

Penalty Shoot Outs- Coach Player's to be Spot On
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The game of soccer can be extremely entertaining but because it also carries a reputation of being a low scoring game, sometimes a winner needs to be decided through a format which some people believe is not a fair way of declaring a winner. Matches from the professional level down to games played US Youth Soccer State Cup tournaments have been resolved by penalty shoot-outs and they will continue to play a part in major soccer competitions and tournaments.

For the neutrals that are not involved in these pressurized situations the entertainment level can build. However for, those that are being sent to the spot the only thing that is building is the pressure to score. It is a mentally demanding contest between the goalkeeper and a lone striker with the odds usually in favor of the person trying to score. If the ball is hit correctly it takes approximately 0.3 seconds to hit the back of the net, which realistically does not give enough time for the keeper to pick out the trajectory of the ball and make the save.

There are many different strategies for successful finishing off a spot kick. Problems amount for coaches who are about to enter a major tournament in when, where and how to deal with these situations, as well as educating and picking the players to take the shots.



It may be absurd way to decide a match based on a something that did not reflect the quality of the match but Penalty Shoot-Outs can be an appealing way to find a winner.

Realistically it is recommended that you do about 15 minutes of trial shots at the end of the training sessions in the week prior to a major event or game that could be decided by a shoot out. But this will not give you the perfect guarantee in picking out the players that can handle the pressurized situations. During this time you will be able to work on finding the players that show good technical aspects of striking the ball. But when it comes to game time and you realize that it will not be resolved during regular or over-time and a shoot-out is inevitable, you will need to think about some of the following issues:

1. Temperament

Does the player have the right temperament?

Have they played a solid game, or have they been mentally knocked out of the game by the opposition or other aspects?

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Do they show enough confidence at the end of the game or do they hide behind others in fear of being selected?

Is the player over confident or are they being level headed? Because you would prefer to have somebody cool and calm in these heated moments.

2. Can you rely on them?

Do you and their team-mates have faith in them?

Do you and their team-mates trust them to do the job?

Have they showed quality and skills to previously deal with pressurized situations?

During the time you spend working with the players on taking penalties, it is important that you try to rehearse the situations and make it as game realistic as possible. Not only will this help the players who you designate to take the kicks but also give your Keeper some challenges and an edge in trying to give your team an advantage when the situation may arise.

Some players may have established a routine in which they are comfortable with and will be reluctant to change their strategy. As long as they keep it simple and do not try to do anything too elaborate then they may be a perfect person for you to rely on in a penalty shoot out.



**Houston Dynamo Players celebrate
after winning the
2006 MLS Cup in a Penalty Shoot Out**

Most teams are required to keep the players waiting for their turn to pick their wits against the opposing keeper, on the half-way line. The walk from the center circle to the 18 yard box can seem like an eternity because so many different thoughts can start passing through the player's minds. "Should I drive it with my laces", "Should I place it to the keepers left". The point should be that players need make up their minds and stay composed as they make the walk and place the ball on the spot.

Insist the players put the ball on the spot, because some referees will demand that it is placed here and if the player is asked to move it after they have placed it and start moving back, it may just add more pressure to the kicker and knock them off their train of thought.

As a player, I have been named as a designated penalty taker and have been involved with penalty shoot outs both as a coach and a player. To help my players I found it useful referring back to some of my own personal situations. I would pick out the point in the goal where I was going to shoot; I would then recommend that players place the ball down and turn their back to the goal just picturing where they are going to put the shot. It is important not to stare at this point otherwise it will be advantage to the keeper. Just concentrate on the point, and wait for the referee to blow their whistle.

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Player will gain more confidence and show comfort in taking the kick if they keep their run up to the ball the same. Make sure that you emphasize that players do not change their mind after starting the approach to the ball as this will break the create them to question their ability when they need to strike the ball with confidence and believe that they will score

When you observe the players for technical aspects you don't need to be looking for players who can hit it with the most power, however, you do want players that can place the ball with some pace. The biggest chance a player has of failing to score is if they totally miss the goal. This is the worst possible shot since there is no chance that keeper may bundle it or to bounce a shot off of a post or bar. Encouraging players to place the ball with pace into the bottom corners may create more successful results.

There are several coaching strategies you may wish to employ when working with players on placing their shot. A tool that I would recommend is to place cones a yard inside of each post, or even place smaller goals which are used in U6/U8 games just on the inside of each post. Encourage the players to hit these areas and the players who hit these areas with more consistency may just be a perfect candidate for a designated penalty taker and one to use in shoot outs. See diagram below.



Encourage players to place the ball between the cones and the post

The expression of practice makes you perfect is not be 100% true because nobody is perfect and players will miss shots, however the more repetition they are given even if it is only 15 minutes after each session, the better they players will become. Helping your players go through this kind of routine will make it more familiar and provide them with more confidence when it comes down to real thing.

Don't over think the order in which players should take their shots even though there is some evidence that skill plays a role, because forward players, who have more goal-scoring experience, tended to be more successful at penalties than defensive players. But if you have helped the players then everyone taking a shot will be confident of completing the task.

Sit back, try and remain calm, but be confident and have belief in your players.

Good Luck.