



# Taking the edge off crosses

Tips on intercepting high balls in the box

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Now and then you'll hear a commentator say, "The keeper's having trouble controlling the box." If we take this common bit of soccer jargon literally for a moment, we're faced with a question: Is it even possible for a single player to "control" the entire penalty box? The logical answer is: No!

But in many cases, the commentators do have a point. So what are they really saying about the keeper in question? In this article, we take a closer look at the concept of "controlling the penalty box" and explain what it actually means. We also provide detailed technique descriptions and sample exercises for overcoming problems in this area.

## Defining the term

"Controlling the penalty box" includes: punching out and intercepting crosses (techniques and positional play described in this article), running out for 1 v. 1 situations, and initiating counterattacks with well-aimed throws and drop-kicks. The exercises at the end of this article focus on intercepting crosses and (to a lesser extent) on initiating counterattacks. They are designed for three goalkeepers but will also work with other numbers. However, be aware that changing the number of players affects the length of rest periods.

**Intercepting crosses should also be practiced under opposition pressure!**

AXEL HEIMKEN



## GOALKEEPER TECHNIQUES

### Intercepting crosses

- Move toward the ball with small steps; the very last step should be a big one (Photo 1).
- Take off with the leg closer to the ball (i.e. right leg for balls from the right and vice versa). Take off powerfully, swinging the arms and the opposite knee (Photo 2).
- Catch the ball at the highest point (Photo 3) and secure it.
- Land on the same foot you took off with.



### Punching out crosses

- Move toward the ball, making fists with both hands.
- Two-handed punching: Take off with the leg closer to the ball.
- One-handed punching: Take off with left leg on balls from the right and vice versa.
- Moving diagonally, punch with the hand closer to the ball, striking the middle of the ball at the highest point and ideally sending it in the opposite direction.



## TACTICS

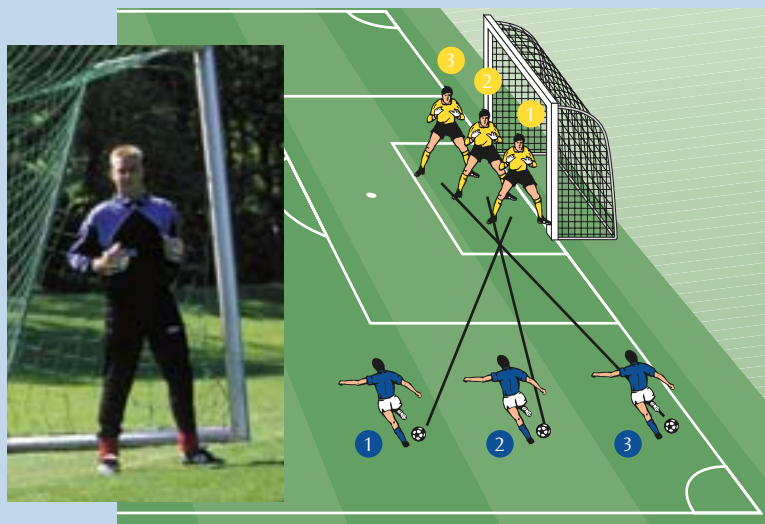
### Positional play

#### Basic position on crosses (see photo)

- Feet are shoulder-width apart.
- Knees are slightly bent, weight is on the balls of the feet. Note: The keeper in the photo has his weight distributed over the entire foot!
- Stance is loose ("dancing" in place).
- Arms are bent and close to the torso; hands are open.
- Eyes are on the ball.

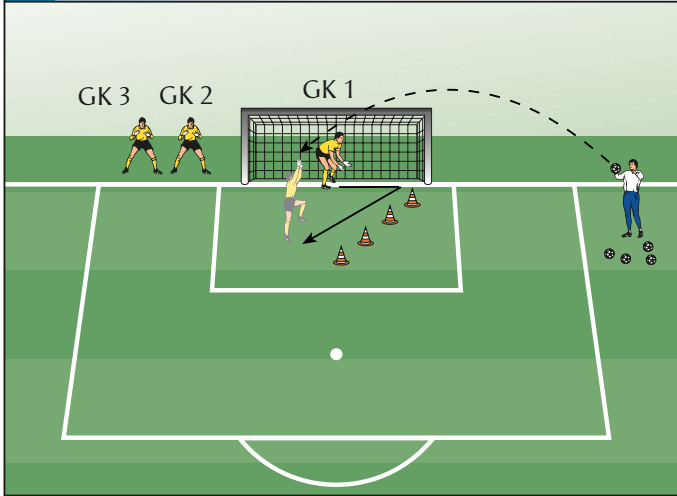
#### Ideal placement (see diagram)

- Position ①: GK stands about one yard away from the near post, almost on the goal line, covering the near corner.
- Position ②: GK moves backwards toward the center of the goal and away from the goal line, toward the midfield.
- Position ③: GK stands even further away from the goal line, in the back third of the goal.



## SELECTED EXERCISES

## 1 Intercepting while moving backwards

**Setup**

- The coach stands on one of the penalty box sidelines, one yard away from the endline, with a number of balls.
- The first goalkeeper (GK1) stands in the center of the goal on the goal line. GK2 and GK3 stand by the far post, outside the field.
- Set out four cones in a diagonal row leading from the near post into the goal box.

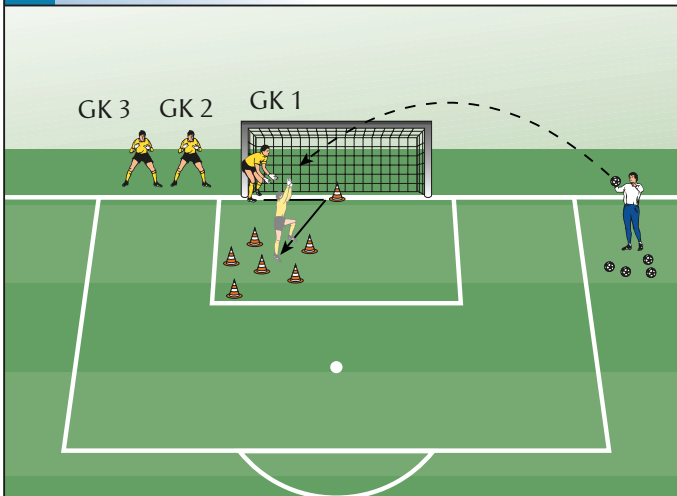
**Sequence**

- GK1 jogs toward the near post, tags it, then runs out to jump up and intercept a high ball thrown in by the coach (shown here: takeoff with left leg).
- GK1 throws the ball back to the coach and moves to the back of the line.

**Tips**

- Practice on both sides. If you have fewer than three GKs, be sure rest periods are long enough (30 seconds minimum).

## 2 Intercepting inside a "cone jungle"

**Setup**

- Setup is same as in Exercise 1, except: GK1 stands at the far post, there is a cone in the middle of the goal line, and there are numerous cones ("cone jungle") in the goal box.

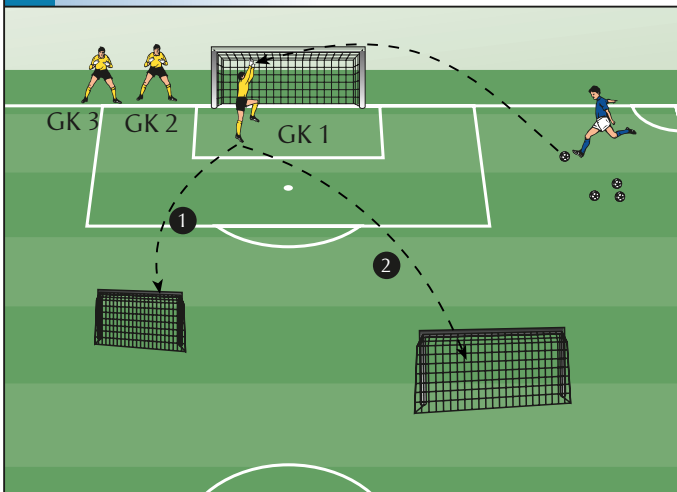
**Sequence**

- GK1 jogs toward the cone on the goal line, touches it, then runs out to jump up and intercept a high ball thrown in by the coach.
- GK1 throws the ball back to the coach and moves to the back of the line.
- Variation: Instead of the cone jungle, GK2 and GK3 move around inside the goal box.

**Objective**

- Training peripheral vision: Goalkeepers must remain aware of nearby obstacles (opponents, teammates) while focusing on an incoming ball.

## 3 Intercepting and starting a counterattack

**Setup**

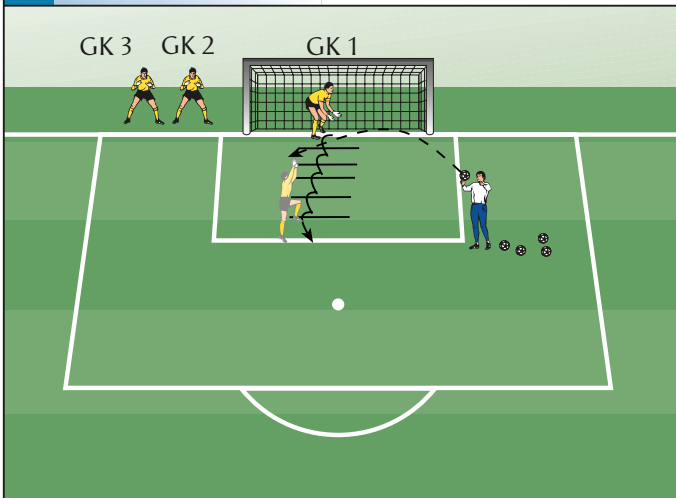
- A crosser (coach, goalkeeper or field player) stands on the wing with a number of balls.
- GK1 stands in the goal (see notes on proper basic position!) while the other keepers stand by the far post, outside the field.
- Set up another standard goal and one small goal in diagonal positions as shown.

**Sequence**

- The crosser plays a cross into the goal box.
- GK1 intercepts the ball and either throws it at the small goal (1) or volleys/drop-kicks it at the standard goal (2).
- Rotate goalkeepers.
- Which keeper can score the most goals?
- Variation: GK2 and GK3 interfere with GK1's interception.



## 4 Coordination plus interception



### Setup

- Setup is the same as in Exercise 1, except: The coach stands at the corner of the penalty box, and five poles are placed in a row in front of the goal, slightly elevated and parallel to the goal line.

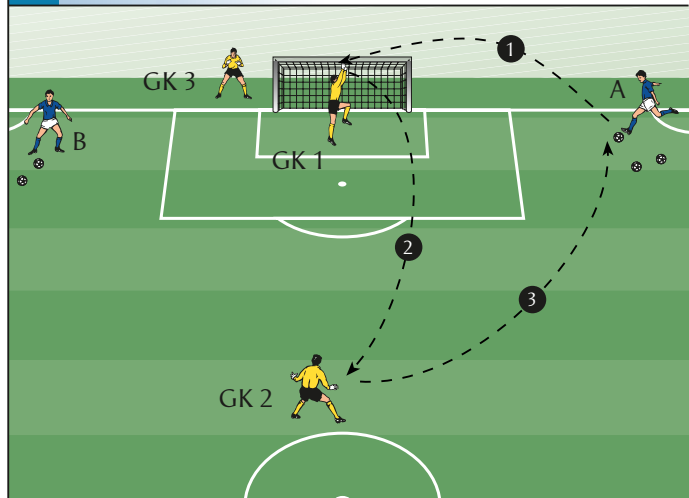
### Sequence

- GK1 runs sideways over the poles, facing the coach, then runs out to jump up and intercept a high ball thrown in by the coach.
- GK1 throws the ball back to the coach and moves to the back of the line.
- Switch sides every few rounds.

### Variations

- Goalkeeper takes a specified number of steps between poles.
- Lay out just three poles. The coach throws the ball farther, forcing the Goalkeeper to run backwards and deflect the ball to the corner (to GK2 and GK3).

## 5 Intercepting and throwing



### Setup

- GK1 stands in the goal.
- A and B stand on the wings, each with a number of balls.
- GK2 stands in the field (distance depends on ability level).
- GK3 stands next to the goal.

### Sequence

- A plays a cross in front of the goal (1).
- GK1 throws to GK2 (2).
- GK2 catches the ball and throws it back to A (3).
- Repeat the sequence on the other side with B.
- Afterwards, goalkeepers switch roles and positions.

### Variations

- GK2 receives and controls the ball, then plays a flighted ball back to the wing (practicing field player techniques).
- GK1 drop-kicks to GK2.

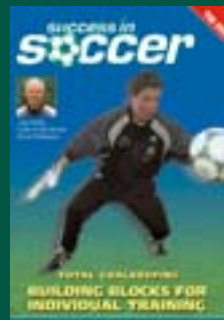
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