

BREAKAWAYS

By Tony DiCicco

So how do they get so good at saving breakaways?

First, they understand the alternatives of the striker, their choices and the cues on when to use each choice. Once you can anticipate the alternatives available to the striker, the decisions are really much easier. Let's explore them.

When a striker breaks with the ball behind the defense, whether it's 50 yards from goal or 15, the alternatives and the cues for the goalkeeper are the same. There are only three:

1. Make the goal small by stepping out quickly after the ball is touched by the attacker. When the attacker dribbles the ball, the ball is away from either player and this is an opportunity for the goalkeeper to assess whether it's too far from the striker or if it's a good dribble touch. If it's too far from the attacker the keeper comes hard with breakaway save technique and wins the ball before the striker gets another touch, as Bri did against Denmark. If the dribble is a good one, then the keeper must step out to make the goal small and "steal ground" from the striker. What we mean is that the space for the next touch has been eliminated or greatly reduced and now the pressure for the striker is to shoot with the next touch or to dribble very delicately to keep the ball away from the goalkeeper. A goalkeeper that doesn't put pressure on the striker allows the striker time to prepare, find the right location and finish the shot. A major mistake I often see keepers make is even when they can't possibly get the ball, they still try to go hard to win it. All this does is give a good striker an easy dribble around the keeper or an opening to slip it by the fast rushing (out-of-control) keeper.

2. The second choice of the keeper is the option that Briana used against Norway. Although she could not get the ball before the shot, she was able to get the ball as it was being shot. We call this smothering the ball and it takes a lot of courage and correct technique for success and safety. On this play, it looks like the striker is going to get the shot off, but instead the keeper is there with his or her hands to smother the ball right on the foot of the striker. This is such a big play psychologically because everyone on the striker's team is seeing goal. When the ball is saved, it's a down for the striker's team. However for the keeper's team, this is a huge win.

3. The third and last choice the goalkeeper has is to step out to make the goal smaller, focus on the ball, and concede that the shot is not going to be prevented. The striker has controlled the ball well and to charge at the striker will just give them an easy opening. Instead, stalk out and with your positioning and body language you say to the striker, "Beat me if you can!" This is the choice that Briana used against the Chinese in the last first round game. She closed the goal and forced the Chinese striker to try to beat her. Her focus was on the ball, her body weight was forward on the balls of her feet, her reactions were sharp and she made a big, big save.

How do goalkeepers learn to make the right choice? There are a couple of ways I teach this. First of all, if you don't have our three-tape video series, (available at the Fort Vancouver Library) get the set because it's explained in each of the three tapes. Second, train each alternative separately to perfect technique. Then serve balls with strikers (remember, the striker must always avoid contact in practice) so that the keeper has to make the correct choice. Remember; build confidence by making sure the goalkeeper is successful to a certain level. Also reassure the goalkeeper that sometimes they will do everything right and the goal will still be scored and sometimes they will make a big mistake, but the striker will miss or they will get lucky and somehow make the save. We coach to the percentages and from experience on what works when.

Good luck and remember technique, positioning, tactics and concentration.
