

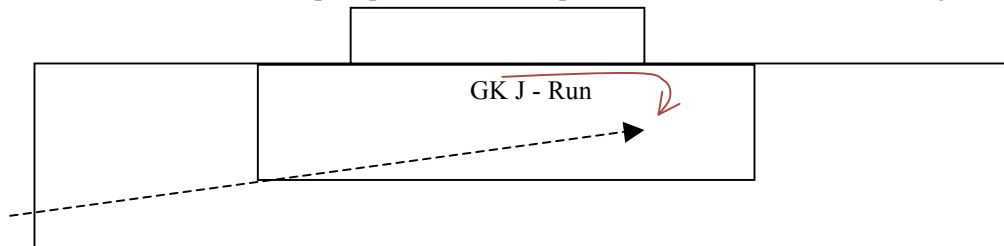
## Don't be a Vampire! Don't fear crosses!

My dad still loves mimicking my youth soccer days when I would charge out tentatively, yet courageously yelling: "Keeper?" hoping my voice was some sort of homing device for the ball. As I reached my arms toward the sky, inevitably, I would get a glimpse of the ball sailing over my head. It seemed to slow down and wink as it sailed by, almost mocking my valiant attempt at saving the game.

Occasionally, the ball would meet a flailing hand only to be redirected to some other place of danger. My dad's version of me playing in goal is hysterical to me now, but I remember how much trouble those high balls gave me. I now have to agree with Dad that catching one was more luck than anything else.

The last bulk of the NW Nationals training sessions have been focusing on catching flighted balls much earlier, higher and more often. Below are the **KEY FACTORS** that are good reminders of things that were covered.

1. Read the flight of the ball and decide as early as possible: "Keeper!" or "Away!"
  - A. Gives teammates longer to get into position
  - B. Gives opponents longer to think about GK coming out
2. Footwork:
  - A. Near Post: Direct path to ball
  - B. Middle: Straight out but still catching back side of ball
  - C. Far Post: "J-Run"; Drop step / crossover step to be able to attack ball coming forward.



3. Upper Body:
  - A. Hands catch top ½ of ball with a "W"
    - If you have smaller hands DO NOT create bad habits by opening up hands to catch. Catch the top ½ of ball so if you don't catch it will drop in front of you.
  - B. Arms are completely outstretched with only slight bend in elbows.
  - C. IF you cannot catch because you are in a crowd or it is just out of reach
    - 2-fisted box to send the ball back in the same direction it came
    - 1-fisted box with top hand to continue ball going in the same direction without it landing in a crowd.
  - D. Chest and Torso must drive to the ball as well to get more strength & control.
4. Legs:
  - Powerful steps (not stutter steps) to get to ball, driving one knee (closest to opponents) up simultaneously with hands; landing on 2 feet.
5. Timing:
  - A. Catch (or box) the ball at the height of your jump (not on your way down) and
  - B. Before anyone else can beat you to the ball. (IF YOU KNOW YOU CANNOT BEAT EVERYONE TO THE BALL: YOU MUST CALL "AWAY")

Performing steps 1-5 under pressure in a game isn't simple. It becomes clear that catching crosses is no easy feat and takes practicing "good" habits and courage and not fearing mistakes.

However, one frustration our coaching staff has is that often our NWN goalkeepers believe that it is not a mistake if the opponent didn't score.

Please do not gauge whether you were correct or incorrect in your decision-making or execution by whether the ball went into the net or not. Our staff has been giving you keys to helping you learn how to make decisions and perform good technique. Ask yourself whether you followed the keys we've been working on. Many times a GK will be perfect and the ball finds the net anyway. ☺

My biggest concern with balls coming out of the air is that 99% of the time if there is no pressure, a GK at practice will catch a ball without using any of the techniques mentioned above. Then, in a game, when the ball is in the air with an opponent running on, a keeper is very hesitant and meekly blurts out, "Keeper?" as if it is a question that needs to be answered. When a keeper is at practice and a ball is in the air, he/she should claim it at its highest point with confidence **ALL** of the time. Don't wait for the scrimmage, a game, a coach to be watching... work on it now! When I see a keeper catch an air ball 1-inch above his/her forehead I say, "That's nothing special... you might as well be a center back and just head it out! We are special because we have these things called arms and hands that allow us to catch every ball **ABOVE** our opponent's heads." It doesn't come without practice. There are many missed opportunities to work on improving your game, but we have to have the attitude to seek those opportunities out. I've caught many a foul ball and bridal bouquets, and was rarely "monkey in the middle" **because I simply loved to TRY to catch everything as high as possible.**

I was amazed one training session as to how much improvement occurred in one hour just because we were reminding the keepers to simply '**catch it higher**'. It wasn't lack of ability, just lack of determination to do it right every single time. By the end of the session there were a variety of services, GKs getting challenged in the air and there was brilliant success! Keep up the good habits, train yourselves to become better with each opportunity and I anticipate we'll see that same success in games. If I hear "*keeper?*" it means you really aren't sure if this is a good idea and aren't positive you will make the save. If I hear an early "KEEPER!" I will smile, because it will sound like someone has been practicing enough to EXPECT to make the save.

Every now and then you will miss, but that miss while **GOING FOR IT** will bring you one step closer to even more success. There is no better feeling than skying above a pack of players to win a ball cleanly in a game. It took me far too long to realize how easy it would be for me to improve. It started with a few balls and one server and me working on steps 1-5 without any pressure until I could catch 20 for 20 at the height of my jump. If I dropped one or mis-stepped so I could not get to the ball I would start over. It took about 8 weeks of training with some friends once or twice a week before I knew exactly how to get to every ball in my area. The next step was having a couple buddies (preferably tall) challenge balls with me.

Thanks for all of your hard work. Our next main focus will be breakaways. As always, bring long sleeved shirts and pants... and pray for rain... I played the odds and picked this topic for Nov. ☺