

## THE IMPORTANCE OF USING YOUR FEET AS A GOALKEEPER

**This article was written by Erin Mcleod who is the starting goalkeeper for our Canadian Women's World Cup and Olympic Team. Erin presently plays professional soccer with the Washington Freedom in the WPSL. Parmar Sports Training Inc. has been privileged to have Erin appear as a guest coach for our +20 Elite program.**

As a goalkeeper I cannot help but stress the importance of being comfortable with using both feet on the ball. The game is constantly changing, keepers used to play little to no role in keeping possession with their defenders and the rest of the team. Now, however, they can actually be a big part in setting the game tempo and creating counter attacks.

Defenders use their goalkeepers for a number of reasons and regardless of what the situation is a goalkeeper should provide security for the team i.e. make few to zero mistakes. Therefore if the keeper receives a pass back they should have the best first touch on the team, there is absolutely no room for error here because it obviously could lead to a goal. If they choose to hit it long first time, away from attacking pressure, the ball ideally should go long and to the flanks (preferably past half). It is almost equally important for a keeper to feel comfortable using both feet, there will be many situations where defenders themselves are under pressure and do not deliver a quality ball, if that's the case it is the keepers job to either take a good first touch out of their feet and control the ball or hit it first time to the ideal areas of the pitch mentioned before. (Obviously in some cases hitting it first time if you have a defender who is open that would be your first choice as hitting long creates a chance for the other team to intercept the ball- the whole point of hitting it one time is to clear danger, if there is only one attacker and open defenders you want to find feet if possible)

Simple drills that can improve distribution for keepers is having a set of balls on the outside of one post with a server on them. A keeper is at the six yard box facing the goal. The server gives all types of balls, one directed to your left foot, right foot, varying angles, a bouncing ball, etc. and each time the keeper hits it cleanly into the goal. This drill isn't for hitting the ball as hard as possible but rather to work on hitting the ball cleanly, listening for the sound of a ball hit in the "sweet spot". Once the keeper has become comfortable then the server can move to the top of the 18 yard box and continue serving similar balls. Now the keeper has to focus not only on hitting the ball cleanly but attempt to hit certain targets on the field. If there is more than one keeper than make the other keeper be a target then switch who's working (Eventually you can hit the ball first time or work on your first touch then hitting the targets).

As far as a keeper's first touch goes, the most simple drill of course is passing in pairs hitting the ball harder and softer working on the first touch. I would suggest including your keepers in most passing drills if possible, not only will it help the keepers with their feet it will also help them to see what type of movements players make to come to the ball and body language they show when they want the ball. This way when it comes to game time they can pinpoint people who clearly want the ball. The more types of distribution a keeper can use the better. A long driven ball for example is great for hitting outside midfielders or for starting an attack, and the same goes for an accurate drop kick. When a keeper has the ball in his/her hands it is normally after a time of stress for the defending team. Therefore it is the keepers job to keep possession and control the tempo of the game. If the team is dog tired from defending, put the ball down, buy them some time and kick from the ground, if the team is in desperate need of a goal and there is little time remaining, pick up the pace... I don't think a lot of coaches/players realize the importance of when a ball is with the keeper. A keeper with solid distribution creates a more calm and secure environment for the rest of the team. In my opinion, a keeper with poor distribution will only ever become an average keeper.