

2014 World Cup Goalkeeper Lessons

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FIFA WORLD CUP
Brasil



We saw tremendous goalkeeping at the World Cup this year; let's take a look at some lessons that all goalkeepers can learn, both good and bad, from the event.

Lesson 1: Control the penalty area... and beyond!

There was a lot of aggressive play from goalkeepers who were able to eliminate dangerous situations simply by being pro-active in intercepting through passes—sometimes even outside of the penalty area. There are two components to this. The first lies in taking up an aggressive starting position when the ball is outside of shooting range; the second is to make the decision to aggressively (and intelligently) attack the ball without hesitating too much.

Manuel Neuer from Germany was truly exceptional in controlling the entire defensive half of the field. Here is a link to a great article about this:

http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/07/12/sports/worldcup/manuel-neuer-goalkeeper.html?_r=2



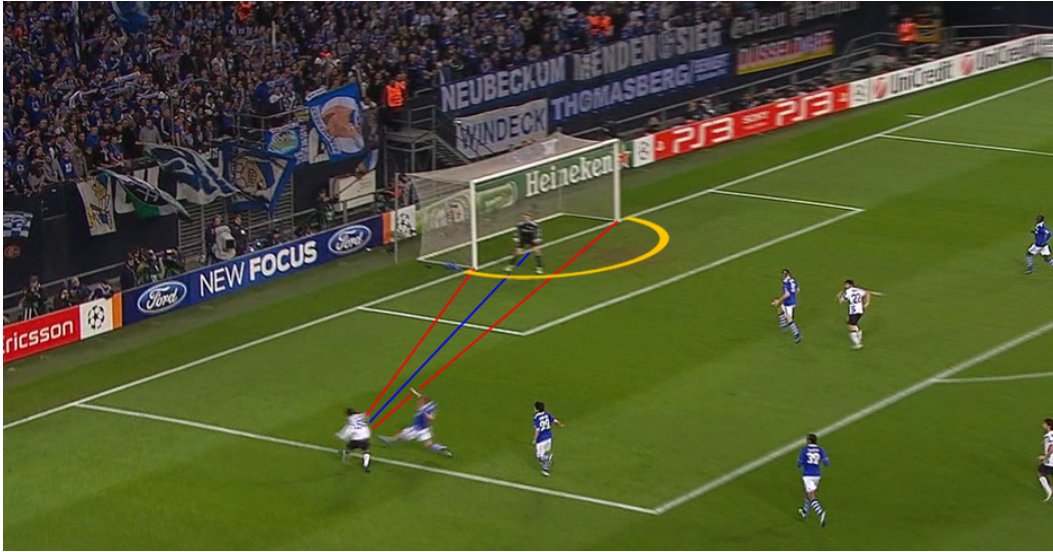
Also, here is video from the final game that shows Neuer coming for a ball with tremendous conviction: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2AuyN9jxzAA>

Lastly, here is video from the Germany vs. Algeria game. This series of clips highlights Neuer's ability to play off his line and outside the penalty area:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a2aBgO3J9NY>

Lesson 2: Lateral balance is crucial for making saves.

Many goals given up at this World Cup were a result of keepers being off balance – perhaps leaning a little bit left or a little bit right before the shot is taken. You will be better off having your weight evenly distributed and shoulders squared to the shot; this requires tremendous concentration and the ability to focus on the ball as opposed to the shooter's body. Here is a photo of Neuer showing excellent posture and positioning along the angle 'arc' that goalkeepers typically travel when shuffling in front of the goal; it is critical to avoid leaning left or right as you shuffle and set.



One less-than-stellar example of this principle is the winning goal from the final, (click link below). Although this is a great finish, notice the slight lean to the right from the Argentina goalkeeper; keeping his balance a fraction of a second longer (and keeping the hands up and in front of the body) might have resulted in a save: http://www.espnfc.com/video/latest-videos/600/video/1948633?&ex_cid=espnapi_affiliate_Google_World_Cup_Video

Another example of an off-balance keeper comes from Uruguay's 2nd goal against England; watch Joe Hart – and excellent keeper – lean every so slightly in the wrong direction (note, also, the great punt from the Uruguay keeper to start this): http://www.espnfc.com/video/latest-videos/600/video/1895276?&ex_cid=espnapi_affiliate_Google_World_Cup_Video

Conversely, many of Tim Howard's saves vs. Belgium were the result of squaring his shoulders and maintaining his balance. Let's just watch all 16 of them. Now, on a couple of these he is leaning the wrong way a bit, but still manages to make the save; see if you can spot those: <http://espn.go.com/video/clip?id=11165912>

Also, being balanced apparently can make you look like you have six arms:



Additionally, Memo Ochoa's saves against Brazil were largely the result of great balance; here are the game highlights: http://www.espnfc.com/video/latest-videos/600/video/1889171?&ex_cid=espnapi_affiliate_Google_World_Cup_Video

And, the German keeper Neuer made some tremendous saves against France by being balanced. Here are video highlights from that game; note the explosive push off on his diving save in the first half, and the perfect balance that he shows on the one-hand save he makes in the final moments: http://www.espnfc.com/fifa-world-cup/4/video/1932297?&ex_cid=espnapi_affiliate_Google_World_Cup_Video

Lesson 3: Don't fall on your butt! (Maintain front-to-back balance).



That sounds like a simple lesson, right? Well, it happens to the best in the world. The previous point referenced 'lateral balance', but this one speaks to a keeper's ability to keep the shoulders and hands in a slightly forward position (as opposed to leaning back or flinching in any way), and the feet parallel, facing the shooting.

Now, we saw several keepers at the World Cup fall backwards too soon, including the amazing Tim Howard; even he makes a rare mistake every now and then: http://www.espnfc.com/video/latest-videos/600/video/1903825?&ex_cid=espnapi_affiliate_Google_World_Cup_Video

Here is Spain's Iker Casillas falling down on the job, losing his balance: http://www.espnfc.com/fifa-world-cup/4/video/1878729?&ex_cid=espnapi_affiliate_Google_World_Cup_Video

And watch as the Switzerland keeper sets with his weight going back and his feet in a 'non-parallel' stance, which leads to him on his butt and in the goal... along with the ball.

http://www.espnfc.com/fifa-world-cup/4/video/1883517?&ex_cid=espnapi_affiliate_Google_World_Cup_Video

But, on a positive note, Mexico's Memo Ochoa has great forward body posture and his shoulder square to the field, allowing him to make a tremendous reflex:

<http://worldsoccertalk.com/2014/06/29/watch-guillermo-choas-sensational-save-against-holland-video/>

Lesson 4: Footwork! Move those feet!

Coaches harp on the importance of moving your feet before diving all the time. Sometimes, you will have enough time to get a shuffle in, and other times, it's just one tiny step. Regardless, any type of footwork before a dive is essential. As a starting point, this improves your ability to cover more of the goal; beyond that, it might allow you to get your body behind the ball and make an easier save that doesn't even require a dive.

To begin, let's see some examples of poor footwork. Here, slow feet cost the Croatian goalie; get that extra step in before diving: [http://www.espnfc.com/international-friendly/53/video/1876045?&ex_cid=espnapi_affiliate Google World Cup Video](http://www.espnfc.com/international-friendly/53/video/1876045?&ex_cid=espnapi_affiliate_Google_World_Cup_Video)

And here is the same keeper against Brazil again (although the 'toe poke' does make it difficult to recognize that a shot is coming and that a set position is needed): [http://www.espnfc.com/international-friendly/53/video/1876320?&ex_cid=espnapi_affiliate Google World Cup Video](http://www.espnfc.com/international-friendly/53/video/1876320?&ex_cid=espnapi_affiliate_Google_World_Cup_Video)

In this clip, the Iranian keeper doesn't move his feet very well, resulting in a goal: [http://www.espnfc.com/video/latest-videos/600/video/1911882?&ex_cid=espnapi_affiliate Google World Cup Video](http://www.espnfc.com/video/latest-videos/600/video/1911882?&ex_cid=espnapi_affiliate_Google_World_Cup_Video)

Additionally, failing to move your feet AND diving backwards is a really bad combination; learn from the Australia keeper's mistake on this shot from Holland: [http://www.espnfc.com/video/latest-videos/600/video/1891500?&ex_cid=espnapi_affiliate Google World Cup Video](http://www.espnfc.com/video/latest-videos/600/video/1891500?&ex_cid=espnapi_affiliate_Google_World_Cup_Video)

Really, while we're at it, any slight backward movement in your dive is problematic, as Brazil's Julio Cesar shows here (although this is a great shot, mind you): [http://www.espnfc.com/video/latest-videos/600/video/1939924?&ex_cid=espnapi_affiliate Google World Cup Video](http://www.espnfc.com/video/latest-videos/600/video/1939924?&ex_cid=espnapi_affiliate_Google_World_Cup_Video)

The common theme among these ideas is that when you don't move your feet, that can actually lead to a backwards dive—because the footwork should help to keep your body in a forward posture and assist in creating a 'push off', particularly if you take the correct 'forward', 45 degree step. Here is a photo of the Dutch keeper Tim Krul using his step to push into a great penalty kicks save; look at his foot:



By contrast, backward diving (and backward hand position) costs the Croatian keeper on his attempt to save a PK: http://www.espnfc.com/international-friendly/53/video/1876208?&ex_cid=espnapi_affiliate_Google_World_Cup_Video

Lesson 5: Don't turn your shoulders!

This is a subtle point, and examples are often tough to find. The lesson here is not to twist your shoulders as you are moving across the goal with footwork; keep the shoulders square to the field and the shooter. If you begin to turn your shoulders on your footwork, this will make it difficult to execute a proper dive, and the most likely outcome will be watching the ball go into the net or tipping a ball into your net. In the clip below, the Nigerian goalkeeper learns how important this lesson is, particularly on free kicks. Although we must give credit to Messi for hitting a tremendous shot, if the keeper doesn't turn his shoulders, he might have a chance for a save: http://www.espnfc.com/video/latest-videos/600/video/1911971?&ex_cid=espnapi_affiliate_Google_World_Cup_Video

Here is Tim Howard showing a good 'square' posture for footwork after a shot is hit:



This brings up a correlated point that all goalies have heard before: **Don't get beat to the near post.** And, if your footwork BEFORE the shot involves a shoulder turn, you might be setting yourself up for that problem.

Here is the Swiss keeper getting beat near post:

http://www.espnfc.com/video/latest-videos/600/video/1897298?&ex_cid=espnapi_affiliate_Google_World_Cup_Video

And it happens to one of the world's best: http://www.espnfc.com/video/latest-videos/600/video/1927641?&ex_cid=espnapi_affiliate_Google_World_Cup_Video

Lastly, the Australian keeper gets beat near post on this one (although it is a close range shot): http://www.espnfc.com/fifa-world-cup/4/video/1878966?&ex_cid=espnapi_affiliate_Google_World_Cup_Video

Lesson 6: 'Top Hand' for crosses (and don't slap!).

It was amazing how many keepers at the highest level were slapping at crosses. Do not do this – either punch a cross or catch it! Now, if using one hand to punch a cross that you can't reach, be sure to go with the arm that will get higher... what we often call the 'top hand'. On a cross from your right, this will actually be your 'near' arm—or right arm; that is the arm that the Nigerian keeper should have used to punch (not slap) this corner:

http://www.espnfc.com/video/latest-videos/600/video/1923761?&ex_cid=espnapi_affiliate_Google_World_Cup_Video

And here the Ghana goalie slaps a ball into a dangerous area, resulting in a Portugal goal: http://www.espnfc.com/video/latest-videos/600/video/1914342?&ex_cid=espnapi_affiliate_Google_World_Cup_Video

Neuer's punch in the final provides a nice example of what you should be doing:



Lesson 7: 'Top Hand' is useful for saving shots too!

Now, when deflecting a shot, the term 'top hand' has a different connotation. If time permits, for higher shots, we try to get the 'trail' arm (and leg) to drive across the body; driving it across will actually help bring the rest of the body along towards the ball. Here is the Costa Rican keeper Navas using the top hand to make the winning penalty kick save in the 2nd round shootout against Greece:



And below is Neuer making a 'top hand' save in a league game; note that in this direction the 'top hand' is the right hand—the picture above shows how the left hand can be the 'top hand' when diving the other way. Of course, remember that we would not use the 'top hand' for a low ball save; that would involve the low hand.



Top hand usage might have even led to a great save in this clip of the Chilean goalkeeper, who gets great spring on his dive, but can't stop this header:

http://www.espnfc.com/fifa-world-cup/4/video/1879063?&ex_cid=espnapi_affiliate_Google_World_Cup_Video

Lastly, here are full highlights from the Netherlands vs. Costa Rica quarterfinal match. Notice the great footwork from the Costa Rican keeper on his first-half save of a free kick, and also note the nice 'top hand' effort late in the match on the shot that hits the crossbar. Also, Dutch backup keeper Tim Krul shows excellent diving form in penalty kicks; he actually is NOT guessing, but merely reacting to the shots—an unusual tactic at the highest level, but not a bad idea for young keepers to try to emulate, particularly against players that are not shooting as hard as they do at the international level: http://www.espnfc.com/video/latest-videos/600/video/1934814?&ex_cid=espnapi_affiliate_Google_World_Cup_Video

Lesson 8: Catch!! And always “watch the ball”!

While many keepers at the World Cup were punching shots hit at them, it is probably safer to use open palms when deflecting shots, as doing so creates more surface area and makes it less likely that a shot will graze off the fists and head into the net. (On crosses, a fist is preferred because it will ensure greater distance, and crosses are less likely to knuckle or dip, so the risk is lessened). Now, if you watch the World Cup, you will see very little catching of shots – but that is because these shots are moving at such a high rate of speed (and are often dipping or swerving). This is not necessarily something that young goalies should try to emulate; try to catch whenever possible. Even at the World Cup, failure to catch was costly for some keepers. One valuable piece of advice that never gets old: WATCH THE BALL (preferably before it is already in the goal, as the Russian keeper learns here):



Remember, keep your hands in position to catch the top half of the ball and look it all the way in; make the shape of the ball with your hands and let the fingers make

the first contact; then this won't happen: http://www.espnfc.com/video/latest-videos/600/video/1890153?&ex_cid=espnapi_affiliate_Google_World_Cup_Video

Also, here is Casillas punching a potentially catchable shot back into a dangerous spot: http://www.espnfc.com/video/latest-videos/600/video/1891929?&ex_cid=espnapi_affiliate_Google_World_Cup_Video

Lesson 9: Make appropriate use of the 'new' breakaway stance.

All right, you may have seen many keepers using this newer breakaway technique. It has its origins in German goalkeeping academies, and here is Neuer using it against Messi in the World Cup Final; note that the chest is up and one knee is turning in to avoid a ball going through the legs:



Now, it's important to understand both HOW to use this technique and WHEN to use it. First, in regard to 'how', the picture on the next pages shows a good view of Tim Howard using the form; some key points to consider:

- 1) One foot opens to cover the far post
- 2) The chest stays big and the arms are wide and in front of the body
- 3) The palms are open and the near post hand slightly higher
- 4) At the distance Howard is from the ball, there is less need to turn one knee in to avoid the ball going through the legs, but you can still note a slight twist in his right knee (if he were closer to the ball this would be more pronounced and he would be lower—as Neuer is in the picture above)



From the realm of ‘what not to do’, here is video of three keepers at the World Cup who left too much space between their legs when using this technique; the result, as you can imagine, is not good:

Australian keeper: http://www.espnfc.com/video/latest-videos/600/video/1905743?&ex_cid=espnapi_affiliate_Google_World_Cup_Video

Korean keeper: http://www.espnfc.com/video/latest-videos/600/video/1903680?&ex_cid=espnapi_affiliate_Google_World_Cup_Video

Swiss keeper: http://www.espnfc.com/video/latest-videos/600/video/1897700?&ex_cid=espnapi_affiliate_Google_World_Cup_Video

So, make sure there isn’t too much space between the feet, and you can always use the heel of the leg that is turned outward to ‘snap back’ and save a shot in that space.

Next, as to the ‘when’ aspect of this technique, there are two considerations:

1) First, this technique is best utilized when the leg that is turned outward can cover the far post; thus, breakaways from angles are the ideal situations to use this. If you are using it in a straight ahead situation, try to stick out the leg that ‘matches up’ against the attacker’s foot which is nearest the ball; so, for example, if you see them open up the inside of their right foot, you will show the inside of your left—and in a straight ahead situation, twisting one knee in is important.

2) Second, regardless of the angle, it is best to use this technique when the shooter is still far enough away that sliding to the ground on your side would NOT enable you to win the ball, and might actually allow the attacker to just dribble around you.

IF you can get close enough AND there is a big enough touch that you can win the ball, it is still best to use our traditional 'hands to the ball, side of the body to the ground' technique for breakaways. The Belgian goalie used that traditional technique to stop Clint Dempsey's one-on-one attempt that developed from a great U.S. free kick in the second overtime of their game:



If we contrast that save with Tim Howard's save against Belgium earlier in the match, we can see that the Belgian attacker being slightly further out than Dempsey yields the key to the 'stalking' technique being preferred in the picture below:



Lesson 10: What can we learn from former World Cup champion Iker Casillas' tournament?

In 2010, Iker Casillas hoisted the World Cup trophy, as his team won the second of three consecutive major international championships (Euro 2008 and Euro 2012 being the others). Now, four years later, the game finds a way to humble him. This

will happen to every goalkeeper at some point. If he can make mistakes like these in a World Cup, anyone can. Let's first learn some technical lessons from the 5-1 loss to Holland:

Here, Casillas fails to execute a 'J' run to build any momentum for this cross; thus he has no power when going into his jump, and fails to use his body to seal off the attacker:

http://www.espnfc.com/fifa-world-cup/4/video/1878661?&ex_cid=espnapi_affiliate_Google_World_Cup_Video

In the clip below, he makes a mistake that even a youth keeper would find horrifying; on any back pass, always focus on taking better first touch away from pressure – and it helps to know where the pressure is coming from (always look around!):

http://www.espnfc.com/fifa-world-cup/4/video/1878671?&ex_cid=espnapi_affiliate_Google_World_Cup_Video

All goals from Spain – Holland: http://www.espnfc.com/video/latest-videos/600/video/1878787?&ex_cid=espnapi_affiliate_Google_World_Cup_Video

Ok, having skewered Casillas, let's learn some psychological lessons from this. Every keeper will have awful games or, in some cases, tournaments – even the world's best... even keepers who have won it all before. In the end, all keepers are defined by how they respond to these instances; although this sport will force you to remain humble, it also forces you to make sure that your mistakes do not destroy your confidence—because the next save may only be a moment away, and that next save is always your most important one!!



Things will be ok, Iker, you've still got plenty of championship titles!