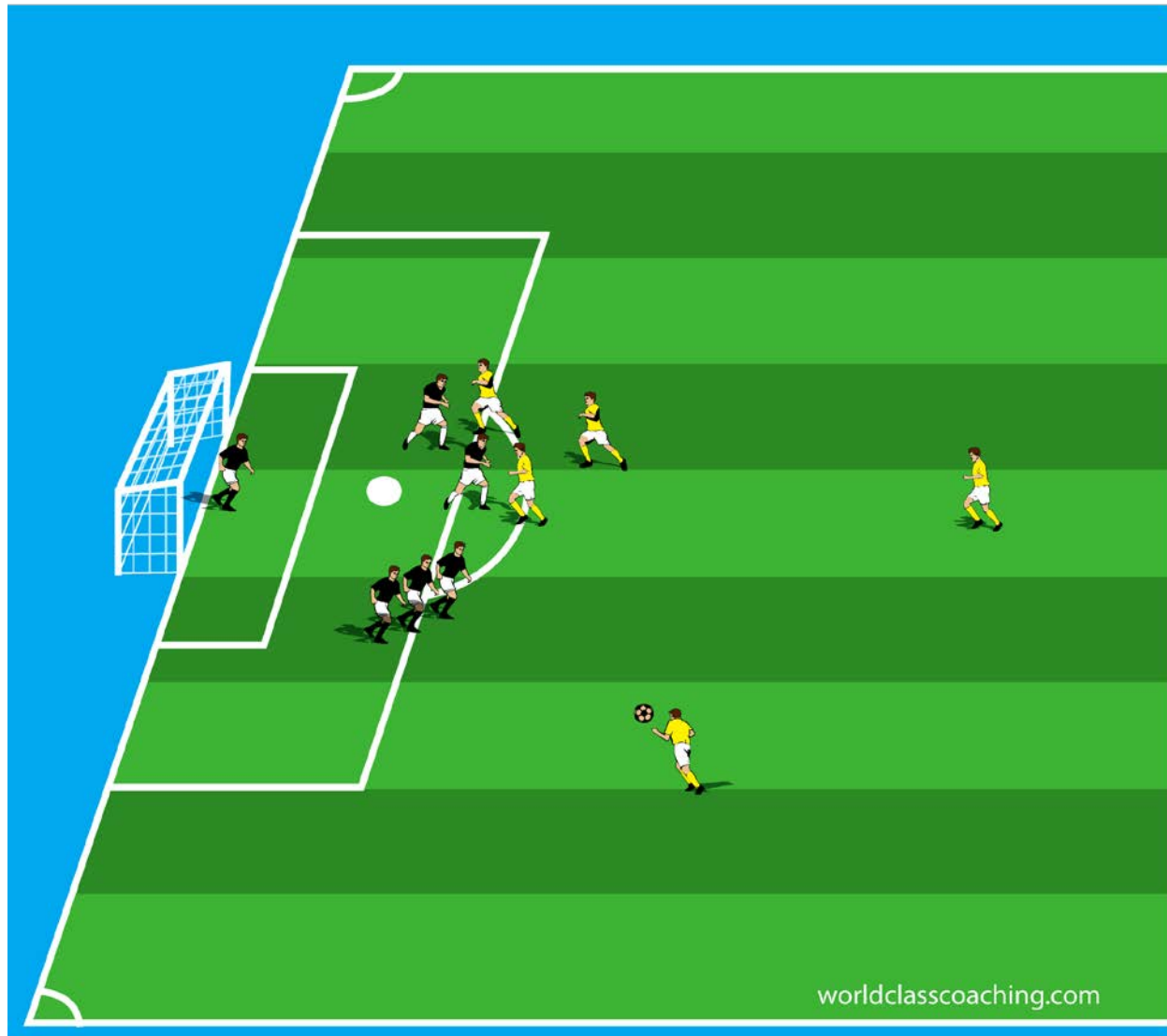


### **U9/U10 Defending Corner Kicks**

Defending corner kicks at these ages presents an opportunity to teach the players about thinking about defending as a group. In the example above, a defender stands at the near post. Her responsibility is to send away any ball that is played directly into her space from the corner. The other defender marks the nearest opponent (goal-side) in the box area, and the midfielder(s) do the same. The goalkeeper's focus is to first assure that all of her teammates are dealing with the most dangerous opponents and then to

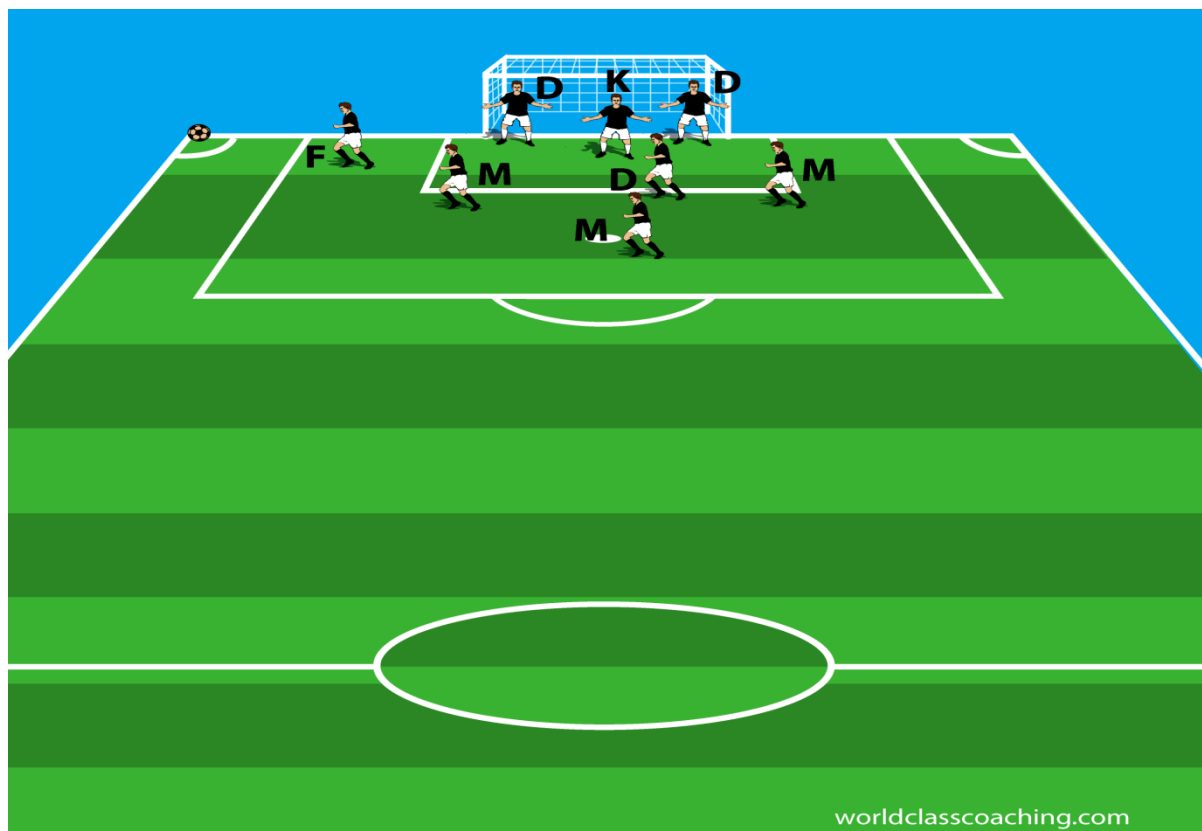


make an early decision as to whether she will play the ball (call 'keeper!') or if the defense must clear the ball (call 'away!'). Note that a forward is sent to the corner to deal with any short corner attempt by the opposition and perhaps knock down any effort by the kicker to serve the ball before goal. The general notion here is to teach young players to want to get the first touch in this situation and for the group to work together to clear the ball and move forward as a team.



### **U9/U10 Defending Indirect Free Kicks**

The spot of the restart affects the team's response. In the attacking half of the field, the team all get goal-side and mark opponents. In the defending half, if a shot is a possibility, 2-3 players form a wall (based on the near post) and the goalkeeper marks the back half of the goal. The other players mark the opposing players nearest the goal.



### U11/U12 Defending Corner Kicks - 1/3 field

Corner kicks offer a very strong chance to score at any level, and the coach preparing her team to defend in these situations must first answer several important questions:

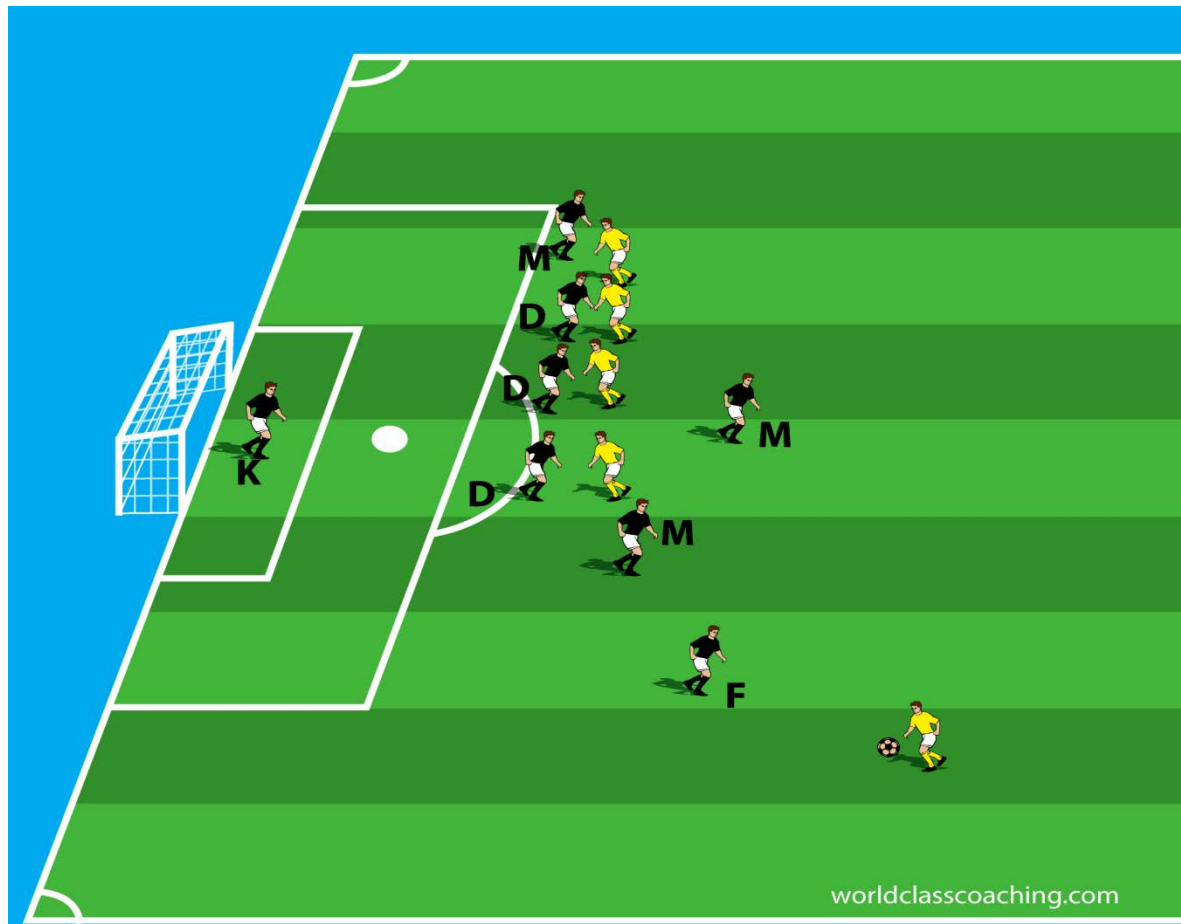
1. Will the team employ zone or man-marking or a mix?
2. How many players will defend?
3. How well does the team defend in the air (the answer to this question impacts the answer to #2)?
4. How big an area can be assigned to the goalkeeper (i.e. how strong is the goalkeeper in the air and handling the ball in traffic)?
5. Other considerations (opponents' efficiency at corners, weather, game situation).

### Recommendation

- deploy a mix of zonal defending and man-marking as shown, placing players at each post (note the near-side defender's up-field-facing position before the kick, freeing the goalkeeper's vision. If instructed to clear the ball by the goalkeeper, she steps out and plays the ball away); the center back and the goalkeeper to control the six-yard box; the three midfielders are placed in a stacked zone across the top of the six-yard box. Any ball that would fall in front of any one of them is their responsibility. The forward is responsible for dealing with any potential short corner (many teams send one player to the corner to deal with this possibility and distract the kicker. It's even better to send a second player- a midfielder- to play 2 vs. 2 against a short corner). A midfielder can be detailed to mark a particularly dangerous opponent.
- train a confident, aggressive mentality into the group for defending corners. Playing passively will lead to goals being conceded, whereas a loud, active and determined defending group

provides an intimidating environment for the attackers and also gives the defenders a psychological sense of purpose.

- clearing out. The team hunts the ball once the serve is struck. When the ball is played away from the goal, all but the two backs on the posts must pursue and pressure the ball. When the ball leaves the box, the two players on the posts sprint forward. Keeping them in gives extra protection in the goal area while the ball is still in a dangerous position. However, when the ball leaves the area, the danger decreases and the retention of those players on the posts both eliminates the possibility of an offside call against the attackers and detracts from the width of the defensive back line in transition.

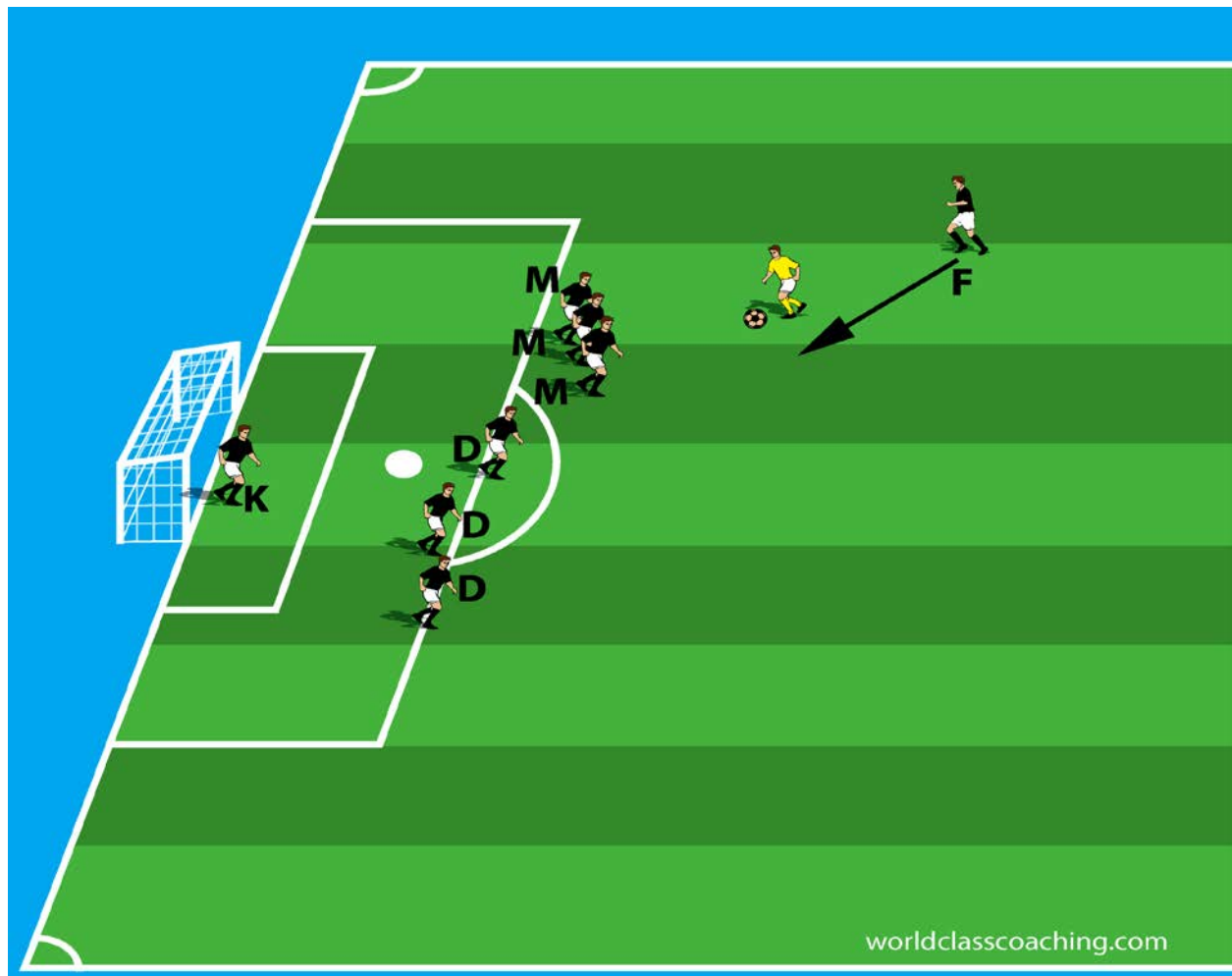


#### **Defending Direct or Indirect Free Kicks: Beyond Shooting Range - 2/3 field**

When the opponent earns a free kick from beyond shooting range, the defending group may still employ a small wall (1-2 players) to distract the server and additional players may remain in the area to deal with short options for the attackers. The remainder of the team organize a restraining line to develop space for the goalkeeper to handle a long serve toward the area. Players along the restraining line should get shoulder-on with an attacker, with the idea that the contact will wreck the timing of their run into the area and also allow the defender to arrive first. If possible, at least one central defender should be left free. Some teams, particularly at the youth level, prefer to have this player leave the line and run into the area just before the ball is struck to give the player an advantage in the race to the ball. This decision may wreck the offside protection offered by holding the line, but it also gives the defender a major advantage. Regardless, the goalkeeper must make an early call as to whether she will handle the



ball or if the team will need to clear the serve, and once the ball is cleared, the entire team must work to get forward and recover their shape as quickly as possible.



### **Defending Direct or Indirect Free Kicks: Shooting Range - 1/3 field**

Direct free kicks from around the edge of the 18-yard box and at angles where shots can be taken require special treatment from a defensive perspective. The coach should give parameters for the number of players to be placed in the wall (from 1-2 for wide angles and up to 4-5 for shots from straight on). Typically the midfielders and/or forward(s) form the wall. The coach can instruct the goalkeeper to arrange the wall or a forward can perform the same duty so that the goalkeeper can focus exclusively on the ball. Either way, the wall should be arranged with the tallest player on the near post (this area is most in danger, as the goalkeeper begins in the back half of the goal) and shorter players filling out the line. It is critical that the coach work out the process for the placement of the wall so that it can be done in just a few seconds under pressure. If the goalkeeper will set the wall, the end player (tallest) should either turn and face her or look over her outside shoulder to see her instructions, all the while grasping the next player in the wall to assure that movement is synchronized. The end player, as a rule, should be at least the width of one person outside the post to deter attempts to bend the ball around the wall. The defenders mark opponents around the wall, picking up the most dangerous players first and holding a line nearly as high as the wall itself (to minimize traffic for the goalkeeper in trying to make the save).

#### Tactical considerations

- in the modern game, most defending teams put a player(s) 2-3 yards in front of the ball to wreck any idea of taking the kick before the wall can be set. By the rules of the game, this is meant to be rewarded with a yellow card, but it is almost universal that there is no card and the attacker requests the proper 10-yard spacing. Once the official steps in to set the wall at the proper distance, play is only restarted with the referee's whistle.
- use of a 'bullet.' Although more common in indirect free kick situations, some teams send a player off of the end of the wall running at the ball ('bullet') just before it is struck. Once again, technically-speaking this should result in a yellow card, but most often it results in a blocked kick. Many coaches only employ a 'bullet(s)' only in indirect kick situations.

#### **U11/U12 Indirect Free Kick in the Area - 18-yard box**

Occasionally, a team will concede an indirect free kick in the area. This is a very dangerous situation, particularly if the placement of the ball is close to the goal mouth (as shown). In this case, many coaches place the entire team on the goal line, splitting the wall around the goalkeeper. Remind players that since this is an indirect kick situation, the opponents will need to take a touch before shooting. When that first touch is taken, the entire wall (some coaches leave players on the posts) sprints forward, keeping in their lanes, hoping to block the shot. Indirect kicks from sharp angles can be played more like a corner kick, with defenders on the posts and a combination of zone and man-marking in front of goal.

## **Conclusion**

Coaching goalkeepers is often a source of discomfort for soccer coaches at any age. The distinctive skill set, the tactical requirements and mental approach required to become a good goalkeeper are not a common ingredient in standard coaching education and can be particularly daunting for new coaches of young players. Many coaches struggle with finding the time and means to work with their goalkeepers (or, if the team rotates everyone through the goal, finding time to train the team in goalkeeping basics) even if they have a good idea of how to train goalkeepers. Yet virtually everyone would acknowledge that to not train goalkeeping and goalkeepers is to court certain chaos in the goal on game day.

This program is intended to be a bridge for everyone from the club goalkeeping specialist looking for curriculum to the coach of young players who wants to work with his/her goalkeepers in and out of training in brief, efficient sessions, and also for the parent who wants to help their child learn more about the goalkeeping position.

Playing goalkeeper in the pre-teen years is highly beneficial for children not only to learn about goalkeeping in case they decide or are needed to play goalkeeper permanently as they mature, but also because experience in goal helps players understand much more about the game and the challenges and rewards of playing the position.



### **Sources and Recommended Reading**

NSCAA. Goalkeeping Level 1 Diploma. Course materials.

NSCAA. Goalkeeping Level 2 Diploma. Course materials.

NSCAA. Goalkeeping Level 3 Diploma. Course materials.

Tony Di Cicco. Proper Goalkeeper Match Warm-up. Field session.

Peter Greiber and Robert Freis. The Complete 'Keeper.

Maarten Arts. The Soccer Goalkeeper Coach.

Tony Englund. Keeper Wars: Goalkeeper Training in a Competitive Environment.

## About the Author



Photo courtesy of Christopher Mitchell and Minnesota Youth Soccer Association

Tony Englund is the Assistant Director of Coaching at St. Croix Soccer Club. Tony has earned more than a dozen diplomas from the National Soccer Coaches' Association of America, including the Premier, National Goalkeeping and Director of Coaching awards and he serves as an Associate Staff Coach for that organization. Tony is a frequent presenter at high-level coaching clinics. He has served as Director of Coaching and Player Development with three Minnesota clubs and has more than twenty years' experience as a successful club, high school and college head coach. His teams have repeatedly earned promotion to the highest levels of state and Midwest Regional League play and won multiple state championships, premier league titles and consistent regional rankings. He is the author of nine books published by World Class Coaching.

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