

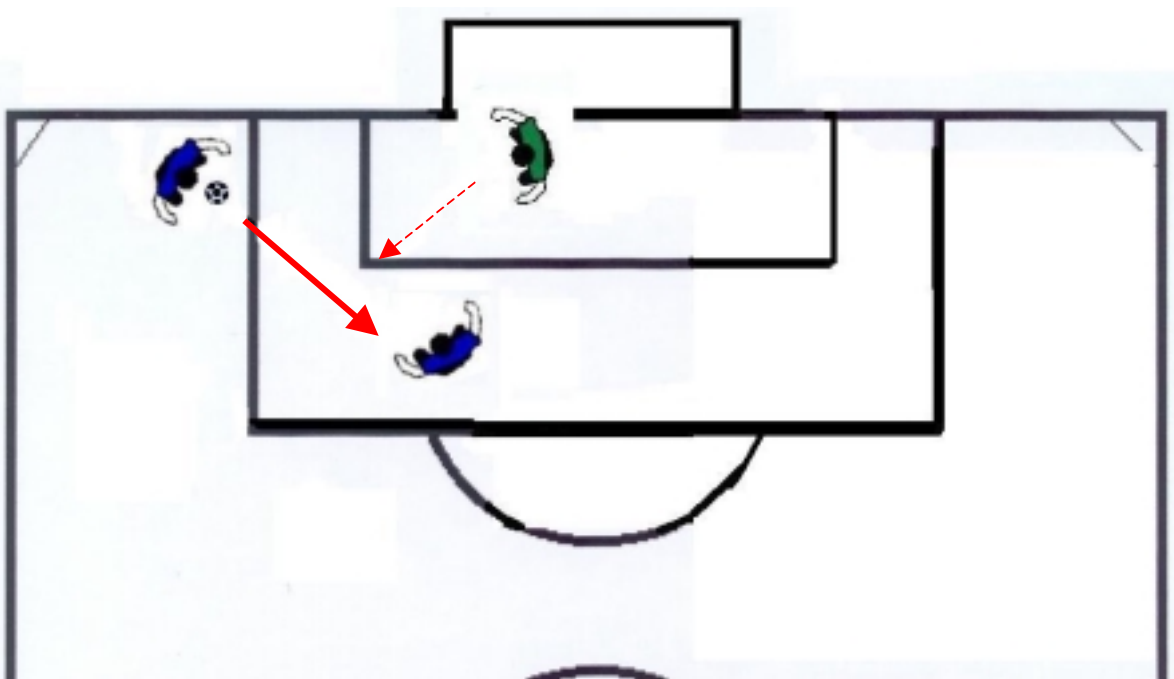
Defending the Low Cross

Note: The "low cross" discussed below is defined for this topic as a ball that is played from the side near the opponents goal line and below head height.

One of the biggest problems for a GK is the low cross, especially if the cross is angled back away from the goal.

This type of pass is difficult to the GK for a couple of reasons. First, the GK is often trained to make the diving save across the goal mouth. On a low cross, the save must be made away from the goal, which takes the GK off his line.

The next big problem is the cross itself. If the cross is moving away from the goal line, the GK must make the save on a ball moving away from him. This requires good timing, absolute commitment, and courage.



To complicate matters, the GK has to deal with attackers that approach the ball at different angles to the GK. Normally, the GK faces the attacker(s). With the low cross, the attacker comes from the side or more often from behind the GK. A well timed near post run will usually beat a GK trying to guard the near post to the ball. The GK must be aware of and assess these runs in his decision to go out after the ball.

Not only are opponents a problem, but also the GK's teammates can get in the way. Many own goals have resulted from the low cross.

Training to save this type of cross should start with the GK at the near post (NP). A server should play low hard balls from near the goal line. The server position should fluctuate from wide of, to close to the NP. The angle of the cross should be from parallel to the goal line to a spot on the six extended from the NP (coach should decide the maximum angle). It is important that the GK see many different serves to assess which saves can be made and which can't.

Technically, the GK should be near the NP on a line from the NP to the center of the goal mouth, 3-4 yards out. The GK's body should be in alignment with this line--in other words, he should not be facing the server, because if the GK faces the ball he will be blind to the runs behind him.

On the save, the GK should go out to meet the ball as its earliest point. This is very important on angled crosses as the longer it takes the GK get to the ball, the further away the ball will be from the GK.

If the GK cannot make the save, he needs to adjust his movement to the ball, being at the 3-4 yard center mark as the ball crosses the center of the goal. Footwork to recover into a ready position is very important as the GK may take a quick step or two out before deciding the cross is unsavable.

Progress the session to sending in near post runs from in front of the NP (where the GK can see the attacker). Then add NP runs from behind the GK across the goal mouth. Add defenders at the NP and on the six that are to deflect the ball if they get a chance or until the GK calls them off. Lastly, add marking defenders on the NP attacking runs.

The low near post cross or back angle cross is a killer ball to a defense and it is important that a GK is trained to recognize **savable** balls and to make the save.