

Support Your Local Goalie

As a referee there is a play I dread seeing develop for risk of injury to the 'keeper – and it is almost fully avoidable. I see this happen at the highest levels of youth play, including High School and upper-age competitive play.

The play develops as the attacking team plays the ball toward the penalty area and the forward steams at high speed to reach the ball and attempt a shot on goal. The ball is played with enough speed that the ball, the on-rushing attacker and the 'keeper are all going to meet at the penalty-area line (the "18-yard line"). The poor 'keeper stops at the penalty-area line, usually squatting down, hoping the ball will get there before the attacker does so s/he can pick it up. Often the result is a collision, and the goalie is usually the one who ends up the worse off of the two.

The 'keeper needs to understand – to be taught – that they are not confined to their penalty-area as if on a leash; they can leave the area and play the ball as any of the field-players would. S/he could kick the ball wide to a team-mate or clear it over the touch-line and concede the throw-in.

But there is another, possibly better, play for the 'keeper to make...

It is perfectly legal in many instances – and certainly in the situation described above – for the 'keeper to leave her/his penalty area and dribble the ball back into the penalty area and pick it up, shielding it from the attacker while shepherding it into the penalty area. As soon as the ball is in the penalty area, the 'keeper picks it up to (a) successfully blunt the attack and (b) keep from getting plowed into the turf by the on-rushing attacker. The attacker then falls back to prepare for the ensuing punt, throw or roll-out by the 'keeper.

Note that the 'keeper is permitted to do this **ONLY** when the ball was last played by an opponent. If the 'keeper's team-mate passes it back the 'keeper may not pick the ball up and must play it by foot – just as if s/he were a field player.

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