

## A YOUNG GOALKEEPER

### THE Modern Goalkeeper: Takes the Ball with Hands but Plays with Legs and Brain

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In this article, I would like to focus on the work with young “future” goalkeepers. I want to remind you that this topic is related to kids from age 8 to 10 years old. In my opinion, it is not the right age to make a specific position for each player, neither with a kid that shows a natural talent to play as a goalkeeper. Watch the kids coming to the field on t-shirts with the image of their favorite goalkeeper (in Italy the current favorite goalie is Buffon) can be nice but also somewhat indulgent.

We cannot forget that the kids must have fun and this has to be the objective for each coach. We can indulge and let them play as their favorite championship, but we cannot lose our focus on helping them with the growth path of a soccer player, a goalkeeper to an athlete, and then to an adult.

We know that the goalkeeper position requires more acrobatic and coordination skills than others. While the normal position requires coordination of feet, legs, body and head, the goalkeeper also requires coordination with the hands and arms. We can't assume that if the goalie has to use the hands and arms as the principal limb, it is not necessary to focus on coordination of the legs.

The modern goalkeeper must know how to use all body coordination as the other players, because through the accurate passing, he can be the first striker. A great example is Manuel Neuer, German goalkeeper of the Bayern Munich and 2014 world champion in Brazil. Today the number one goalkeeper not only has to know how to defend his goal, but understand the game and his tactical situations in defense and attack. These skills allow the goalkeeper to be the owner of his area and sometimes to become an additional defender.

In modern soccer, the goalie is the first striker so he has a specific tactic assignment. This takes an evolution of the training methodology which not only focus on training the goalkeeper to defend his own goal, but also learning how to manage the entire defense area and to kick with his feet.

So it is important to not teach the kids to be just “only” a goalkeeper. He must try different positions and understand their differences because in the future he will “command” the defenders both mid-fielders and strikers.

It is also good for to make scrimmages without goalkeepers or with little doors so that the goalie can understand the challenges to control the ball with his own feet, to react to the pressing and to play with the teammates more directly. This way, he will be good at giving directions and signals to his teammates.

We coaches should stimulate and facilitate the involvement of our young goalkeepers in the scrimmages (perhaps implementing a rotation). We can arrange exercises or themed games, to develop the techniques. I focus on this topic because today the goalkeeper is required to be very nimble in the phase of “transition,” that is the moment when his team conquest or loses the ball. This situation, by the statistics, is the moment of goal opportunities. The slower the goalkeeper is in the transitional phase, the more goal situation will be created. So this is the opportunity to create a situation where his team players outnumber the opponents. The goalkeeper is often the starter of this kind of action, which transforms himself from the last defender into the first striker.

## **Exercises**

### **1. Bowling with Slalom**

This exercise improves the ability to launch with the hands or pass with foot, depending on the variant applied. It also trains to control the ball and shoot.

*The game is carried out in pairs. At the start they have to try to hit a target through a roll with their hands. Whoever closer to the target is entitled to a shot on goal, and run after a slalom.*



*Variants:*

- *One teammate as referee*
- *You can pull on the rebound of the goalkeeper*
- *Other teammates are defenders, take the place of the slalom*

### **2. Goals below or above the tape**

The exercise requires the analysis of the trajectory of the ball that the goalkeeper can move with the body behind it, and the ability to throw or kick the ball in a defined space.



The game is to go in turns to defend a door (4x2 meters) that has a colored ribbon from pole to pole, at a height that can vary from the indications of the coach. The other gatekeepers serve as strikers throw the ball over or under the tape, as the coach will determine, from a distance of about 10 meters. When the attackers throw the ball with his hands the goalkeeper ca not use your hands to parry, but will reject the ball with any part of the body, thus increasing their awareness towards it.

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