

**AY/CY Coaching Clinic**  
**Coaching Goalkeepers: Important Basics and**  
**Tactics**

**October 3, 2010**

**I. Techniques**

- A. Footwork\*\*
- B. Positioning\*\*
- C. Catching\*\*
- D. Parrying/Punching
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**II. General Tactics**

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**\*\*Drills for certain techniques can be found in separate document.**

Kevin Wolfe

San Carlos, CA

(650) 340-6503 work / (650) 743-1082 cell / (650) 593-9213 home

[kevin.wolfe@morganstanley.com](mailto:kevin.wolfe@morganstanley.com)

## GOALKEEPING TECHNIQUES

Soccer goalkeeping technique is focused on the mechanics of catching the ball, or at least deflecting it around the goal. Footwork is the key, because if a keeper's feet can't get them to where the ball is going, their hands will be useless. Catching is important, since sloppy catching technique can allow the ball to slip through the hands and into the net. Proper positioning allows the keeper to cover the largest portion of the goal possible, but occasionally a desperate diving attempt must be made to catch or deflect difficult shots. Finally, remember the goalkeeper is the last line of defense and the first line of attack - a keeper has to know the best way to get the ball to their teammates after the save has been made.

Goalkeeping is about safety - half is the safety of the goal; the other half is the safety of the *goalkeeper*. Proper goalkeeping technique is critical not only to keep the ball out of the net, but to keep the goalkeeper from getting injured. A good technical goalkeeper is safe in more ways than one, thus the importance of instilling good habits early. A poor technical keeper is a danger to their team and to themselves, so teach them well!


## FOOTWORK

### Quick Summary - Footwork:

- Keep the feet moving
- Stay square to the ball
- Always get the body behind the ball
- Move forwards toward the ball
- Recover quickly with hands free
- Stay close to the ready position

### Mistakes to Watch For:

- Not getting completely behind the ball
- Back on the heels
- Feet crossing over each other
- Stepping backwards on the save

Footwork is the foundation of solid goalkeeping!  Often the difference between a save and a goal is just half a step. Use the feet to get the body behind the ball.

## POSITIONING

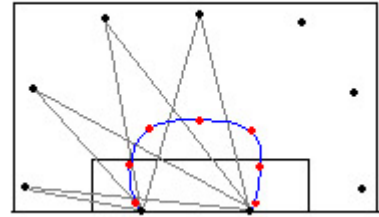
### Quick Summary - Positioning:

- Know the location of the goalposts
- Stay on line between the center of the goal and the ball
- Move far enough off the line to cover the angle to each post
- Be aware of balls over the head when way off the line
- At sharp angles, always play outside the near post

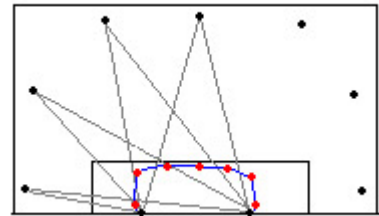
### Mistakes to Watch For:

- Not checking the goalposts frequently
- Staying planted on the goal line
- Standing inside the near post on sharp-angled shots

# CATCHING



The Goalkeeper's Arc






Adjusted Arc (to counter the "chip")

## Quick Summary - Catching:

- Hands to the ball first
- Soft, quiet, cushioning hands and arms
- Good catching position - "W" with thumbs behind the ball or inverted contour with pinkies touching
- High balls need to be caught at the highest point possible
- On ground pickups, get fingertips all the way to the ground by bending at the waist and knees
- Protect the ball properly, but only after the catch has been made securely

## Mistakes to Watch For:

- Trapping ball with body part other than hands (chest, forearms, etc.)
- Hands on the sides of the ball
- Waiting on high balls
- Legs apart and not behind the ball
- Attempting to protect the ball before the catch is secure
- Knees on the ground at any time

- For balls high in the air, the hand position is the same. However, the goalkeeper must also take additional steps to ensure they can catch the ball cleanly:
  - Jump to catch the ball at the  highest point possible.  Keepers must not wait on a high ball in the air and make a basket catch at the waist! They must get to the ball above their heads. If the ball is not caught high, attackers can rush in and head the ball away before it gets to the keeper's hands. Watch carefully for this and insist they use proper technique.
  - Raise one knee, the one nearest any opposing pressure, as they jump. This provides extra boost for the jump, and also can provide some protection against onrushing forwards.  However, a goalkeeper should *never* raise their knee with intent to injure or "send a message" to another player. The knee is primarily used to generate additional height on the jump, secondarily as a fender against collisions. It should be kept close in to the keeper's body.

## PARRYING & PUNCHING

### Quick Summary - Parrying:

- Use drop step & crossover to go back on the ball
- Use opposite (top) hand on high balls, same side (low) hand on wide balls
- Drive through the ball
- Use open hand and fingers to guide the ball around post
- For wide balls, go forward at an angle

### Quick Summary - Punching:

- Use for crosses that cannot be caught
- Try for maximum width, distance and height
- Fingers form flat surface, thumb behind fist
- Two hands to send the ball in the opposite direction; one hand to continue it in the same direction
- Start with hands in, elbows out, and drive through the ball

### Mistakes to Watch For:

- Using fist to deflect ball around goal
- Backing up on heels for balls over head
- Pushing ball upwards with full hand
- Turning the palm and pushing ball backwards or "dunking" it

### Mistakes to watch for:

- Fingers not forming flat punching surface
- Thumbs tucked inside fist
- Punching with arms already extended
- Wide, looping swing on a one-handed punch

## DIVING

Diving should only be done as a last resort - good footwork and positioning should eliminate the need to dive often. ⚠  
Beware the keeper who loves to dive *too* much and dives even on what should be easy saves. It looks impressive, but safety should come first.

### Quick Summary - Diving:

- Use good footwork to get into position first
- Step forward into the dive
- Stay square to the shooter
- Catch the ball with the hands first
- Power to the ball with the near leg, opposite knee drives across for extra boost
- Land on the side (hip and shoulder)
- Don't use hands to get back up

### Mistakes to Watch For:

- Diving backwards
- Turning over onto stomach or back after the save
- Weak power step and drive to ball

# BREAKAWAYS

## Quick Summary - Breakaways:

- Good starting position
- Time the shooter
- Match the shooter's pace
- Stay up as long as possible
- Approach in a low ready position
- Stay square with the slide
- Center the soccer ball at the midsection
- Hands to the ball first!

## Mistakes to Watch For:

- Approaching attacker with wrong pace
- Not getting low enough on approach
- Sliding feet first
- Catching the ball at head level
- Turning over on the ball after the save
- Not recovering after a deflection or after the attacker gets by

## Coming Off the Line

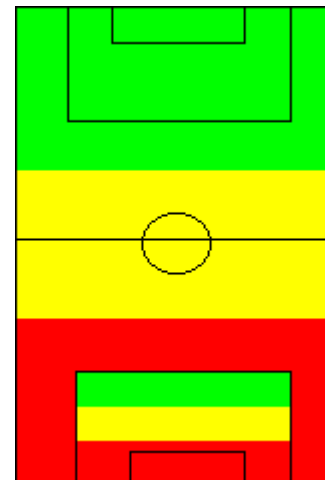
Inexperienced keepers struggle with trying to decide when to come off their line. This is certainly a difficult decision to make, since it depends on both the situation on the field - attacker's speed and ability, positions of other players on both offense and defense - and the keeper's ability and confidence.

The decision will be made a little easier if the keeper starts from a good position.

👉 In general, the position of the keeper in the penalty area should match the position of the ball on the soccer field. If the ball is in the attacking third, the keeper should be in the front third of the penalty area; ball at midfield, keeper about 6-12 yards out, ball in the defensive end, keeper close to their line. If the keeper is young and small, or the opposing team like to shoot long, high looping shots, adjust the position back towards the goals a few yards.

Position from the middle to the top of the penalty area helps the goalkeeper get to long through balls more quickly (even intercepting and clearing them outside the area if necessary), and also puts the keeper in the play for use as an outlet for a defender under pressure. Even when they are back, the keeper should stay a minimum of 1-2 yards off the goal line to maintain some angle. ⚠️ A goalkeeper who stays rooted on the line not only concedes the better part of the penalty area to the attacking team, but gives them the most net to shoot at when they do get close

**A very common question I get asked is, "When should I come out?" I think this is the wrong question. It should be, "How should I come out?" I think that the exact timing is much less critical than coming out hard and decisively and not second-guessing.** This is not just for breakaways, but applies to any attempt at the ball (handling crosses, long through balls, etc).




Keeper's position in penalty area should match ball's position on the field

The goalkeeper should:

- Pick a moment when they have a clear shot at the ball, and then
- 👉 Come hard for the ball without hesitating or stopping.
- Slow down just as they reach the ball carrier, leaving a couple of arms' lengths of space as a cushion.

The second item here is key. Many a goal has been scored because the keeper was indecisive and got caught in "no-man's land", neither attacking the ball nor being in good shot-stopping position. 👉 Once the keeper decides they're going for the ball, they must go through with it; they must at least make some contact with the ball. Once the keeper gets near the ball, they must slow down and leave some space to prevent being dribbled by the attacker.

 Never start a run by backing up. They should check the posts, look around at the situation, wait for the right moment, but the keeper should do all of this while on their toes and ready to move forward. (Any backpedalling should have been done previously, well before the keeper's charge.

Young and inexperienced goalkeepers may lack the confidence to come hard on a breakaway or out for a high cross. Build confidence by first teaching them proper techniques, and slowly building into game situations - no pressure, then light pressure, then heavy traffic. A keeper who is confident in their footwork, catching ability, and other techniques will have less to worry about when the time comes to be aggressive

## DISTRIBUTION

The goalkeeper is the last line of defense, but also the first line of attack. A quick restart to the attack can be very effective. After a save is made, the keeper must quickly look to break out and start the counter. This is especially true after the rule change of July 1, 2000 eliminating the four-step limitation and requiring the goalkeeper to put the ball back in play after 5-6 seconds.

### Quick Summary - Kick Distribution:

- Hold ball with both hands
- Step into kick at slight angle
- Plant foot should point towards target
- Drop the ball
- Kick straight at target and follow through
- Goal kicks: Approach at a slight angle
- Goal kicks: Plant foot behind ball
- Goal kicks: Foot angled outward to get under the ball

### Mistakes to Watch For:

- Run-up uneven/too long/too short
- Tossing the ball in the air
- Plant foot pointing wrong direction
- Kicking foot swinging around body instead of straight
- Poor follow-through
- Goal kicks: Approach/foot angle too straight-on
- Goal kicks: Plant foot too close to ball

### Quick Summary - Throw Distribution:

- Roll - most accuracy, least distance
- Javelin throw - medium accuracy and distance
- Javelin throw starts from beside head
- Sidearm throw - medium accuracy and distance
- Overhand throw - least accurate, most distance
- Overhand throw must keep hand on top, elbow locked
- Roll fingers under ball at end to provide backspin for javelin and overhand throws
- Throws should have low trajectory and hit the ground a bit before they reach the receiver

### Mistakes to watch for:

- Ball drops from hand to ground on roll
- Step with same side foot on roll
- High, arcing throws that are difficult to receive
- Javelin throw does not start behind head
- Ball not secure between palm and forearm on overhand throw
- On overhand throw, elbow not locked or bends halfway through throw
- Overhand throw not given full 180-degree rotation
- Poor release point on overhand throw

# GOALKEEPING TACTICS

## Don't Act, React

Strangely, the first decision a keeper should make when facing a shot is to not make a decision at all! Instead, the keeper should react to a situation as it develops, rather than acting right away. They should stay patient until the right moment comes. 🧤 Some rules of thumb for keepers:

- **Force the shooter to decide.** Put the pressure on the attacker - make them decide what they should do. If the keeper is already in good position and prepared, they shouldn't need to act too soon.
- **Be ready to pounce on a mistake.** As soon as an attacker makes a mistake - a poor touch or pass, a weak shot - that's the goalkeeper's moment to charge in. Look for that opportunity.
- **Be ready to react the moment the ball is shot.** It is easy to time the shooter and see exactly when the shot will come. Just before the shot is taken the keeper should get into the ready position, able to spring whatever way the shot goes.
- ⚠️ **Don't Guess!** Guessing what an attacker will do should be reserved for PKs and even then it is not sheer guesswork. Chances are a guess will be wrong, and once the keeper has gone the wrong way it may be impossible to recover.

## When to Dive

Younger and inexperienced goalkeepers often wonder when they should dive. The answer is, "almost never". A good goalkeeper minimizes the need to dive by being in good position, aggressively sweeping up loose balls, and challenging shooters. 🧤 A dive should only be used as a last resort, and **always after the shot has been taken**. The keeper should 🧤 stay on their feet as long as possible - once they've dived, they're committed and can't change their mind if the shooter does something else.

A dive is the ultimate and desperate reaction to a shot, it should only be used in ultimate and desperate situations.

## Communicating With Defenders

Communication is a key for every player on the soccer field, and especially so for the goalkeeper. Once the keeper has made a decision, the defenders need to know what it is. The goalkeeper also must be an organizer and general on the field - they are the only player who faces the field the whole time and are the best positioned to see the development of the play.

The keeper should know at least these two basic calls:



- **"Keeper!":** this means the goalkeeper is making a play on the ball, defenders should get out of the way.
- **"Away!":** this means the opposite - the keeper is *not* going after the ball and the defense should pursue it. It is usually used for crosses or corners.

The keeper 🧤 must yell these commands loudly and repeat them if necessary. There must be no doubt in anyone's mind who's ball it is! This even includes the opposing team - forwards will sometimes back off if they think the keeper is coming hard.

The keeper should also direct traffic and position defenders on the field. Don't expect a lot of this to occur with young keepers, especially those who don't play in goal full time, but with experience a 14 or 15 year old full-time goalkeeper should be able to scan the field and set the defense as necessary. To do this, the keeper must be a student of the game - they must know:

- The defensive scheme used by the team and how the coach wants the defenders to play
- Tendencies and strengths of the opposing team and opposing players
- The role of first defender, second defender, third defender to make adjustments on the fly
- The role of first, second and third attackers to help anticipate how the attack may develop

In short, they must be a second coach out on the soccer field. This is a tall order for a youth soccer player, but here are a few points that will help develop this.


- **Be loud and repetitive.** It can be hard to hear out on the field, especially for someone on the ball with their head down. Make sure the message gets through.
- **Be specific with commands.**  Yelling "Mark up!" or "Who's on #10?" often isn't enough - tell specific players what to do ("John, mark #10" or "Ashley, Kristy, shift one mark to the right").
- **Work from the ball outwards.** The keeper should focus on the ball carrier first, and arrange defenders near the ball first. When danger is less imminent, set the defenders who are further away.
- **Arrange to get feedback from defenders.** It can be eye contact, a wave of the hand, a verbal okay, but have defenders let the goalkeeper know they were heard. The goalkeeper will be able to shift focus knowing the defender is set, and the defender won't have the keeper yelling at them for something they already heard.
- **If the keeper does not call, the defenders must take responsibility.** The defense should never assume the keeper has a ball unless the keeper calls for it; they should go for the ball unless they hear otherwise.  A few collisions with their own defense in practice should quickly teach a quiet keeper the value of calling loudly for the ball!


Communication between the goalkeeper and defenders is a key to making the defense function as a unit.

## GOALKEEPING PSYCHOLOGY

The position of goalkeeper is one of the most psychologically demanding on the soccer field. Mistakes are final. The glory is usually reserved for the players at the other end of the field. It's not a position for everybody. You can't be stupid and play goal, but perhaps you must be a little crazy.

A coach must, of necessity, be a part-time psychologist, and nowhere is this more important than for the goalkeeper, where confidence is key.

- **Only play those who want to play in goal**  
In youth soccer, everyone is encouraged to try all positions. However, I would not include goalkeeper in that category, at least in game situations. It does no good to put someone in the box who simply does not want to be there. It can be shattering for a youngster to be scored upon. If you must, try everyone in practices, but limit game play to those who want to be (or at least, don't mind being) in net.
- **Stay positive when goals are scored**  
It can be tough to be positive, especially when a simple lapse has just let in the game-losing goal with seconds to play. Goalkeepers need to be able to put mistakes behind them quickly and recover, so try to put a positive spin on things:
  - Credit the shooter. Sometimes the opposing team has just made a great play; give them credit - it's not always a mistake by the keeper that lets a goal in.
  - Don't dwell on it. Help the goalkeeper shake it off quickly, make a fast coaching point if necessary, and move on once the kickoff has been taken. You can cover problems in more depth at the next practice.
  - Look for the technique that needs improvement.  Focus on the skill that needs work, not the fact that the goal was allowed. Very often it's just basic footwork or catching that needs brushing up.

- **Give credit for other than direct saves**  
A keeper can keep the soccer ball out of the net in more ways than making a direct save - forcing a missed shot gets the job done too. Aggressiveness goes a long way here - by making the shooter decide too early, a keeper can force a miss or a pass on an otherwise open shot. A goalkeeper who can get into the heads of opposing forwards early has a huge advantage.
- **Don't panic after a save**  
This applies to both coach and goalkeeper. Give the keeper time to internalize the save (builds confidence), calm down, give field players time to recover, and look upfield to restart the attack. Six seconds is plenty of time to do all this. If you stay calm, you're showing that you have confidence in the keeper's ability to control the ball and the game.
- **Help the keeper develop good habits**  
Teach them good technique, then hammer it in with repetition. Don't allow any lazy or sloppy technique, even when they're not officially doing drills or playing. Good habits will show themselves in games just like bad habits. Repetition is the key;  doing it right *every* time (consistency) is what separates a good goalkeeper from a great one.
- **Don't allow less than full effort, every time, every shot**  
Every shot deserves an attempt at a save, even if it seems futile. Eventually, the shots that seemed impossible to stop before will start coming into range. If the effort is there, the results will start to come.
- **If things aren't going well, pull the goalkeeper with care**  
Many coaches will pull a keeper if they are getting shelled, but be aware of the repercussions of this. Some players will take this as a sign you lack confidence in them, and only go downhill. Make sure you stay positive, and point out you're not pulling them because they are a poor player or person, just that it's not their day.
- **Encourage additional training**  
There isn't always time to properly train a keeper in normal practice sessions, especially when that player needs to develop foot and field skills as well. Encourage them to attend club or private training sessions, goalkeeper camps, rent or buy books or videos, or visit this and other web sites. A player who is serious about goalkeeping needs all the extra training and practice they can get.

## PENALTY KICKS

As the Laws of the game of soccer currently stand, the goalkeeper must be on the goal line between the goalposts, and may not move forward until the ball is struck. All other players are outside the penalty area, at least ten yards from the ball and behind it. The shooter is identified, the keeper and other players take up their position, the referee signals, and the pressure is on!

For the goalkeeper, a penalty-kick really is a no-lose situation. The keeper is not expected to make the save, so the pressure is on the shooter (the conversion rate of penalty kicks, at all levels of soccer, is 80-90%). But there are tricks a goalkeeper can use to increase their odds of making the save.

The days of guess and dive are over. The goalkeeper should learn to "read" the shooter to try to predict where the ball is going. Combined, perhaps, with scouting reports on shooters, and statistics on general tendencies, a keeper can do much better than 50% in picking direction. Although picking the correct direction doesn't always mean the keeper can make the save, it gives them a head start.

### Reading the Shooter

- **Watch the shooter's eyes and overall demeanor.** Often they will give away small clues before they are ever ready to shoot, like peeking at the corner they are aiming for.
- **Watch the approach.** Is it straight on, or wide? A very wide approach often indicates the shooter is going towards the opposite corner. A straight-on approach gives fewer clues.
- **Watch the plant foot.** The ball will go where the plant foot points.
- **Watch the hips.** The ball goes where the hips point. A "push pass" shot will require the hips to open up in the direction the ball is going.

- **Watch the head.** If the shooter drops their head low with a big pull-back of the leg, it usually means a cross-body shot. If the head stays up more, it can mean the shooter will stay open to push the ball to the opposite corner.
- **Don't react too soon.** Use the cues above to predict where the ball might go, and be *ready* to go that way, but wait a split second to be sure it really is going there. The keeper might think one direction based on the shooter's eyes and approach, but the plant foot and hips may tell a different story just before the ball is struck.

### General Tendencies

A study done of all the penalties taken in the 1998 World Cup (including shootouts) noted that almost 70% of the kicks taken went to the opposite side from the kicker's dominant foot (that is, right-footed kickers shot to their left -- keeper's right -- and vice versa).

This is the natural swing of the foot across the body; it is difficult to put the ball to the other corner with an instep kick. So, if all else fails, the keeper should go right for a right-footed kicker and left for a left footer.

### Don't Act, React

Also, the goalkeeper should react quickly, but not too quickly. Many penalties, especially at the youth level, are poorly taken, either weakly hit or right down the middle. Often the goalkeeper can easily make the save if they just wait and simply react to the shot.

Even "reading the shooter" is a reaction to what the shooter does, and not just guesswork.

## ADVANCED TACTICS

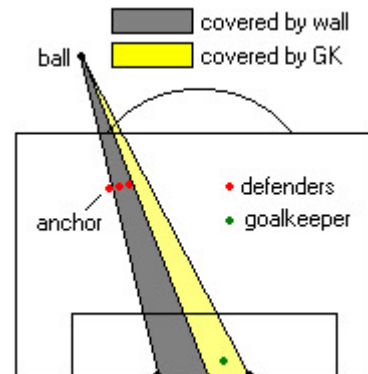
Here are some key points for several important tactics a soccer goalkeeper must know.

### Setting a Wall

If the opponent is given a free kick within 10-20 yards of the penalty area (or an indirect kick inside the penalty area), the standard defense is to make a "wall" of two or more players the minimum 10 yards from the spot of the kick. This wall serves to block part of the goal from the shooter so that the goalkeeper only has to worry about guarding a small portion of the goal mouth. However, if the wall is not properly positioned, it may actually do more harm than good!


The wall must be set up quickly, following these basic guidelines:

- One defender must identify themselves as the outside "anchor" of the wall. Make sure everyone knows who this is; they should raise their hand and make eye contact with the keeper. Some teams may wish to identify this player ahead of time, even in practice sessions.
- The goalkeeper must choose how many players will be in the wall. The more extreme the angle, the fewer players. Two players is sufficient for a ball close to the end line; the keeper might want as many as five or even six in the wall for a straight on shot. The exact number will depend on the situation and how much goal the keeper feels confident covering.
- The goalkeeper sets the "anchor" just outside a line between the soccer ball and the near post (Fig. 1). This covers the near part of the goal with a little overlap to prevent balls from bending around the wall. The keeper will usually dash over to the near post to sight from the post to the ball to make sure things are positioned properly. While doing this the keeper is way out of position, so speed is essential! Some teams prefer to free the keeper of this duty by using a forward, who lines up the wall by sighting from *behind* the ball back towards the goalpost.
- The other players line up against the "anchor" player to the inside of the goal. Players need to be right against one another so no ball can slip through the wall.



**Fig. 1: Setting a Wall**

Once the wall is set, the goalkeeper moves to cover the space between the inside of the wall and the far post.

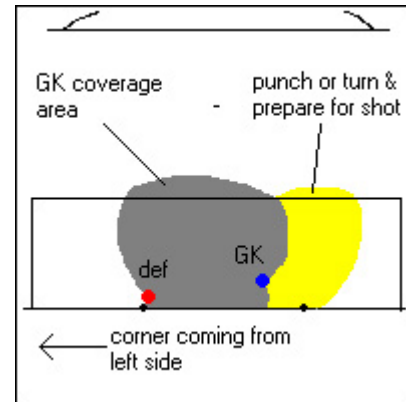
On rare occasions, the attacking team will win an indirect free kick in the penalty area that is less than 10 yards from the goal. What to do then? Defenders are allowed to be closer than ten yards to the ball,  provided they are on the goal line and between the goalposts. The wall, then, will actually be set *in the goal*. The tallest players available should be on the goal line, to prevent a chip shot under the crossbar. Since this can only happen on an indirect kick, one defender should be designated as the "bullet man" to rush the ball as soon as it is touched and disrupt a subsequent shot.

Most teams almost never practice this situation; I have seen it occur only a handful of times in thousands of games I've seen. But a good goalkeeper is prepared for any situation, and if they're aware of this provision of the laws, they can organize things quickly if it should ever occur.

### Handling Corners

Key points for handling corner kicks:

- Anything within the 6-yard box in the air should belong to the keeper! Older players should be able to extend their range even beyond this. Train your keepers in traffic so they will have the confidence to collect corners and crosses in their goal box.
- Start position will vary, but I prefer a spot about 2/3 to 3/4 of the way to the far post (Fig. 2). This is because it is easier to move forward quickly than backwards. The area the keeper should easily be able to cover is shaded in gray.
- Always position a defender on the near post, shoulder right up against it and facing the corner. This player is there to clear away hard driven shots to the near post that the keeper can't get to.
- For balls hit over the head past the far post, track the ball, leave it late and either punch it wide or be ready for a shot or deflection from the far side (the yellow shaded area in Figure 2). Some goalkeepers or coaches like to station a player at the far post to handle these, similar in duties to the near-post defender. I prefer to have this defender marking rather than standing at the far post.



**Fig. 2: Corner Kick Setup**

### Handling Back Passes

The goalkeeper must sometimes make themselves available as an outlet for a defender under pressure. However, if done incorrectly, a back pass to the goalkeeper can result in tragedy - an uncontested giveaway in front of the net or even an own goal. Here are key points for back passes to the keeper.

- The goalkeeper must ask for the ball. Don't ever back pass to keeper who isn't expecting it!
- The keeper who is making themselves available must move **away** from the goal and **outside** the near post. This puts them in the least vulnerable position should the pass go awry.
- The passer must pass with good pace and **outside the near post**. Many own goals have been scored by defenders who passed inside the post and missed connecting with their keeper.
- Once the ball is received, the keeper must clear it quickly, preferably with one or two touches. Switching fields is often a good option to get the ball away from pressure. This is a skill that must be practiced!