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### From Jens Lehman to You: Dealing with the Penalty Kick Tiebreaker

As the deadline for Play On approaches, Germany's Jens Lehman has demonstrated his ability to master the defense of the penalty kick by stopping Argentina twice in the quarter final round of the World Cup tie-breaker. Lehman's saves against Argentine's Ayala and Cambiasso have propelled the German's to the semi-final and arch rival Italy. What was of interest following Lehman's performance was the admission by the German's that Lehman studied the Argentine shooters closely on video and had written notes to study ahead of each shooter.

The Penalty Kick Tiebreaker (or "kicks from the mark" as FIFA calls them) is a big business! After 120 minutes of regular time and over-time, teams alternate penalty kicks to break the tie so one team can move on in the tournament or claim a championship. When youth goalkeepers play in tournaments (invitational or state cups) they should be prepared for this challenge. Prior to this form of tie breaking, games in a knockout phase of a competition ended with a coin-flip or the drawing of straws!

### Penalty Kick Preparation

Over the course of the season, a team's goalkeeper has probably faced several penalty kicks in the run of play. But, because tournament play calls for games to be decided with penalty kicks following a match that is still tied after overtime, this is a situation that has huge importance and commands special preparation in order to meet the challenge of this important event. These tips may help in dealing with the penalty kick tiebreaker.

- The goalkeeper should not be overworked in penalty kick practice. Facing a high number of practice kicks by teammates does not make the goalkeeper more prepared to face this situation in the game. The "right amount" of penalties is going to depend on the individual goalkeeper, but this number should be arrived at through quality performance, not through quantity. Practice penalty kicks for the team can be accomplished by "stand-in" goalkeepers or by using flags to identify areas of the goal where the kick should be played (placed 4 feet to the inside of each post).
- The goalkeeper should practice different approaches for dealing with the penalty. Having the goalkeeper hold on the line and react, move along the line and then get set just before the kick is taken and reading the shooter and moving early are three common strategies to deal with the kick. Young

goalkeepers need to take a little time to see what method works best. Once an avenue for success is found, quality repetitions should be spent practicing that particular strategy. The biggest point for the goalkeeper is to be “big” on the line and move authoritatively to the shot as it comes off the shooter’s foot.

- The goalkeeper should spend some time in getting some powerful diving and deflecting into the practice regime. Being able to cover distance in a quick step or two can make a big difference in success or failure in the penalty kick tiebreaker.
- Some work in assessment of the kick is important to practice. Analyzing which way the hip of the shooting leg points is one clue to where the ball might be played. If a right-footed kicker’s hip is “open” the shot is probably going to the goalkeeper’s left. If the kicker’s shooting hip “closes” at the last moment when planting, the ball is probably headed to the goalkeeper’s right. There is about 2-3 hundredths of a second between impact (a little more in younger players) on the ball and its arrival at goal. This cue may or may not help, but it is a cue: the shooter’s posture can give an early indication of where the ball is going.
- As tournament games are on the horizon where the penalty kick tiebreaker may be used, the goalkeeper should practice the event, as it will actually happen. Alternate with an "opposing" goalkeeper--come into goal from the corner, react to the kick on a whistle, rotate out of goal back to the corner etc. It is also helpful to take these kicks at the end of a game in the training session--everyone is somewhat fatigued as if they had played through full-time and over-time.
- Above all else, the goalkeeper must remember that the job is simple in penalties: deal with each kick individually and move from one to the next. A save or a forced "miss" should carry the day. Being able to have one save out of five is a very good situation for the goalkeeper.
- The team coach may want to use the goalkeeper as a penalty taker. Many youth goalkeepers are good "strickers" of the ball and would be happy to help the team cause by taking a kick within the first five, or shortly thereafter. This is something the coach and goalkeeper need to decide on and then plug into the practice plan.

### The Flip Side

The team needs to have rehearsed the penalty kick tiebreaker. There should be consensus between the coach and team as to the general order of who will take a penalty and what the descending order of players will be on the "list" at the end of overtime.

At the end of regulation and overtime play, players should hydrate, adjust their shoes and socks, stretch and relax (take a few deep breaths, let their shoulder and neck muscles relax) and then focus on where they want to place the ball--accuracy and power are a lethal combination.

Good practice prior to the event helps players come from the center circle to the spot. Again, using the whistle to signify the taking of the kick can be an important cue to taking the kick successfully (this is the signal that unleashes the penalty taker onto the ball; the whistle is helpful in the kicker being positive at a moment of high stress).

### The Breaks of the Game

The taking of Penalty Kicks "from the spot" is a way to find a winner. Following overtime, a team must let all the "baggage" go from the game and prepare for the task at hand. Television commentators are speculative when they say, "obviously, this team is playing to get into penalties." As this is sometimes the case, plenty of practice and preparation can increase (but not guarantee) success in this part of the game. Penalty kicks are not the best way to end an important game, but it beats a coin flip or drawing straws!