

USING THE GOALKEEPER TO HELP MAINTAIN POSSESSION AND RELIEVE PRESSURE

By Fran Kulas

After a 2002 World Cup where many teams were unable to protect a one-goal lead due to their inability to maintain possession, this session looks at a specific avenue in using the goalkeeper to help maintain possession and relieve pressure.

Rarely do we see players pass balls to their goalkeeper from areas deeper into midfield than the edge of the defending third of the field, in attempts to maintain possession of the ball or relieve pressure. Teams who utilize their goalkeeper as a “member of the team” while in possession, are in a sense playing a man up, 11 vs. 10.

In addition, it is important that when the ball is played back to the goalkeeper from players in more forward positions, that our players understand that this situation is a chance for the team in possession to reset or reframe the look and shape of the game. *A pass to the goalkeeper changes the shape of the game like no other* and if the team is trained properly to recognize the visual cues, can be a fantastic opportunity to manipulate the opponent. For example, most teams’ lines of confrontation are set by their highest player, or player in the most forward position. If a ball was to be played to the goalkeeper and a forward chases, for most teams this would be a signal for the rest of the team to step forward as a group. As a result of manipulating the opponent in this fashion, it creates an opportunity for the attacking team to utilize the newly created space in order to penetrate. If the ball is played to the goalkeeper and a forward does not chase, it is then that we realize the opponent has drawn their line of confrontation deeper into midfield. When this happens, it generally is a signal that the attacking team will have time and space to play out of the back third.

Two reasons why players and teams do not often pass to their goalkeepers to maintain possession are 1- they don’t have confidence in the goalkeeper’s foot skills and total-soccer playing abilities and 2 – they aren’t comfortable playing balls in the direction of their own goal. This session aims to provide the goalkeeper with ample opportunities to prove him/herself to his/her teammates in a range of activities with the ball at his/her feet. In addition, this session presents a wide range of scenarios for field players to sharpen their awareness as to instances when it is most advantageous to play the ball to their goalkeeper in an attempt to maintain possession or relieve pressure.

At this point of this presentation you may be raising the question:

Why would a player in the midfield want to play the ball back to their goalkeeper when they can play it to their sweeper (who usually provides depth) or a defender who would be closer to the player under pressure?

Response – with the latest trend going to more flat and “principle based” back lines, many times the only constant player providing depth is the goalkeeper. To take it a step further, assuming that there was a “sweeper,” it would be more likely that an opposing forward would be closer to the sweeper or any defender for that matter, than the goalkeeper, thus creating a more dangerous situation if the ball were to be played to a defender.

* Note to Coaches – this session has been designed based on 16 available field players and 2 goalkeepers. Coaches will need to make adjustments to the session based on the total number of available players and space for their session.

Warm-Up

Set-Up

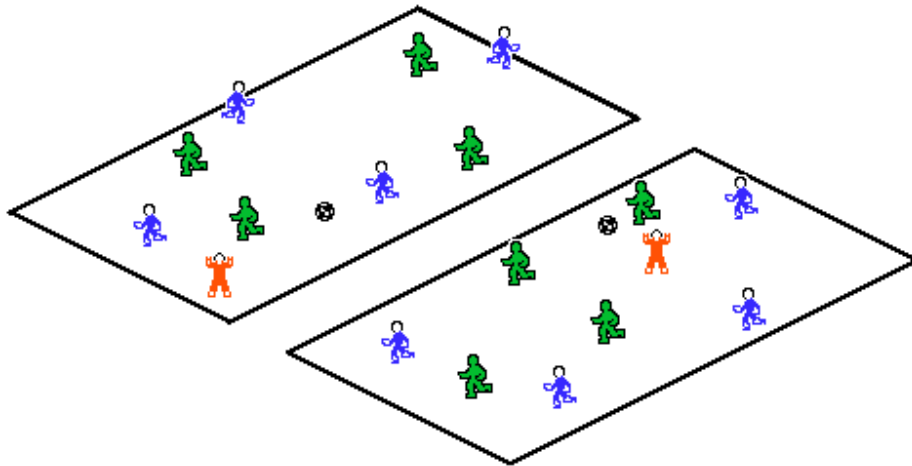
- Divide entire team into 4 smaller teams of 4, with two teams, 1 goalkeeper, and 1 ball in each area

Explanation

- Players pass and move inside area, with every 3rd pass going to the goalkeeper. Goalkeeper must alternate between 3-2-1 touches each time he/she is played the ball and must play to a player different color than the one who passed it to him/her.
- After the goalkeeper has received and passed the ball a total of four times, he/she must look to play a long ball to a player in the opposite grid. When the ball arrives in the opposite grid, the cycle repeats.

Coaching Points

- Goalkeeper's awareness and vision as it relates to options off the ball
- Goalkeeper's speed of play both technically and tactically
- Goalkeeper's angle of support
- Field players' angles of support
- Technical aspects of passing and receiving



Small Group Possession Activity

Set-Up

- Same as above

Explanation

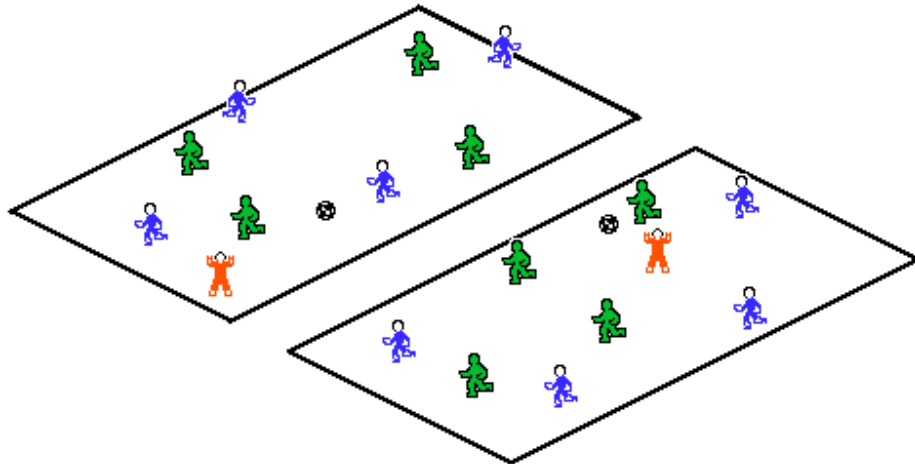
- 4 vs. 4 + 1 keep away in each field. Goalkeeper plays with team in possession to create a numbers up situation (5 vs. 4)
- A point is scored when a team can achieve 4 consecutive passes consecutively in the same possession, one of which must go to, and come from the goalkeeper

Variations

- Place touch restrictions (maximums and minimums) on goalkeeper

Coaching Points

- Play away from pressure, not into it
- Keep the game and the ball moving
- 1st touch should take players : 1-where they want to go and 2-away from pressure
- Encourage players to stay “facing the game”



Match Related Activity

Set-Up

- 9 vs. 9 (8 field players + 1 goalkeeper)
- Field divided into 3rds
- Players are NOT restricted to thirds of the field

Explanation

Stage #1

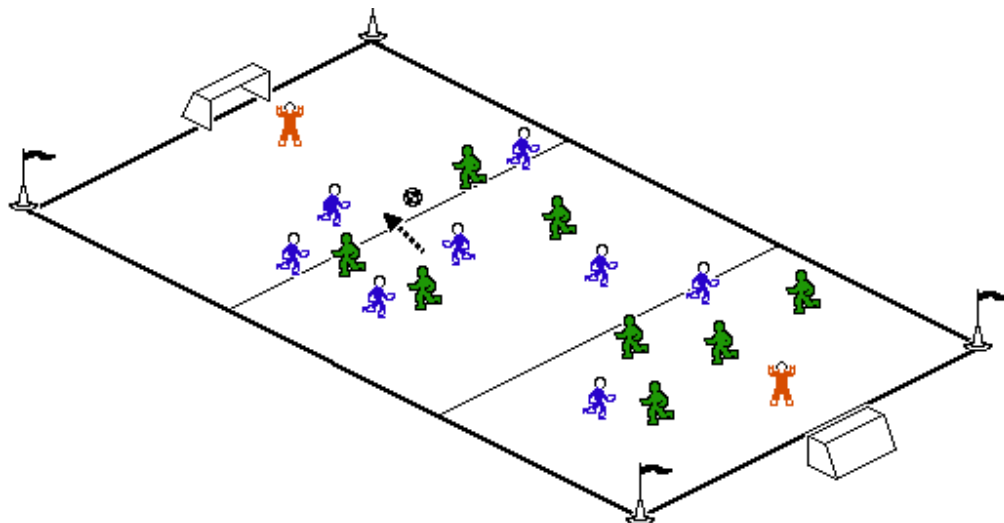
- If ball is won by defending team in middle 3rd of the field, they must pass the ball to the goalkeeper in the same possession before being permitted to go to goal

Stage #2

- Award 1 point for a normal goal
- Award 2 points for the team whose goalkeeper touches the ball in the same possession of which a goal is scored

Coaching Points

- Goalkeepers must stay “in-line” with the ball and the game
- Goalkeepers must display positive body shape that “invites” a pass
- Goalkeepers must play high off goal-line when appropriate (can afford to be higher off when team is in possession than when they are in transition from offense to defense, or when they are defending)
- Field players must quickly recycle their team shape to one that is conducive for maintaining possession, after the ball has been played to the goalkeeper (width, length) [this will be determined by the opponents’ line of confrontation]



Final Match Condition Activity

Set-Up

- 9 vs. 9 (8 field players + 1 goalkeeper) with goals on the top of the 18-yard box

Explanation

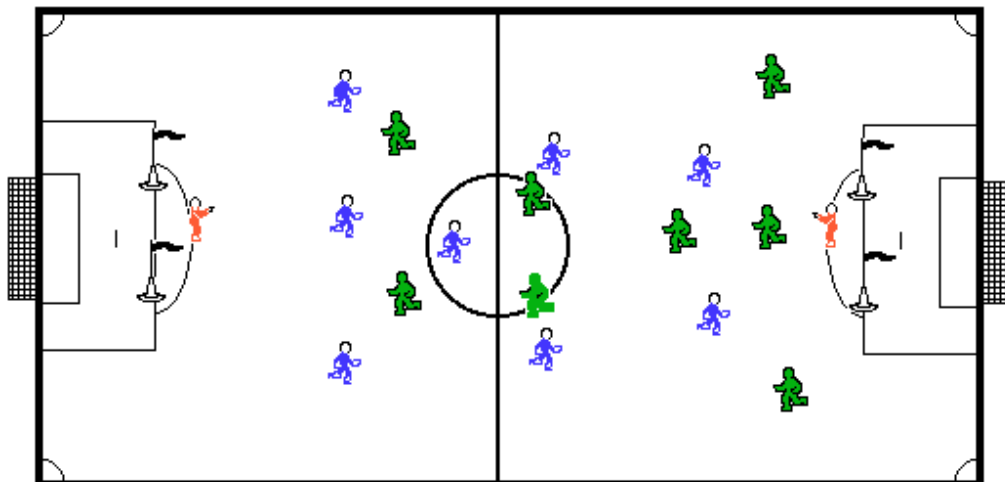
- Play normal soccer only when one team goes ahead by a goal, that same team may not score again until the score is tied. When the score is tied, either team may attempt to score until one team gains a lead. The cycle repeats with each lead change.

Variations

- The team that is ahead 1-0 may achieve a point by achieving a predetermined number of passes, one of which must include the goalkeeper
- Play the game in a 20 minute time period and have the team who is ahead at the end of the 20 minutes declared the winner

Coaching Points

- Recognizing how style of play changes when the score of the game changes and how the goalkeeper's role varies with these changes
- Playing away from pressure vs. into it
- Using the goalkeeper to relieve pressure





Fran Kulas is the State Director of Coach and Player Development for the Kentucky Youth Soccer Association. In addition to his role with KYSA, Kulas is also the Assistant Women's Soccer Coach at Morehead State University (NCAA I) and serves on the Region II ODP Girl's staff (goalkeeper and team staff). He is also a member of U.S. Youth Soccer's National Coaching Education Staff and serves as the Chairperson of U.S. Youth Soccer's Parent Education Advisory Group.

Prior to his arrival in Kentucky, Kulas was the Head Women's Soccer Coach at Wittenberg University (NCAA III) in Springfield, Ohio for three years. While coaching at Wittenberg, Kulas was a staff member of the Ohio South Youth Soccer Association Olympic Development and Coaching Education Programs.

Prior to coming to Ohio, Kulas led his girl's high school team, A.I. DuPont, to the Delaware State Championship and a national ranking of 4th in 1999. Prior to coaching at A.I., Kulas was the Assistant Men's Soccer Coach at his alma mater, the University of Delaware (NCAA I). Prior to joining the UD staff, Kulas served for two seasons as the Assistant Coach/Goalkeeper Coach for the Delaware Wizards (U.S.I.S.L. D3 Professional) and the Delaware Genies (U.S.I.S.L. W-1). While in Delaware, Kulas was a member of the Region I Girl's ODP staff (goalkeeper and team staff) and served in many capacities for the Delaware ODP, including five years as the Head Goalkeeping Coach for the program.

Coach Kulas graduated from the University of Delaware with a Bachelor's Degree in English Literary Studies and holds the USSF National "A" and "Youth" Coaching Licenses. He has published articles in several nationally recognized publications including *Soccer America*, *Success in Soccer*, *Performance Soccer Conditioning* and *World Class Coaching* and has presented at the last three U.S. Youth Soccer's adidas Workshop and Coaches Conventions (Leadership in Today's American Culture – 2003) & (Parent Education – 2004 & 2005).