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## **Goalkeeping Fitness: Finding a Focus That Isn't Blurred**

About a year ago, I produced a set of physical fitness exercises that I felt would develop the essential and necessary component parts of a top-flight youth goalkeeper. I included an endurance base, speed, strength and local muscle endurance features. Based on my experience and (not too recent) research, I put forth daily examples of an "all-around" fitness program. Recently, I listened to Verne Gambetta, a prominent strength, speed and fitness coach (who works with our US Soccer National Teams) talk about fitness workouts and testing for goalkeepers. To quote Mr. Gambetta, "I can help improve a goalkeeper's vertical jump...and I can also take inches off a keepers vertical. I can improve it with a program of strength and speed training. I can destroy a goalkeeper with a series of long aerobic runs."

Gambetta reminds us that all coaches want to improve the vertical jump and overall power / speed / strength of a goalkeeper. He suggests several principles be put in place to meet the fitness requirements of goalkeeping:

Ban the long runs a goalkeeper takes at various parts of the season. At the most, maybe one easy run of a couple of miles, but no more.

- Create a series of fitness practices that involve running (sprinting) forward, lateral movement and one and two footed jumping.
- Utilize "short and sharp" bursts in each repetition, versus longer timed repetitions that decrease maximal output.
- Introduce exercises with a ball (and a light medicine ball) that promote a wide range of movement from the trunk and torso of the goalkeeper's body.

Over the past few months, I have tinkered with the above principles and recognize that goalkeeping is still about keeping the ball out of the goal. My personal belief is this: with young goalkeepers (ages 12-14 or 15) marry a little fitness work with simple catching (driven balls, diving, high balls). With intermediate and advanced youth goalkeepers (15-18), I would suggest highlighting goalkeeping fitness 3-4 times per week, as a part of an overall training program. Here are some strategies to help focus on the principles:

- Work in relevant space (replicating the 6 yard box and penalty area) when working with a goalkeeper. Plastic markers and cones can supplant Field markings and a "real" goal.
- Utilize short sprints (6 yards, 12 yards, and 18 yards) from a standing and a rolling start. Include several catches / dives at the end of a repetition.

- Impart upon the goalkeeper to sprint through the "finish line" of any sprint, whether it is 5 yards or 15 yards.
- Evaluate the workload. Don't have the goalkeeper overdo something just to become buried in his or her own fatigue. Include enough rest between sets so that the goalkeeper works at a 1: 1 1/2 or 1: 2 work to rest ratio (eg: if a goalkeeper does an activity for 30 seconds, they rest for 45 or 60 seconds).
- If the workout has been physically taxing, finish with some easy catching: promote technical proficiency that may have been torn apart through demanding and dynamic physical training.

The purpose behind physical training should be two-fold: to prepare the goalkeeper (in a physical, mental and emotional way) to deal with the confrontational contact that comes from a variety of situations in the game and to increase the physical playing capability (move more quickly, more powerfully) over time. Goalkeepers come in different sizes and shapes and aptitudes. Good physical preparation is one important component in the development process. Some goalkeepers need more work in this area than others do. Above all else, goalkeepers should remember that keeping the "easy" balls out of the back of the net should be the primary objective.