

# Volleyball Notes



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# *The Nature of the Game*

The nature of the game must be understood before we can begin to analyze systems, theory, tactics and coaching methods in our sport. Volleyball has many characteristics which are unique unto itself and the coach must embrace the nature of the game so that he/she may better adapt the particular strategies and tactics for successful play. Volleyball is characterized by the following elements.

Volleyball is a **rebound** sport. This implies that there is no possession of the ball by the players with the exception of the skill of serving. The coach must constantly be concerned with training the movement of the player to be in a position to re-direct the ball. The coach must be concerned with the contact point on the body and the position of the player to most efficiently re-direct the ball. In most other games, the athletes possess the ball and run with it while holding it. They can compensate for poor body position by this act of possession. Strength can overcome poor movement skills. In volleyball we must work hard to position our bodies correctly before the contact to rebound the ball.

Most contacts of the ball in our sport are **intermediate contacts**. They are not the termination contacts; therefore, ball control is essential. Cooperation and teamwork are essential. Once the ball is put into play only the final contact of the attack is a terminating skill. Thus, the inter-relationship and cooperation of the athletes is essential for success and dominates coaching strategy and tactical theory. Because of the overwhelming number of intermediate contacts the term "ball control" dominates coaching thought.

Volleyball is unique in that it has a **high concentration (ratio) of people** to the size of the playing field. We have a congested, dense playing area, therefore, we need to consider the organization of our athletes, the organization of the movement, the flow of the players and what we call: "balancing the court", or "covering the court." The relationship of the players who are next to each other in the rotation becomes critical. The inter-relationship of who plays next to who becomes a prime coaching concern.

Volleyball offers relatively **little positive feedback**. Particularly instantaneous positive feedback. Therefore, it presents some difficulty in the learning process. One of the key elements of motor learning is

immediate reward or positive feedback. In volleyball it is difficult to have youngsters identify where this positive feedback is except with service aces or attack kills. All other contacts tend to be intermediate and not positive in their reinforcing capabilities; particularly in the area of defense. Blocking and back row recovery skills require great creativity by the coaches to achieve high performance. This is why our athletes tend to learn serving before passing and offensive skills before defensive skills.

In volleyball the traditional roles of **offense and defense are reversed**. In volleyball offense prevents points from being scored -- you merely achieve possession of the ball when you have success offensively. With defense we are attempting to score points. Volleyball can handicap the traditionally aggressive offense as it can produce many unforced errors and lose many points; conversely the conservative defense which simply waits for the opponent to make mistakes is not likely to produce success in volleyball. In volleyball defense we want to be aggressive and create the opportunities to score points. The coach must understand this reversal and integrate

these concepts into training and tactical presentation early in the development of his/her athletes.

Volleyball has a tremendous **imbalance between offense and defense**. This imbalance has increased in recent years in spite of the changes made by the FIVB Rules of the Games Commission, attempting to narrow the gap. Probably more than any other team sport in the world the offense has a tremendous advantage and in some ways this negates the reversal of the normal roles for offense and defense which is structurally presented by the rules. The offense scores or achieves success in the form of a side-out over 70 percent of the time at the top level in men's volleyball, and the normal opportunity to score points is therefore rare.

Volleyball is a team game with a physical **barrier** that prevents most direct one on one physical contact. The players are in control of their own game and in many respects they control their success and failure regardless of the level or actions of the opposition. The coach must retrain his/her players to reach a level of ability that will allow success regardless of how strong or weak the opponent is. This also carries over into the type of athlete which gravitates toward the sport

of volleyball. They tend to deal with frustration and aggression in different ways from the athletes in other team sports where bodily contact can release frustration and can moderate highs and lows of performance. The coach must train the athletes to play within themselves and to compete against themselves. To compete against themselves, the team faces the challenge of the standards that the coach sets for the team as well as to compete against the opponent.

Volleyball presents **no time limit**. Therefore, the game must always be won by the victorious team. The last point must be scored. A large lead can easily be lost in volleyball and the coach must train his/her team to "win" the game as opposed to waiting for the opponent to "lose" the game. Momentum is most critical in volleyball and easily and quickly shifts from team to team. It is most difficult in our sport to depend on lack of play by the opponent versus strong performance by ourselves to win the match. There is constant pressure to score points.

Volleyball is more a **player dominated** game than any other team sport in the world. This is opposed to coach dominated games, where the coach has a much stronger direct influence, particularly

during the actual play of the game. The contacts that the coach is allowed are restrictive in volleyball. Therefore, the coach must do most of his/her work before the teams walk into the arena for competition. The coach has less opportunity for adjustment and interaction than in many other traditional sports. The players must be trained to react to situations independently and to create tactical changes by their own design to achieve success.

The ball contact on the forearms in the underhand pass is unique to our sport. This is an **unusual skill** as the ball is normally contacted at the end of the appendages in traditional sports. It is somewhat like the perception involved with players in sports who use implements such as racquets or sticks, yet we have none in volleyball. The hand-eye coordination is very unusual in this particular skill just as it is for the players in soccer/football who must play the ball off their chest to control the ball.

The rules of volleyball require **rotation** by the players. This means that our sport is dominated by the theory that all players must become equally adept in all phases of the game. The rules tend to direct coaching thought away from specialization and toward the

*universal player theory*. The type of team where all six starting members are equal in all respects has been the goal for many, many years. This is an unfortunate situation which has in many respects retarded the development of some of the top teams and some of the thinking in our game. The coach must understand the rotation concept and the limitations on specialization. The coach must use the rules effectively to train his/her players to become familiar with all portions of the court and to become equally comfortable in the front row as well as the back row. Particularly in the learning phase of the sport for young players, the rotation concept is perhaps the most dominant rule with which they must become familiar.

The other element that rotation dictates to our sport has to do with coaching adaptation in practice. We believe that since the **universal player is the ideal**, we must therefore, spend time in practice training our players on all the skills. This becomes virtually an impossibility in most real-world situations. There are simply not enough hours in the day to train all of our athletes equally well on all the skills. The coach's role relative to rotation is to overcome, and work within this rule to build in specialization. This is consistent

across all sports for achieving success. Greater specialization always equals greater success.

The movement skills in volleyball are somewhat unique to our sport. There is running, shuffling, side-stepping, cross-over stepping and various combinations of these types of movements. All of these must be trained specifically by the coach during the training time. These skills must become second nature to our athletes. In volleyball we **move in all** directions by many means, plus diving and rolling on the floor.

In volleyball there are two **unique zones of play**. Most sports are played between the top of the head and the knees of the athlete in something we would call the middle zone (mid-zone). Volleyball has two zones which are outside this. We play many balls very close to the floor in a low zone (from knees to the floor). We must teach the players to become comfortable playing on the floor. Diving techniques, rolling techniques, flying recovery techniques, are all standard in volleyball. The other zone is the high zone (from the top of the reach to a point 3.5 meters above the floor). We train our

players more in the skill of jumping than any other sport in the world and much of our game is played in this very high zone (hi-zone).

As we develop our understanding of the game, it is important for us as coaches to relate to the elemental nature of our sport. The following are concepts which will make coaches successful:



**Strong teams are based on six basic foundations or building blocks:**

1. Physical characteristics (size, agility, speed, strength, power),
2. Tactics are supported by the technical expertise and level of the players,
3. Experience level of the team,
4. Mental components, particularly the ability to shift tactics and strategy (the teams sophistication),
5. The teamwork characteristics, the ability of the team members to compliment each other and to cooperate, and
6. The coaching strength that the team possesses.



Each movement and each contact in volleyball is part of an unbroken chain. The players who perceive this chain contribute more effectively than the players who perceive their actions as independent, and their movements as separated from team patterns.

The player's role on any contact is to *better the ball*. Regardless of the previous contact each player must strive their best to create a more advantageous situation for the following contact.

The number of **combinations in volleyball are infinite**. In volleyball, we can never prepare for every situation. The number of positions that plays can be run from, the number of areas of the court that must be defended, the positions for blockers, the combinations of players, are elements of infinite combinations.

Volleyball is dominated by **movement before the contact** and player movement between the contacts. We cannot make up for poor movement by holding the ball or strength. Our ability to effectively control the ball and to "volley" the ball depends on movement.

Volleyball is really six distinct games within the total game. Each rotation presents a different team and a different set of criteria to the opponents and likewise, each opposition rotation presents a

different team to your side. As coaches we must view the game from the point of view of rotations to be successful in the total game.

Within each rotation we must consider the individual match-ups and we must strive to **match our strength against opponent weakness.**

Tactically, we must emphasize team strengths and disguise or cover up team weaknesses. This is the key to specialization.

Players must be trained to compete with themselves. They must be coached and pushed to be the best player they can be. If they are merely content to be the best on their team or better than their opponents they will eventually fail.

Players must be trained to think of every contact they make with the ball as the most important contact they will ever make in the game. Once it is over they must forget about that contact and concern themselves only with the next contact. This ability to **focus concentration on the immediate play** is the best guarantee of success. This focus is the best guarantee of attention to the task at hand, and will create the most beneficial environment for team cohesion and team cooperation toward a common goal.

Each player who steps on the floor must have a specific and critical role in the team strategy and tactical outline. The player must understand his/her role and the role must fit his/her technical abilities. You can never ask a player to perform within a tactical construct that is outside his/her technical capabilities.

## **The six “T’s” of volleyball**

Teaching  
Techniques  
Theory  
Tactics  
Teamwork  
Training

### **Notes on Team Tactics**

In general, coaches have the choice to either develop the players and find the tactics which will fit the abilities of those players or try to mold the player to fit specific tactics. There is no question that the vast majority of coaches favor developing the abilities of the players and then selecting the tactics which best take advantage of those players' skills.

However, there is an element that must be considered in dealing with this common coaching dilemma. Coaches must understand their own strengths and weaknesses long before they can effectively deal with the players' strengths and weaknesses.

Coaches train players and transmit information to players in certain parts of the game more effectively than in other parts. All coaches will feel more comfortable when their team is employing tactics that they have a **strong fundamental knowledge** of versus tactics with which the coach is less familiar. The point to be made here is that there is some modification to the blanket statement that the tactics must always fit the players abilities

We must modify this theory for the coach to most effectively take advantage of his/her own skills and his/her own abilities to impact on the result of the match or the set. You must be **coaching in a comfortable environment**, which implies a certain set of tactical considerations versus another set of tactical considerations. Therefore, one consideration must be that the coach should select players who are more likely to fit into the tactics that the coach prefers to employ with his/her team. We commonly talk about coaches who favor a certain style of player versus another. The **coach's style** is most important for ultimate success. While we must never force a player to do something tactically that he/she is incapable of doing technically, we must be cautious to also not force the coach to employ a tactic simply because it is the best for his/her team. He/she may not make maximum use of the tactic or strategically select it at the most opportune time. So there is some balance to the general rule of the tactics fitting the ability of the players

## **Notes on Key Definition**

### **Systems**

The various methods of deploying individuals on the playing surface. Systems can involve serve-receive patterns, offense maneuvers, setter movement, spiker coverage positions, blocking alignments, back court defensive positions, etc. Any alignment of players which we can codify and describe is a system of play in volleyball.

### **Tactics**

The application of specific systems to match the strengths of the personnel on your team. As we have already discussed, the tactics can never be more complex or exceed the technical abilities of your players on the six basic individual skills. Tactics are further defined as the coach's decisions to use those system which will most effectively take advantage of the players' strengths and cover up the players' weaknesses. One of the most important elements to understand about tactics is that they are developed completely based on the abilities of your own team and those systems which you feel will be best suited to the particular individuals that you are coaching.

# Tactics in Volleyball

## Systems of the Game

### Attack Tactics

Individual

Serving

Setting

Smashing

Team

Setter at net

Penetration

With 1st pass

From back court

With high set

Quick attack

### Composition of the Team

0:6:0

3:0:3

2:2:2

4:0:2

4:1:1

5:0:1

### Defense Tactics

Team

Serve/Receive

5 players

4 players

3 players

2 players

Block & Back Court

No. 6 up

No 6 back

No 6 middle

Cover by net player

Cover by back player

Individual

Blocking

Back Court

Serve/Receive

## Strategy

The application of tactics to the specific opponent that you are playing. When we develop a strategy we are picking and choosing from a broad range of tactics which your own team has mastered. We choose those elements which will be successful because of particular "match ups" that you can predict will occur against your opponent. You will, for example, have certain hitters matched against certain blockers. This is within the tactics that your team has trained for; this is defined as strategy. You will develop a serving strategy within the general tactical serving plan of your team which should take advantage of receiving weaknesses of the opponent. You will develop a particular blocking strategy within the menu of available tactics that your team has mastered which will be most effective in defending a particular opponent's offense. Your strategy should vary from opponent to opponent, possibly even from game to game, and strategy will always involve a rotational decision that will be most effective in giving you more successful match ups than unsuccessful match ups against a particular opponent.

## Coaching

Coaching covers the decision making processes which are imposed upon your team to effectively select the strategies for a particular opponent and to effectively select the tactics that will be developed during the training period and to integrate the available components into a cohesive unit. The effective coach will maximize the individuals and the individual skills and the individual tactics available so that the whole which he/she develops will be greater than the sum of the individual parts. If the coach does that, we would judge him/her to be successful.

Coaches often say, "I have told them at least a million times, but they still do ....." Or, "We practice this over-and-over again at practice, but when we get into the game, poof!"

The most important thing to learn as a volleyball coach is that all behavior has a function. A behavior's function may not be apparent in all situations, but functions are there all the time. If a behavior's function is not apparent to you as the coach, then there's a 99-percent chance that the behavior is being triggered by an unseen motivation.

We all have strategies for everything that we do. If a coach is not getting what is wanted from the players, then maybe the coach would benefit from taking a long, hard look at all the strategies that the players are using. Coaches

often overlook hidden strategies and concentrate on the rather obvious, like the information trying to be conveyed.

If a player knows the desired behaviors, and if a player can perform those behaviors at practice routinely, then the coach often comes to expect the results. However, when the behaviors are not done in the game, then something is cueing or triggering the behavior that you see. Coaches merely have to cue the desired behavior into the game time frame.

Everyone gets frustrated when progress is not seen. We become disappointed. There are times when we lose hope. If our response to frustration is anger or disappointment, either as the coach or player, then it is time to structure a new plan. Structure a new belief. Not having a plan or a solid belief is what failure is all about.

One of the beauties of sport is the realization that you can have what you want. Behaviors will change with regular attention. Take the proper steps and begin to walk toward the desired goals.

Sports and sports' practices can be taken at a simple-level: lift weights / get strong. Coaching is more difficult, but if you connect the positive experience you encounter every day, you will become confident



**A coach would do well to constantly ask these questions:**

- How can I get what I want?
- What exactly do I want?
- Is what I want equal to what the players want?
- How is time spent at practice?
- Can I get what I want by doing a certain drill?
- Can I change the pace of practice?
- Can I better control the objectives of a drill by how the ball is tossed?
- Would word clues be of assistance?
- Is the drill's criteria appropriate?



Nothing will be accomplished until the athlete becomes focused. Focused on what? Hopefully, on what you want to accomplish!

**Repetition turns learning into a trained response.**

\*(Phobias are an exception. Phobias are one time learnings.)

## **Learning**

The athlete can perform a learned response by engaging his or her brain.

## **Trained Response**

An athlete can perform a trained response without engaging his or her brain. A trained response is done as a part of that athlete's automatic pilot.

## **Notes to Sharpening Your Coaching Senses**

1. Coach for one factor.

Give feedback without stopping the drill. Word clues are an example. Coach for that one factor until it is learned.

2. Coach for another factor until it is learned.

Do not expect the first learned factor to continue to be performed until it is trained response. Whenever possible, it is better to isolate a factor when teaching so that the parts which are not of focus do not become improper trained responses.

3. Repeat the learned factor until it becomes a trained response. Repetition turns learning into a trained response. However, the trained response must be cued properly.

Repetition has value only because of a player's focus. In most gyms, what has value to the coach, is what dictates the player's focus. If the players and coaches do not have the same focus, then, what is of value to peers, is probably what is dictating the focus. Value is the first thing to look at in the practice environment.

The coaches' values change throughout the season. From the pre-season to the post-season, the coach will focus on different aspects of the game. Different aspects are valued to different degrees depending upon the time of year. A transition occurs throughout the year and the most valuable aspects of the program change from individual training, to group training, to team training and to competitive training.



**Individual training**

skills, technique, conditioning, leadership of self

**Group training**

support movement, off-the-ball movement, relationships, responses, extended success

**Team training**

conversion, system cues, team responses

**Competitive training**

results, effort, joy, identifying success



A team reaches sport-form, called peaking, through freedom. Freedom from expectations. Freedom from perfection. Freedom from failure. To get to sport-form a coach must redefine what has value

## Notes for Peaking Your Team

The learning curve for skills starts at the conscious level. At the conscious level, learning takes place one step at a time.

The other end of the learning curve is unconscious competence, sometimes called the automatic pilot. In the peaking experience, it is important for coaches not to interfere with the automatic pilot.

Confidence and peak performance come when an individual and a team are in their most productive state. That state is a state of personal power. Personal power results when a player trusts both his/herself and the automatic pilot and when the player can trust the universe. The player has to feel that this is a safe place to be.

Everyone fulfills his/her best through personal power. Through personal power an individual is **empowered to make decisions and then act**. The person has to decide as well as eliminate what is vague and unclear.

As a coach, enhance personal power by allowing each player to trust their automatic pilot. Approve of the individual in a way that gives him or her the impression that the universe is a safe place. One must be free to interact with the universe. Free interaction is necessary if the player is able to add to himself or herself through experiences.

A player performs worse than his/her capabilities because he/she has interfered with him/herself in some manner. Poor performance from a player is not because a player does not care or that the player is a bad person.

**Team peaking** should be an objective for the coach. Teams may be peaked by the type of practices they experience. Obviously, physical peaking is one of the most effective methods. However, the type of coaching that is encountered also has a tremendous effect.

Coaches should structure training into **four phases** to move the team toward a peak throughout the season. The four phases of training are: Individual, Group, Team, and Competitive phases.

The individual phase is technique oriented training. Individual training comments from the coach might sound like, "left-foot, right-foot", etc. Here the physical training is individualized. A player becomes aware of the types of efforts that are expected and of the improvement that is necessary. In the individual phase, the coaching emphasis is on technique and individualized comments.

The group phase is the meat of the training for any team. In the group phase, the coach directs and raises the level of awareness for the "support movements." An example of the group phase training is conditioning the back-row

player covering the hitter during a team passing drill. Seams should be identified and the rules governing the movement into seams should be experienced. In the group phase, the coaching emphasis is on off-the-ball movements.

The team phase is the conversion and transition training. Team systems are put to the test here. In the team phase, the coaching emphasis is on cue recognition for team systems and organization of the court during the rally.

The competitive phase can be made to occur during all of the phases of training listed previously. In the competitive phase, the coach creates an emphasis on rewards and records results. In the competitive phase it is not productive to talk about technique, or what should happen. If things work in the competitive phase, get excited about the successes. In the competitive phase, the coaching emphasis is on results.

A team can not peak until it becomes result-oriented.

### **Notes for Skills Training**

The primary goal in teaching skills is to produce a movement pattern that becomes an automatic response to a specific cue. A thinking response is two-times slower than an automatic response. As more responses become automatic, the player becomes more efficient and more successful.

When a coach introduces a skill to a team, the coach must be aware of the **desired sequence of movements**. The more specific the coach controls for the desired sequence of movements, the more successful the coach will be. The coach will produce skilled players when the coach monitors and controls the desired sequence of movements.

Repetition of movement creates a nerve pathway for that movement. If the movement is performed the same way over-and-over again, the pathway will become efficient and fast. If the movement is performed differently each time, the pathway will be inefficient, inaccurate and slow.

A path from point "X" to point "Y" can lead in many directions. The nerves can carry an impulse in millions of diverse directions. Attempt to control and understand the skills from a perspective from within the nerves of the players. The player's pathway responds to the learning and formulates a player's motor coordination.

Inefficient nerve firing confuses nerve pathway, and could yield a result that is not proper. For example, volleyball coaches do not want a player to wind-up before bumping the ball. Volleyball coaches must be aware of the nerve path within the player, the sequence of movements, the cue leading toward the desired response.

Undesired nerve firing does not end in the desired response. Most efficient

nerve firing means a successful skill which is consistent

A player can become skilled by performing a skill inefficiently. Inefficient skills are hard to keep consistent. Inefficient skills have erratic results. Even if the player is able to have a great degree of consistency in the movement, an inefficient nerve pathway has been established. The inefficient nerve pathway might take a moment longer to perform the skill, but the action is still a learned skill.

As coaches who teach skills, our ultimate goal is to train efficient nerve pathways. After we have trained the efficient nerve pathways, we want to let the proper firing sequence know when to engage. Once the movement is trained, **the skill must be cued**. Eventually, we need to get the cues happening as a part of the game. Coaches need to stretch right into the players' nerve pathways and plug them into the action on the court in tournament competition.

Transcend from the nerves to the championship play via practices. Practices are the middle ground between nerve pathways and game-point in the championship bracket of tournaments.

# *Notes on Competitions and Tournament Play*



*Over the years*, many methods of determining who is “number one” have been created to accommodate sports that determine champions. Many of these formats can be applied to various sports. For example, single and double round-robin tournaments are common to the majority of sports. Home-and-home league play is typical for team sports.

The reason for competitive formats is to provide equitable opportunities for teams and individuals to see where they stand compared to their peers over a given period of time. The drama of standings and the opportunities and risks of moving up or down enhances the competitive experience. Most people who engage in competitive sports enjoy the thrill of the hunt. At every level, how-

ever, the spirit of competition can be dimmed when someone takes the consequences too seriously. Seldom has world history been altered by the results of athletics. Winning and losing are parts of life and should be kept in perspective.

When kids play Little League Baseball they begin by enjoying the play. Some well meaning parents teach kids that losing is bad, humiliating, a blight on self worth. When the emphasis is on the end product—winning or losing—and not on the process—the effort of doing one's best under any and all conditions, the true reasons for participation are skewed.

Certainly, we must try our absolute best to win. It is a great life skill to habitualize. It feels great to win. It is disappointing to lose, but seldom devastating. It is virtually an art form when two opponents meet who are equal and give their best. The intensity of focus is on tactics and corresponding skills. No one whines. They just play. Finally, someone wins and someone loses that particular contest. If great effort was put forth by both principals, basic sportsmanship through mutual respect was demonstrated, then no one's self worth is impugned. It is as it should be. Compete. Play. Win or lose, move on to the next day and game. If the excitement and

enjoyment is not there for you, find another activity .

Discussing the merits of competition often makes one far too philosophical. A description of various competitive formats follows.

## **Pools**

Any of the combinations of numbers and genders in team makeup can play in pools. Even though water can be a medium for play, the pools discussed here are of the dry variety. Pool play can be applied in leagues that last over days, weeks, or months. College athletics call them conferences. In the Pros, its divisions. Pools usually are identified with tournaments that are shorter in duration than leagues. Pool play requires at least six teams which, in turn, are divided into two pools of three. There is no maximum number that can play in a pool. However, if there are more than six teams in a pool, scheduling in a restricted time block becomes logistically difficult

Before becoming a competition organizer you need to understand some basic terms:

**Tournament:** An organized series of games among several indi-

vidual teams in any given sport to determine a linear ranking in that event.

**Pool:** A grouping of teams or individuals determined by a random draw or criteria based seeding. Two or more pools are an organizational format for a tournament.

**Seeding:** In formal tournaments, where specific criteria determine the relative strengths of the entered teams or individuals, an effort is made to balance the stronger and weaker teams in the pools so that participants have relatively equal playing schedules.

**Round-Robin:** Within a pool (or league, division, conference) every team plays each other. Most tournaments have single round robins, in which each team plays each other once. A league will often have a double round robin where each team plays each other twice in a home and home format, meaning that one game is played at one team's home base and the other at the opponent's home.

**Crisscross Final:** When pool play is completed and rankings are established, the second place team from Pool "A" plays the first place team from pool "B" and the first place team from pool "A" plays the second place team from pool "B". The winners from those

two matches play for the championship. The losers play for third and fourth. The crisscross can apply down the ranks of the pools. Third and fourth in each pool crisscross for positions of fifth through eighth in the tournament.

**Single Elimination:** Teams or individuals are seeded into a bracket representing a map to a championship match. If a team wins they continue to the next destination. If a team loses they are out. This format can be used in two ways: [1] To accommodate a large number of teams or individuals (the NCAA Division I basketball tournament leading to the Final Four is a well publicized example.); [2] To accommodate a tournament with more than two pools. (Instead of a crisscross, final teams are seeded into a single elimination final.

**Double Elimination:** This format is divided into a winners' bracket and a loser's bracket. If teams or individuals continue to win then they continue on as in a single elimination. However, if a team loses once, they go into a losers' bracket that represents a backroads map back to the championship final. But, if a team loses in the losers' bracket, they are out. Double elimination tournaments can be time consuming. Many state high school associations combine a single and double elimination format. To assure teams have

at least two matches, they provide for a second match even though they lost their first competition. However, unlike a double elimination, a team that loses once can no longer have a chance at playing in the championship or entering a consolation bracket.

These are the basic organizational formats. There are other, creative varieties which are attempts to make the tournament as fair as possible, logistically organizing numbers of teams, playing venues, within a time limit, and interesting to players and fans. At the end of this chapter graphic examples of the described formats are presented.

## **Need of Tournament Knowledge**

So what, you say? Well, perhaps, an example will shed light on the need for competitive — or organizational knowledge. You have been assigned to organize the activities for your company's annual summer picnic; your church has elected you chairperson of the recreation committee during a scheduled meeting on an evening you chose to watch television; you are a member of a family whose roots can be traced to prehistoric times, a family who has held

reunions ever since the landing at Plymouth Rock. You, as the youngest adult, are appointed social director. And so it goes... You decide to organize a Tournament. This book is on volleyball, so its the vehicle of choice, but tournaments are applicable to any number of athletic activities. Organize it as follows:

### **Organizing A Competition**

[1] Send out a notice describing the activity. (For example, a coed four player grass tournament. Two males, two females. Depending on number of teams round robin pool play with a crisscross final.

[2] When you know how many teams, or organize the tournament. For illustration purposes we will use two examples: (A) 10 teams; (B) 15 teams.

When organizing an event you must consider facilities needed or available, the time block assigned, and the number of teams. When playing indoors, the time constraints and facility limitations are much more restrictive. Gyms have just so many playable courts

and scheduling can be a hassle and expensive. Outdoor tournaments are much more accommodating in terms of space. There are lots of grass fields and sand. However, you must have enough court standards and nets to make courts. Weather can be a limiting factor for those that are less than hearty.

Time becomes a factor if you are renting facilities or if daylight is limited. Our illustrations will assume grass courts in a park, during July so that time and space are of no concern. You have equipment to set up three courts.

## **Ten Teams**

There will be two pools of five teams. Since there is no criteria for seeding, place them as balanced as possible based on your knowledge of the players involved. Each team is required to have a name for the purpose of identification and to provide some color to the event. Therefore, after registrations are in and before a schedule is determined, organize as follows:

## Blue Pool

1. Bashibazouk
2. Red Tide
3. Oldies
4. Yikes
5. Jugernot

## Gold Pool

1. Piblokto
2. The Future
3. Travesty
4. Rodents Under Net
5. Pox

Each pool is scheduled on the following formula:

Team 1 vs. Team 2

Team 5 vs. Team 3

Team 3 vs. Team 4

Team 4 vs. Team 1

Team 5 BYE

Team 2 BYE

Team 2 vs. Team 4

Team 3 vs Team 1

Team 1 vs. Team 5

Team 5 vs. Team 2

Team 3 BYE

Team 4 BYE

Each pool will use this formula. The team drawing the BYE will referee the matches in their pool. The Team numbers correspond with the team names. For example, G3 is gold pool/third team, Travesty; B1 is Bashibazouk.

A scheduling problem is that there are three courts. If there were four, scheduling two five team pools would be obvious and easy. The object here is to present a common situation. The following schedule can be used:

<b>Court 1:</b>	<b>Court 2:</b>	<b>Court 3:</b>
B1 vs. B2	G1 vs G2	B3 vs. B4
G3 vs. G4	B1 vs. B5	G1 vs. G5
B2 vs. B4	G2 vs. G4	B5 vs. B3
G4 vs. G5	B4 vs. B5	G2 vs. G3
B2 vs. B3	G5 vs. G3	B4 vs. B1
G4 vs. G1	B3 vs. B1	G5 vs. G2
B5 vs. B2		G2 vs. G1

Two pools and three courts can be difficult to balance play and BYEs. When scheduling, try to be as equitable as possible when considering play-to-rest ratios. The above example has a couple of teams with three matches in a row and two rests back to back. Usually, in any format, a team thinks they're at a disadvantage only if losing.

## Time Block

The next problem to solve is putting the format into a time block. There are several ways to control the length of matches: Play fast score (Rally Point); play two games to 15 points in each round; reduce the number of points per game to 11; play timed games. If two out of three game matches are played, use regular score and allow an hour for each match. This includes warm-ups and the potential for a third game. Reduce the game score to 11 and allow 45 minutes per round. A fast score game takes about half the time of a regular scored game. Remember that after pool play there will be a crisscross final representing two more matches. Of course, the two pool champions can play for the tournament championship reducing the championship match to one. This is known as a straight cross final. You can extrapolate the time needed if a full pool crisscross or straight cross formula is used.

Below, compare a couple of options for the example:

2 out of 3, 15 point games

7 rounds of pool play x 1 hour each = 7 hours

Crisscross final - 2 matches x 2 hours = 2 hours

Assume a half-hour rest between pool, semis, finals = 1 hour

TOTAL TIME = 10 hours

Therefore, if the tournament begins at 9:00 a.m., pool play would conclude at 4:00 p.m. The semi-finals would begin at 4:30 and finish at 5:30. The finals would begin at 6:00. It works, but it is mostly applicable for the hard-core volleyball player.

2 out of 3, 11 point fast score (Rally Point) games

7 rounds of pool play x 30 minutes each = 3 hrs. 45 min.

Crisscross final - 2 matches x 30 minutes each = 1 hour

Assume 15 minutes rest between pool/semis/finals = 45 minute

TOTAL TIME = 5 hours

If the tournament started at 10:00 a.m., and there was an hour lunch break, the tournament would be over at 4:00.

Elimination tournaments defeat the purpose of social competition since losing means being finished. However, an elimination final coupled with a pool play tournament can be effective as illustrated when dealing with the next example.

### **Fifteen Teams**

The pool formula described under the ten team example applies here since we are dealing with multiples of five. Simply add a third pool (Red Pool). The problem is keeping the time block manageable. If there are three courts, then each pool has a court. It will require 10 time slots to complete the round robin with one court per pool. If you have two courts per pool, five slots will do. Trying to secure enough space and equipment may be the best way to solve the time problem. Assuming this option is not possible you need to keep each round to 45 minutes in length. You can either play two out of three game matches using rally point scoring or play two 15 point regular scoring games only each round.

## The 15 Team Three Court Round Robin Schedule (All courts on same schedule.)

8:00 a.m. 1 vs. 2

8:45 a.m. 3 vs. 4

9:30 a.m. 1 vs. 5

10:15 a.m. 2 vs. 4

11:00 a.m. 4 vs. 5

11:45 a.m. 2 vs. 3

12:30 p.m. 1 vs. 4

1:15 p.m. 5 vs. 2

2:00 p.m. 3 vs. 1

2:45 p.m. 5 vs. 3

Again, it is difficult to balance play and rest ratios.

### **Play Offs**

A crisscross final won't work. A straight cross final won't work. So what works? A single elimination.

The pool champion with the best record gets the first seed (top, "1st, Best Record"). The pool champion with the second best record gets the second seed ("1st, 2nd Best"). The pool champion with the third best record gets the third seed ("1st, 3rd best"). The pool runner up with the best second place record is seeded fourth ("2nd, 1st best"). The pool runner up with the second best second place record is seeded fifth ("2nd, 2nd Best"). Finally, the runner up with the third best record is seeded sixth ("2nd, 3rd Best").

## **Breaking Ties**

What if two teams from different pools have the same win-loss record? There is a standard formula for breaking ties:

If teams are tied with same match win/loss record then;

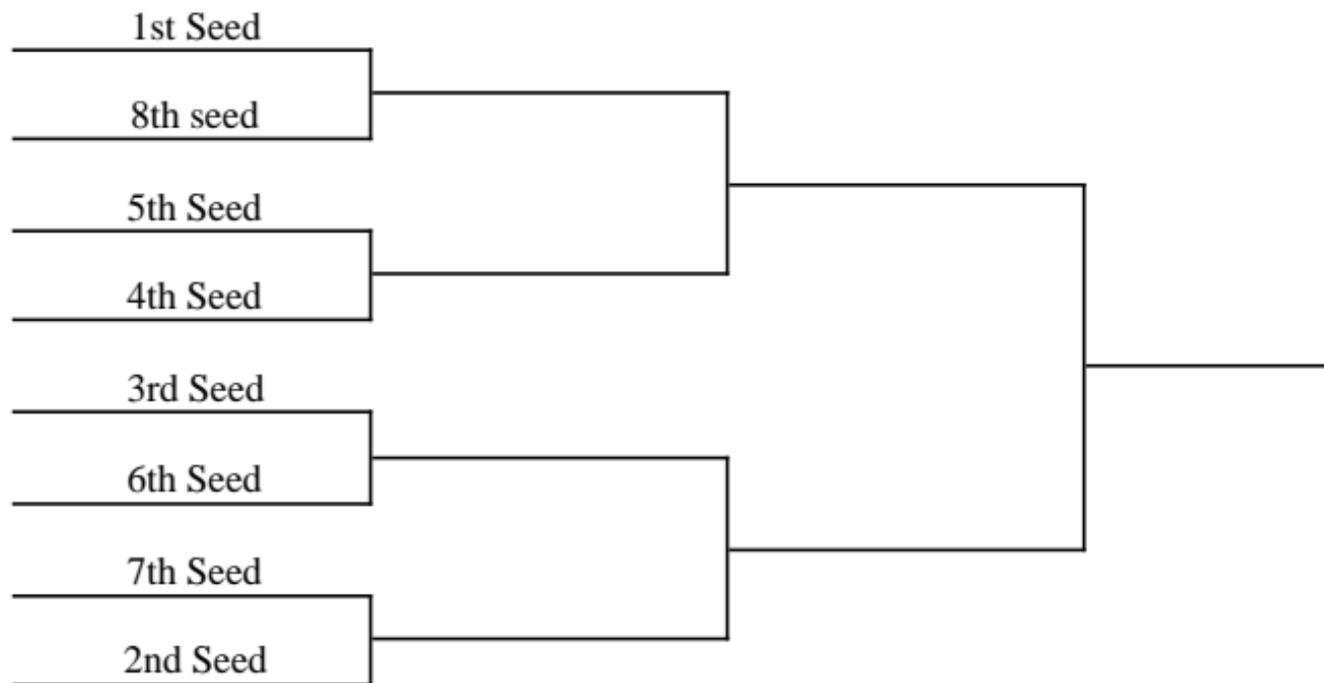
Team with best games win/loss percentage records is ranked higher. If they are still tied then;

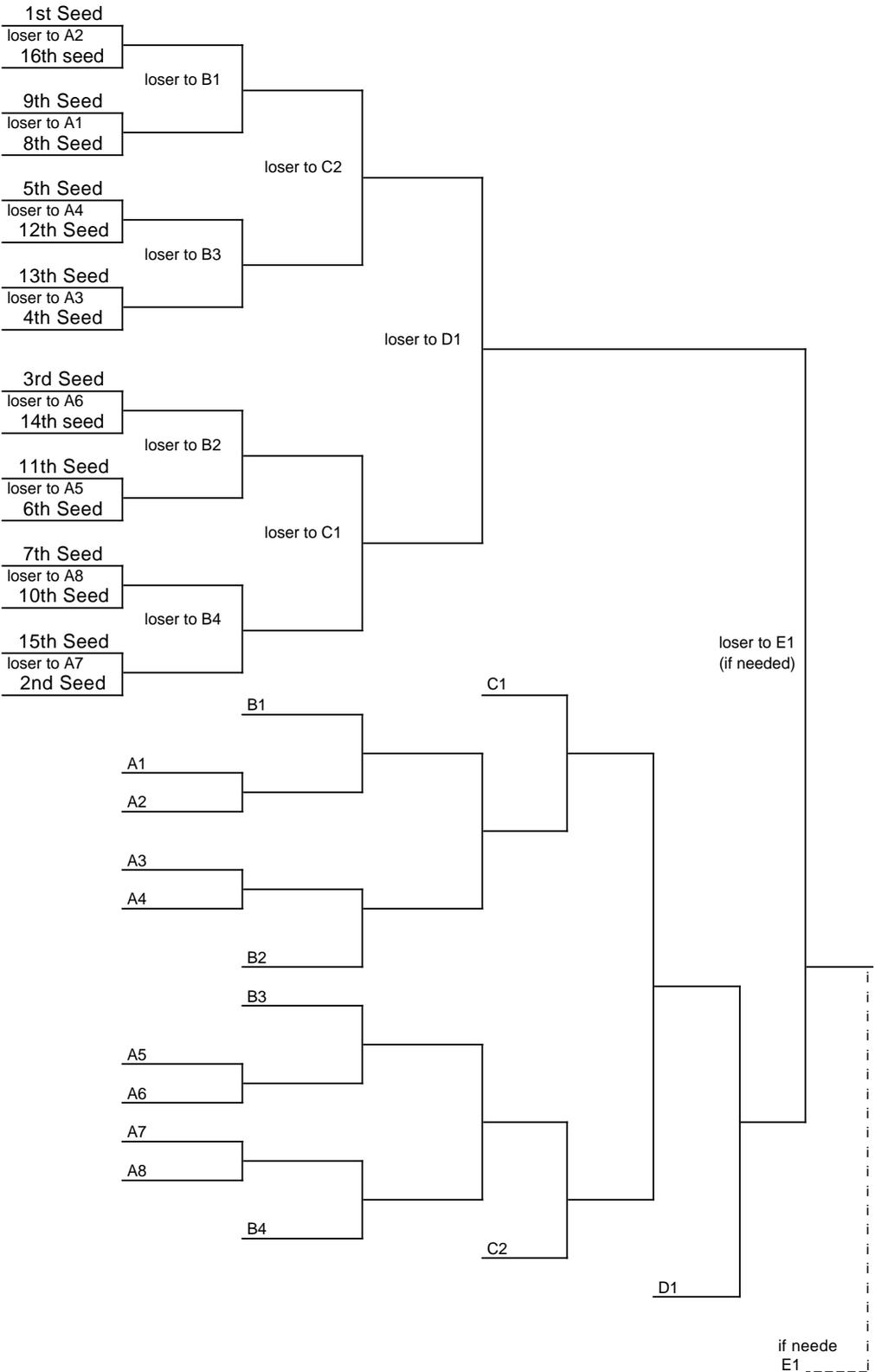
The team with the best ratio of points won to lost is ranked higher. If they are still tied then;

Flip a coin. Winner of the flip is ranked higher.

## **The Objective is to Play**

Tournaments can embellish the joy of playing. They can be highly organized or created on the spot. Add prizes or consequences appropriate to the situation. Many people who have never really played in a tournament format will be thrilled to be part of a team working and playing together with a goal. The inherent drama of matches played in and those on surrounding courts, enhance the interest in the event. The feeling of camaraderie among team mates as well as among all of the tournament's participants is special. Anyone who has run an organized 10 team tournament can identify the feeling. Doing one's very best is the glue of mutual respect among all players. Winning is a gourmet dessert but participation in the event is the tasty entrée.





if neede  
E1 -----j



# Notes on Team Conditioning & Program Building

## Pre-Season

*The sport* of volleyball requires a base of conditioning that incorporates many different aspects. A general fitness level, that which is acquired through **aerobic** training, is needed so that the athletes can perform in matches up to two and a half hours in length. **Anaerobic** training, that which is needed for the specific parts of the game, such as jumping, spiking, playing defense, and making the quick transitional moves from defense to offense, is also needed.

**Strength** must be developed to enable each athlete to perform the required skills at a high level. A general weight-lifting program with a few specific exercises for volleyball is beneficial.

Because volleyball demands a great deal of jumping, it is important to develop the muscles used for jumping, and to increase the athlete's jump as much as possible. This is accomplished with a **jump-training** program that includes strength, speed and technique training.

If this sounds demanding, it is! Volleyball is a dynamic game, and when played at a high level, it is physically demanding. The constant jumping, the explosive spiking action and the low defensive position require a great deal of strength. On top of all of this,

**flexibility** and **rest** are equally important.

Each workout should be preceded by a **warm-up** that includes range of motion and some jogging that raises the body temperature. This will prepare the athlete physically and mentally for the activity ahead. Flexibility is most easily obtained during the cool down period when muscles are warm and can stretch easily. Cool down should include some "rag-doll" jogging, stretching and sometimes, light massage.

All athletes need rest! The muscles need time to recover. By alternating the type of workout and muscle groups involved, rest can be incorporated into the program. When athletes are involved in a pre-season conditioning program they must be aware that adequate sleep is important and they may have to curb their lifestyles somewhat to meet all of the demands of the physical training.

Each athlete in your program should understand that they must get into good shape before the playing season begins. This takes about six to eight weeks of tough training. If you try to get into shape during the competitive season you must spend valuable gym time on conditioning. All athletes should strive to be in good shape throughout their lives, not only during their volleyball career or volleyball playing seasons. Each one should have **goals for a conditioning program** that can be set up and monitored with the coach. You can help motivate each athlete by individually setting some goals with them. Although everyone must have a general conditioning program, you can probably find one or two areas to concentrate on with each individual.

**Records** should be kept of all activities so that the athletes can periodically check their progress. When this conditioning phase of your program is finished, it is especially rewarding for athletes to look back at their records and see their own improvement and accomplishments. Hopefully, they will have met some, or all of their goals. This can be a great source of confidence and provide motivation for the upcoming season.

## Aerobic Base

This part of training forms the foundation of conditioning and should be continued year round to keep your athletes in top shape and healthy. Whatever the exercise is, it should be performed continuously for over 20 minutes at a pace that does not exceed 80 percent of the athlete's maximum heart rate.

Subtract the athlete's age from the number of 200 for men and 226 for women to get an approximate maximum heart rate.

This will give you the average maximum number of beats per minute the athlete's heart could reach. A good pace to train at is one where you are still able to talk occasionally to a partner. Too slow of a pace is preferable to too fast a pace.

Volleyball athletes must train aerobically for general condition, not to run in marathons. There are a few different ways to train aerobically: running, cycling, cross-country skiing, swimming, aerobic dancing with specific volleyball movements included. Aerobic training should be done three-times per-week for 30 to 40 minutes.

Studies have shown that after 20 minutes of continuous aerobic exercise, the level of fat used as an energy source is increased quite dramatically. So for each minute after 20 minutes of training, more fat is being burned.

Aerobic training will increase muscular strength and endurance and also the strength of tendons and ligaments. This helps to prevent injury during higher intensity training sessions. It improves the cardiovascular system.. It strengthens the respiratory systems as well. The heart becomes more efficient. The body's ability to burn fast as a fuel is also increased.

The best way to aerobically train for volleyball is to use *vollancing* or aerobic volleyball dancing. This is running at a slow pace and adding approach jumps, block jumps, rolls, and dives done with a submaximal effort that does not break up the continuity of the running. This can be done indoors or outdoors.

## Anaerobic Training

Anaerobic or interval training is the second type of conditioning that your team needs. Most actions here can be specific to volleyball. This training can consist entirely of spike approaches, block jumps, quick short dashes, and defensive moves such as rolls, dives, sprawls and run-throughs. These movements should be done in the specific manner that the athletes do them. This may vary according to what position they play. For example, a middle blocker's footwork would be different from that of an outside blocker, therefore, the movement should be specific to their position.

Since jumping is so important in volleyball, some jumping should be done each day. There should be variety in the exercises in order to give the leg muscles some rest. Again, the time it takes to perform the exercise and the heart rate are important. The work should not be performed for longer than 30 seconds, at or near full intensity so that the heart rate is at 80 percent by the end of the repetition.

After the work period there is a rest period. This rest period must occur. For volleyball a work interval of 10 to 15 seconds, with a rest interval of 30 to 45 seconds is a good guideline to follow. At a higher level of play where rallies are sustained in matches, longer intervals of up to 30 seconds are recommended. During the rest periods the athletes should never stand still but walk around. There should be three or four repetitions in a set. The rest between sets should be twice as long as the rest between repetitions.



### Sample Anaerobic Workout

<u>Activity</u>	<u>Duration</u>
Block Jumps	15 seconds
Rest	45 seconds
Block Jumps	15 seconds
Rest	45 seconds
Block Jumps	15 seconds
Rest	130 seconds
Defensive Shuffles	15 seconds

Rest	45 seconds
Defensive Shuffles	15 seconds
Rest	45 seconds
Defensive Shuffles	15 seconds
Rest	130 seconds

Repeat the above series two times.



Anaerobic training should be done twice a week and should take about 20 to 30 minutes. The emphasis needs to be on the legs, with blocking, spiking, defensive shuffles and other defensive movements.

Resistance should be added in the form of weighted belts or weight vest. Bicycle inner tubes can, and have, been used quite successfully as weight belts when filled with sand. The valve is cut out and the tube filled with sand, and tied off at both ends. The belt can be tied around the waist with a rope, wrapping it securely around a couple of times. These are often inexpensive or free at a bike shop.

Start out easy with only a kilogram of sand and increase gradually in one kilo increments, going up to six or seven kilos. An inner tube from a larger type of bike is best suited for a weight belt. You can use a ten-speed inner tube or 1/4 inch or 1/2 inch surgical tubing as resistance in the form of a tension band.

Surgical tubing costs about 45 cents a foot. Using a partner, wrap the tube around behind the neck and down under the arms like a harness. The partner provides the resistance from behind for block jumps, spike jumps, and sport sprints.

Try jumping on the 2-3 foot thick high-jump landing pads. Do leaps over the stretched out tubing to not only increases the workout load, but teaches players balance in landing, while being safe for landing. You can raise the tubing from right on the mat surface, to higher levels for more difficulty, as the players sink well into the mat itself.

## Weight Training

Weight training is the third type of fitness that your team should include in its pre-season conditioning program. The emphasis for this part of your total program should be on developing muscular strength, not endurance, or the energy systems. The definition of muscular strength is the greatest forces muscles can produce in a single effort. Muscular endurance on the other hand is the ability of those muscles to perform many repetitions of the same movement.

Muscles grow when there is resistance during contraction. By continually making demands on the muscle at or near the muscle's capacity (progressive loading) you should see a gradual increase in strength. As the muscle strength increases the resistance should correspondingly increase.

The purpose is to demand effort at the muscle's capacity, forcing all the fibers to be used, without overloading or exceeding their capacity. Overloading is not the goal. With weight training machines and the correct techniques, the athletes can safely reach a level of training at capacity. When the effort reaches a point where the muscles begin to exceed their capacity, stop the exercise.

For safety, this high intensity strength training with resistance should be done with a machine or a partner. When the athlete reaches the point of failure, and the muscles cannot meet the challenge, the exercise can safely be terminated.

Weight training should be high intensity work. This means the repetitions should be carried to a point where the muscle fails. At least the major muscle groups should be involved in your weight training program and if time allows, add other exercises starting with some for the upper body. The upper body does not get much work in the aerobic and anaerobic workouts, so strength has to be developed in this part of the program.

There are many good weight lifting machines that use various forms of resistance such as iron bars and plates, compressed air, and hydraulics. These are easy to learn how to use. Machines that provide full range resistance are the best. They can be used to exercise the muscle in both directions of the motion. The athletes powerfully

extend the weight to the machine's limit, then, slowly, taking twice the time, lower or return the weight to the starting position.

There are many different viewpoints on what is the best method of progressive loading that provides the fastest strength gain. Some say you must do three or more sets of two to six guide repetitions. Others say two sets of eight to twelve repetitions is the way to go. It has been said that you should only lift three times a week, but now another school says you can lift five times a week if you work on alternate muscle groups.

For my college team, I use the second method and have seen good results. You must find the weight with which the exercise can be performed the minimum number of guide repetitions, (eight, using the second method). The athlete trains at that weight, with two sets of eight to twelve repetitions. When they can do two sets of twelve then the weight must be increased. The increase will depend usually on the type of machine being used. The new weight should not be so much heavier as to cause the repetitions to drop below the minimum guide number of eight in this case.

The exercise is done until the point of failure is reached. One set done to momentary failure will produce a faster strength gain than many sets which are terminated a couple of repetitions short of failure.

If the maximum guide number is reached in a set, the athlete should continue the exercise to the point of failure. Some progress should be made in each session. Either the weight can be increased or more repetitions done. Each repetition must be done with the correct form. There should not be any jerking or throwing motions but steady and smooth movements.

Sets should be done with intensity and the athlete should move from one exercise to the next, alternating upper body and lower body exercises. No rest is needed between these sets.

A sample workout which includes five upper body exercises and four lower body exercises in two sets of eight to twelve repetitions, takes about 40 minutes to complete. Have your athletes work with fitness specialists in their area that best know the equipment and the

most up-to-date information.

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## **Sample Weight-Lifting Program**

### **Upper Body**

Flat press

Incline Press

Bench Press

Dumbbell Pull-overs

Lat Pull-downs

### **Lower Body**

Leg Press or Squats

Quadriceps Extensions

Hamstring Curls

Lunges

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## **Jump Training and Pool Jumping**

We have found that the best way to improve our athlete's jump is simply by having them jump in a specific manner as they would in the game; block jumps, approach jumps, taking off of one or both feet. If time did not permit us to do more, this is all that we would do for jump training and it would produce results.

With sufficient time allowed we have added pool training to our workouts. The water provides resistance and a soft landing. It takes the constant pounding out of jump training. This program takes about 30 to 35 minutes and requires a water depth of about five feet or shoulder height. This workout is anaerobic in nature and should be performed on alternate days of your other anaerobic workouts.

Begin with a few laps of jogging in the pool for warm up. We incorporated three kinds of jumps; block jumps with 45 degree knee bend, approach jumps, and 90 degree squat jumps, with hands clasped behind the neck for added resistance. The head goes under

the water during this exercise. The jumps are done in sets of 20 to 25. This takes about two minutes, and one minute is taken for rest in between sets. During this rest period leg exercises are done, such as leg circles, abduction, adduction, full range of motion, and flexion and extension.

Do the leg exercises for 30 seconds on one leg and then switch to the other leg.



### **Leg Exercises for the Swim Pool**

*Leg Circles*

*Abduction - Adduction*

*Flexion - Extension*

*Full Range of Motion*



### **Sample Pool Jumping Workout**

Block Jumps	20 to 25 repetitions
Leg Circles	60 seconds
Approach Jumps	20 to 25 repetitions
Abduction - Adduction	60 seconds
Squat Jumps	20 to 25 repetitions
Full Range, Ad-Add	60 seconds
Block Jumps	20 to 25 repetitions
Flexion - Extension	60 seconds
Approach Jumps	20 to 25 repetitions
Full Range, Flex-Ext.	60 seconds
Squat Jumps	20 to 25 repetitions
Two laps Jog	
Cool down	



### **Sample Gym Jump Training**

Jump training in the gym consists of three sets of ten repetitions of high skipping for warm up. If you have access to a court and a net, use the net for blocking jumps, and approach jumps. You should use a

Vertec or something else to gage the height of the approach jumps. We place our Vertec near the net so that the athletes are approaching as they would in a game.

Approaches should be done at two inches below their maximum jump reach. An individual would train in sets of ten jumps. They would have to touch the height ten times to complete a set. We like to train three or four athletes together. As a group they have to touch the prescribed height 30 times if there are three of them, and 40 times if there are four of them. This adds more peer pressure to the workout.

An individual would start at two sets of ten and increase over the six to eight week period to five or six sets of ten. The groups would begin with a set of 30 or 40 accordingly, and increase to 150 to 200.

Three sets of ten blocking jumps is sufficient. The pool and the gym workouts should alternate or be done at least eight hours apart. Therefore in one week, the workouts would alternate pool-gym-pool, and the next week, gym-pool-gym. We have had great success with this program. If your athletes cannot find a pool to use for their pre-season conditioning, then they should do the gym workout three times a week with only four to five sets of approaches. It should be noted that vertical jump can be increased with approaches. It should be noted that vertical jump can be increased with strength training and jump training, but technique plays a large part also.



## Example Training Schedule for NCAA Women's Team

### May

Jog 4 times per week

2 miles in 17 minutes

Sprint 3 times per week

5 x 50 yard dash

5 x 100 yard

2 side step, stay low

1 skip

2 backwards quickly

2 x 220 yard sprints

Jump Training 4 times per week

5 x 10 Block jumps

3 x 5 Tuck jumps

3 x 5 Split jumps

2 x 20 Side jumps

Sit-ups

3 x 10 crunches 4 x per week

Push-ups

2 x 15 pushups 4 x per week

### June

Jog 4 times per week

2 miles in 15 minutes, 30 seconds

Sprint 3 times per week

5 x 50 yard dash

5 x 100 yard

2 side step, stay low

1 skip

2 backwards quickly

3 x 100 yard sprints

4 x 220 yard sprints

Jump Training 4 times per week

7 x 10 Block jumps

3 x 10 Tuck jumps

3 x 10 Split jumps

3 x 15 Side jumps

Sit-ups

3 x 15 crunches 4 x per week

Push-ups

2 x 20 pushups 4 x per week

### July

Jog 4 times per week

2 miles in 15 minutes

Sprint 3 times per week

5 x 50 yard dash

5 x 100 yard

2 side step, stay low

1 skip

2 backwards quickly

3 x 100 yard sprints

5 x 220 yard sprints

Jump Training 4 times per week

10 x 10 Block jumps

3 x 10 Spike Approach

3 x 20 Side jumps

Sit-ups

3 x 20 crunches 4 x per week

Push-ups

3 x 15 pushups 4 x per week

### August (first week)

Jog 4 times per week

2 miles in 14 minutes and :30 secs

Sprint 3 times per week

5 x 50 yard dash

5 x 100 yard

2 side step, stay low

1 skip

2 backwards quickly

3 x 100 yard sprints

5 x 220 yard sprints

Jump Training 5 times per week

10 x 10 Block jumps

3 x 10 Spike Approach

3 x 25 Side jumps

Sit-ups

2 x 25 crunches 5 x per week

Push-ups

2 x 25 pushups 5 x per week

### August (second week)

Jog 3 times per week

2 miles in 14 minutes

Sprint 3 times per week

5 x 50 yard dash

5 x 100 yard

2 side step, stay low

1 skip

2 backwards quickly

3 x 100 yard sprints

5 x 220 yard sprints

Jump Training 5 times per week

10 x 10 Block jumps

3 x 10 Spike Approach

3 x 25 Side jumps

Sit-ups

2 x 25 crunches 5 x per week

Push-ups

2 x 25 pushups 5 x per week

## Spring Season\* Conditioning for NCAA Women's Program

	Mon.	Tue.	Wed.	Thur.	Fri.	Sat.
Aerobic	30-40 min		30-40 min		30-40 min	
Anaerobic		40 min		40 min		40 min
Jumping	Pool for 35 min		Gym for 30 min		Pool for 35 min	
Next Week	Gym		Pool		Gym	

## Spring Season Conditioning for NCAA Women's Program

### Alternative Program:

	Mon.	Tue.	Wed.	Thur.	Fri.	Sat.
Aerobic	30-40 min		30-40 min		30-40 min	
Weights	40 min		40 min		40 min	
Jumping		Pool+ Gym		Pool + Gym		

\* The Spring Season for college women in the USA occurs from the months of January to June depending upon the coach and program. Most programs hold formal practices and compete in some matches. However, the official-NCAA competition season happens from August to December.

This program does not include anaerobic training. The jumping should be done at least eight hours apart. This is the program we use during the spring semester at school.

In summary, you must build a good foundation. Some of the hardest work needs to be done long before you get into the gym. Athletes who come in out of shape or overweight take a greater risk of injury because they are trying to keep up and get in shape as they train. The first two weeks of on-court training in most programs require two-a-day practices or intense sessions. If your athletes can begin this phase of training with a good base of conditioning then you can spend most of your time on the court with the volleyballs.

If your athletes are in poor condition you may have to hold off on the interval training or modify it. When athletes are learning weight lifting techniques the workouts will be higher volume and less intense. In all aspects of the conditioning program, the motions should be as volleyball specific as possible. Sets should be stopped if technique is poor.

If strength training is not possible, then the number of interval workouts with resistance should be increased to three times per week. Strength and interval work should be done on different days if possible or spread apart if done on the same day. The average time spent for each workout, including warm-up and cool down is just over one hour.

When we begin on-court training, we continue to pool train for another four weeks and lift twice a week for two to three more weeks. We stop the aerobic workouts but continue to do anaerobic work that is integrated into our practices. This conditioning program takes us through our 14-week season in good shape.

When working with the student-athlete, you must remember that they need time to attend classes, study, practice, play, rest and relax. You may not have enough time once school begins to do everything that is beneficial to your program, so you must decide what your team needs the most and concentrate on that area. Create what you need for your particular program. We demand a great deal from our athletes during these workouts, but we also try to find ways to

vary them and have some fun.

## **Notes on Applying Movement Training**

Volleyball is one of the most demanding sports from a movement standpoint. Movement ranges are critical to the player's success. Ranges of movement must be built into specific body postures and skilled movements. Then these movements must be cued so that the player will respond with the appropriate action at the proper time. Next, they must be performed usually explosively and reliably. All of this is complicated by the decision-making process.

In movement training we are **striving to make the bulk of the action performed by a trained response**. In order to accomplish this, it is required that much of the decision-making be reduced to a response or non-thinking level. Thinking responses should be primarily reserved for specific opponents or situations which occur infrequently enough that they do not warrant proper allotment of time at practice. Trained responses are accomplished by repetition and time.

### **Train your team's range of movement**

Coaches need to incorporate flexibility, strength, endurance and acceleration into the program. Train the proper body postures for each skill and improve the players' movement intervals between skills.

### **Train your team's volleyball specific movement skills**

Condition for forming the body and approaches to the ball prior to contact. Train all contacts with the ball. Forming contact surface, and mastering the dynamics of ball control are training elements. Train to improve the point of contact on the ball, direction of the follow through and acceleration.

## **Reading**

Cueing - when A occurs then B follows

Trained or automatic responses

Recognizing - enlistment of proper skills, movements

Timing of enlistment of proper skills, movements

Thinking results in the proper response, (two times slower than  
A) responding with a trained skill but changing the cue

Considerations for designing and structuring the team's training  
program should have activities that address the following:



***Movement Training Check List***

*Hand-eye coordination*

*Reaction*

*Perception*

*Vision Training*

*Quickness, fast and slow twitch muscles*

*Body to ball awareness*

*Turning movements*

*Air pivots, shifts of body mass*

*Static / Dynamic*

*Specific Skills*

*Movement as it affects concentration*

*Movement as it affects flow*

*Starting, stopping, clearing, and opening*

*Acceleration*

*Point of contact / Direction of swing dynamics*

*Skill movements*

*Serve, set, spike, etc.*

*Movement intervals between skills*

*Body postures*

*Eye sequences and tracking*

*Foot speed and reactions*

*Movement directions*

*Lateral, front-back, rotational, high-low, arm speed,*

*Flexibility*

*Change of direction*

*Platform speed*



## Summary of Team Preparation

The special preparation that must be given to a team takes many forms. In general, to best prepare your team to win at the top level they must train under the conditions that most closely approximate competition. This could involve many factors and is called *specificity of training*.

- a. general arena surroundings,
- b. floor surface,
- c. lighting conditions,
- d. practice at the same time of day as important matches,
- e. make your practices intensely competitive,
- f. place positive and negative consequences on the result of all drills and competitions in practice,
- g. give your players the most confidence possible by emphasizing those areas in practice that they are most likely to perform during the game, and also those areas that they are most successful at performing technically,
- h. have your team practice the tactics they will employ in the match,
- i. have a real referee in training to simulate game conditions.,
- j. physically prepare your team by tapering their work load slightly so that they will be as fresh and recovered as possible at the moment they must play the important competition. A light activity load on the day of the match is recommended, but the day before could have no physical activity.

## Notes on Program Building

The development of a top class volleyball team has historically taken a relatively long period of time. There are, however, several exceptions: most particularly the USA Men's Team which captured the gold medal in Los Angeles in 1984. There are several keys in developing successful teams.

The first key is that you must choose the **best athletes** available, and you must train them to take advantage of their abilities.

The second key to develop this top team quickly is to create a tactical system which is specialized and which takes maximum advantage of the abilities of the players. **Specialization** is the key. A team can be developed most quickly by concentration on a few elements of the game rather than trying to develop a broad base of skills in all the elements of the game. Specialization can shorten the road to success, but it is a hazardous road because you are depending on a narrow set of skills rather than a broad-based fundamental foundation.

The third key is to gain as much **experience** as possible. It is recommended that a minimum of sixty international matches per year is necessary to achieve success in a short period of time.

The fourth key is to develop as **new** a tactical approach as possible. Sport always follows the lead of the new development, the novel idea. It usually takes at least three years to catch up to new ideas.

### **Flexibility of systems**

To reach the top level, teams must be **adaptable**. They must have a basic foundation of play that they are familiar with and in general will use against most opponents. The teams who reach the top have the ability to change their system with some subtle shifts to take advantage of specific opponent weaknesses. They also have the ability to change so that the opponents might not expect exactly the same tactical presentation match after match. Possibly your team will be able to change from one setter system to a two setter system, or to change setters within a one setter system, or to change your type of attack from combination plays in position four to combination plays in position two, or from combination plays which move from right to left, to combination plays which go from left to right. You may choose to change blocking tactics or defensive systems.

If is important that you develop in your team the capabilities to adjust to various opponents and to the situation in the match. *The best teams are the most flexible.*

# Enjoyment

Team Play

Theory

Techniques

Teaching  
Process

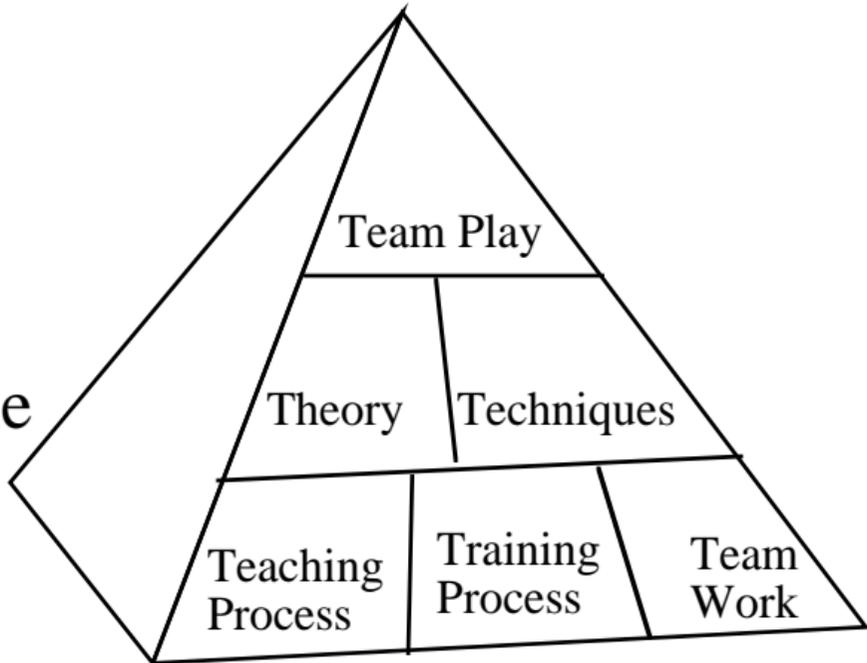
Training  
Process

Team  
Work

Reasonable  
Starting  
Point

Regular  
Progress

Meaningful  
Goal



## Base of the Pyramid

There are three components that are the basis of a team.

The *teaching process* in volleyball is a learning theory. Perceptual motor learning is the process of motor skill accretion and how we develop it.

Imagine a continuation of a line with two poles. One end of the line is something called the part theory. In the **part theory**, take all the skills and divide them into small components. This end of the spectrum was rather popular in the not too distant past.

### Figure 10

The other pole is called the whole theory. Doug Beal and others feel strongly that the whole theory is much better. The **whole theory** is involved in a play concept. The whole theory allows players to play the game; teach the team to play the game while making all the activities as game-specific as possible. Use exact situations including the environments in which matches are staged. Use the actual relationships between the net, boundary lines, benches, team, and everything

possible. All the parts have an impact on the learning process in skill acquisition.

It is important for coaches to go through the process of defining how you teach your players to acquire skills. Be aware of how you integrate new components into the system.

The second part is called the *training process*. In many countries, the word trainer is the same word as coach. In America, the two words are quite different. The coach is the manager, the overall coordinator of the team. One of the processes is coaching itself.

There are many aspects to training. Certainly there is skill training, but there is also physical training, psychological training, emotional training, mental training, lots of different aspects of training that the coach has to coordinate in preparing the team to play. All aspects must be fit into the plan of preparing a team.

*Teamwork* is the third component. Actually, teamwork is difficult to define. Mostly as coaches we understand if we have good teamwork. If we don't have good teamwork, we know too. But, we do not always know how to develop good teamwork.

If there is good **communication** of individual and cooperative roles, teamwork is a much simpler process of development. Spend a lot of time on role definition.

**Role definition** is much more than talking to the players one-to-one. Teamwork can not be fostered by simply telling the players to "Do this!" "Do that!" "Don't do this!" and "Don't do that!" *Role definition is at least 75 percent developed by how the player is used in the training process.* The majority of the role definition is obtained without verbal interaction. Doug Beal coaches with the belief that role definition is developed through the training process, not verbal interaction between coach and player. The player can discover the role based on how he/she is used.

When did you substitute the player in the game? How do you use him in practice? What drills are the prime areas involved in that player's activity? This is how to develop roles. Certainly there is some verbal feedback, but develop teamwork through the important process of role definition. Encourage the player and convince him to

accept the role. The most important thing is that the player knows what the role is.

Good teamwork includes great cooperation. **Cooperation** means that the players are willing to subjugate their own performance and egos for the performance and success of the team. Teamwork and cooperation occur if players are willing to fail individually for the team that succeeds. It is a hard concept in volleyball.

**Specialization** is the priority for success in a team sport. Principally, you can rank the ability of teams, by how well specialized they are. Specialization is another way of saying, "Do you have the people who are most skilled in any area, performing in the area of the most skill needed? Do you have that? Did you match-up?"

The second level of the pyramid has two major areas that most coaches talk about when developing a team: theory and technique. These two items - theory(systems) and techniques(skills) - are based on the three factors or processes on the bottom level. Coaches have to develop the items along the bottom of the pyramid, then go to the second level.

*Theory* is how we play the game from a systematic approach. Generally as a team becomes more sophisticated or more experienced, or moves up a level, it can increase the number of systems. Theory becomes more complicated. There is some benefit to a complex theory. There is benefit in the ability to change systems and to have a large number of systems in your repertoire.

The volleyball team can be like a classical pianist who, as he becomes better and better, increases his repertoire. The team should strive to develop more answers to our opponents problems. A good opponent presents you with different problems. The larger the repertoire, the more systems you can play.

The other half of this level in the pyramid is *techniques*. The system you can play and the theory of the game are always limited by the way your players acquire skills. The techniques and their perfection have an interaction with the systems that you can play. To some degree your ability to play different systems is limited by technique. Examples of systems are different serve-receive patterns, different

defense patterns, different blocking, different attack combination plays, etc.

Techniques and skills have another limiting factor with the player you have on the floor. Certain players can learn certain skills better than others. You cannot teach some skills to certain people that you can teach to others.

The top level of the pyramid is called *team play*. The systems you have developed and the techniques that your players have learned leads to this final theory. Team play is another word for tactics.

There are two major limiting factors of tactics. One is your team. All items in the pyramid limit your team. What systems do we know, what personnel range do we have and what kind of training processes have we gone through, etc. etc.?

The other tactical limitation is the opponent. Tactics are the choice of systems, based on your team's strength, suitable for the opponents you are playing. It is something like looking over a menu at a restaurant, and deciding what is going to be best for dinner that night. Your team has a style based on team play, and the opponent is going to limit that style.

The overview and pyramid are important in understanding the process we go through to develop a team and to analyze it.



# Volleyball Questionnaire



Name \_\_\_\_\_ Birthdate \_\_\_\_\_ SS# \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Grad. Date \_\_\_\_\_ Today's Date \_\_\_\_\_

Parent(s) Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

## Academic Information

High School \_\_\_\_\_ H.S. Code # for the Clearinghouse \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

GPA \_\_\_\_\_ Class Rank \_\_\_\_\_ College Major \_\_\_\_\_

SAT verbal \_\_\_\_\_ math \_\_\_\_\_ Date Taken \_\_\_\_\_ ACT \_\_\_\_\_ Date Taken \_\_\_\_\_

Have you applied to the NCAA Eligibility Clearinghouse? Yes — Not Yet — No Call: (319)377-1492.

## Athletic Information

Height \_\_\_\_\_ Weight \_\_\_\_\_ Positions Played \_\_\_\_\_

Preferred Hand \_\_\_\_\_ Standing Reach (one hand) \_\_\_\_\_ Approach Jump \_\_\_\_\_

H.S. Coach's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Coach's Phone \_\_\_\_\_

J.O. Coach's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Coach's Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Junior Olympic Team \_\_\_\_\_

Honors and Awards Won in Volleyball \_\_\_\_\_

Camps and Clinics Attended \_\_\_\_\_

Participation in Other Sports \_\_\_\_\_

Is a video tape of your volleyball skills and competitions available? \_\_\_\_\_

## Please Return To

Student-Athlete Schedule for:

\_\_\_\_\_ date: \_\_\_\_\_

	<b>Monday</b>	<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>Thursday</b>	<b>Friday</b>
<b>8:00 am</b> Course: Professor: Bld & Room:					
<b>9:00 am</b> Course: Professor: Bld & Room:					
<b>10:00 am</b> Course: Professor: Bld & Room:					
<b>11:00 am</b> Course: Professor: Bld & Room:					
<b>12:00</b> Course: Professor: Bld & Room:					
<b>1:00 pm</b> Course: Professor: Bld & Room:					
<b>2:00 pm</b> Course: Professor: Bld & Room:					
<b>3:00 pm</b> Course: Professor: Bld & Room:					
<b>4:00 pm</b> Course: Professor: Bld & Room:					
Other end time:					





## Notes on Recruiting

One of the primary concerns of high school volleyball players, their parents, and coaches alike is the process of **collegiate recruiting**. From the perspective of the collegiate coach, the recruitment process is so critical to the success of a program that it may embody as much as 50 per cent or more of the staff efforts on a daily basis over a 12-month period. Very often in a Division I collegiate program, a recruiting coordinator is hired solely for that purpose. From the perspective of the high school or club coach, not only has it become important for the coach to be able to give educational direction to an inquisitive athlete, but his or her program very often may fall under parental pressure to assist in the recruitment of players for the value of securing a scholarship. Programs now achieve a high degree of prestige not only in the win/loss record, but also in the number of players successfully competing in the collegiate ranks.

Coaches can be the most instrumental people in helping their athlete obtain a college scholarship. In order to be of the most help, it is important for coaches to know what opportuni-

ties are available, and to know what level of competition is realistic for their athlete. An important step for a coach to take for the benefit of the athlete is to seek and obtain information regarding the process of recruiting.

There is a very real fear of risking immediate eligibility status. An important issue is to be not only appropriately informed of the collegiate rules, but to be very well informed of the **state** body governing athletic rules. The rules inevitably vary from state to state. By knowing and sharing the knowledge of the recruiting rules with the athlete and his or her parents, the coach can help to explain what can be very confusing. Taking the time to explain the rules can help to avoid the unfortunate situation when athletes are ruled ineligible to compete at an institution because there was a violation of one or more the recruiting rules.

One source for these requirements is the *NCAA Guide for College-Bound Student-Athlete*. This booklet outlines many of the rules and will answer questions that your athlete may have. It is important to write for a new booklet each year, since the rules are constantly changing. The booklet is available by writing to the NCAA at 6201 College Boulevard, Overland Park, KS 66211-2422.

Other sources may include: (1) state high school athletic governing body; (2) local collegiate coach; (3) clinics; and (4) high school athletic coordinator.

## Notes on Answering Recruiting Questions

The following is a capsulized version of pertinent information regarding the collegiate recruitment process. (Items preceded with an asterisk [\*] are currently under review by the NCAA and therein subject to revision).

1. *At what age may an athlete receive mail or phone calls from interested colleges or universities?* [\*]Any age

2. *At what age may an athlete be contacted in-person by a collegiate recruiter?* After the completion of the junior year.

3. *Does receiving mail or phone calls spell, "SCHOLARSHIP?"* No, it means someone is interested. A scholarship offer may or may not come later.

4. *What are some NCAA recruiting limitations?* There is no limit to either the number of letters or phone calls involved in recruiting. Direct in-person contacts are limited to [\*] three at the high school and [\*] three away from the high school. (**Note:** No in-person contact may be made until competition is completed

during a match or tournament and the coach has released the athlete). Lastly, campus visits are limited to [\*]f ve off cial, paid visits. There is no limit to the number of visits f nanced by the student.

5. *What are the academic minimum requirements for NCAA recruit prospects?* Athletes must graduate with a minimum of a 2.0 grade point average (on a 4.0 scale) in a core curriculum of at least 11 courses which must include a minimum of three years of English, two years of math, two years of social science, and two years of natural or physical science, involving at least one lab. In addition to these core curriculum requirements, athletes must achieve a 700 combined score on the SAT, or a composite score of 18 on the ACT. These tests must be taken under national testing conditions on a national testing date. Because the tests may be taken more than once, and the best combination of math and verbal totals may be applied, it is recommended to begin testing toward the end of the junior year. Coaches can be major motivators for athletes to achieve in the classroom as well as on the court. It is important for coaches to pass this information on to their athletes and the guidance counselors to ensure that their

athletes will be eligible to compete.

Coaches, parents and players need to understand that student-athletes must begin to think about attending college in their freshman year. They need to make sure they are taking the proper academic courses needed for acceptance into college. Many university entrance requirements are more strict than the NCAA. Guidance counselors or the admissions department at the university will be able to give that information to you or your athlete. The better the student your athlete is, the more choices he or she will have available.

6. *What if an athlete does not achieve the base academic requirements?* Check into the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) or 2-year college options. There is also the option of a student-athlete attending a 4-year institution on his/her own, i.e. not in affiliation with any athletic scholarship. This option would require losing the first year of eligibility (**Note:** there are other avenues of applying for financial aid for college through national aid programs.)

7. *How does one evaluate an athlete's physical potential as related to college/university programs?* There are three levels of competition within the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA).

Division I is the toughest, has 269 schools and is allowed to give a maximum of 11 scholarships. Division II has 193 schools and is allowed to give a maximum of eight scholarships while Division III totals 259 schools and is not allowed to give any scholarships. Athletes at Division III institutions may receive financial aid provided it is based on financial need and **not** associated with athletic ability. Universities under the jurisdiction of the NAIA also offer scholarships, as do various community or junior colleges.

**Note:** *The National Directory of College Athletics* [women's edition] is published annually by Ray Franks Publishing Ranch, P.O. Box 7068, Amarillo, TX 79114, Phone (806) 355-6417. It contains complete listings of U.S. junior and senior colleges and Canadian colleges. Within each division, coaches may learn specifics of the traditional strength of volleyball programs by requesting media guides from specific schools of interest. Also, current information is available through volleyball periodicals. Presently, many national and local newspapers will run the latest polls on most recent results in the box scores of the sports section.)

Another evaluation tool is to "spectate your sport" by going to watch matches in your area. If at all possible, high

school and club coaches should familiarize themselves with the various levels of collegiate play by attending matches at the local colleges. If coaches have a good understanding of the level of competition at each of these divisions they can help guide their athletes to a level in which the athlete will be accepted and successful. A college coach will most likely come to you for an honest and accurate evaluation of your player. Also more and more volleyball is being broadcast on television, largely by the sports cable channels.

In reference to actual physical skill, a common denominator of playing height potential is vertical touch not vertical jump. In other words, how high can a player touch when using both an approach jump or a block jump. In a top Division I program, it is extremely possible that the average approach touch among spikers is 9'9" or better.

8. *What are some recommendations for counseling the recruited athlete?* It is important to determine the athlete's priorities. Are they academics? interest? coaching style? teammates? social atmosphere? volleyball program? level of competition? type of degree desired? etc, etc. By determining the priorities the coach

can

organize, plan and prepare in an effort to be better acquainted with the schools of interest. Then work to make good decisions based on a deductive process as opposed to emotion.

9. *What are some recommendations for counseling the non-recruited athlete?* Establish a list of schools of interest and write the volleyball coach at each institution. This initial letter should be as informative as possible regarding the athletic profile and academic standing.

If an athlete is interested in playing on a collegiate level, whether he/she is recruited or not, this type of communication can be beneficial. By their junior year, they need to be sending letters to the coaches of colleges in which they would be interested in attending. Include a resume outlining pertinent athletic information such as position played, height, weight, vertical touch, volleyball honors received, and an academic profile. It is imperative to include the athlete's GPA and, if available, SAT or ACT scores. State the academic areas of interest. Be sure to also mention what other sports he or she has participated in and other awards received. The letter should be written and addressed to the name

of the coach. If you or your athlete don't know the name, make a call to find out. If the athlete competes on a club team, be sure to mention that. If possible, the name and phone numbers of both high school and club coaches should be included. This is enough information to start the communication process between the athlete and the college coach. Relaying this information to your athlete can be a huge help. Many athletes have no idea how to even begin the process.

Be prepared for a videotape request from the institution. Athletes will most likely need your assistance in preparing a video to be sent to college coaches. In preparing a video, remember the best place to tape a volleyball match is from behind the court with the camera stationary and from an angle high enough to see both the home and opponent's courts clearly. An ideal videotape should have two parts. The first part opens with the player introduction and a 10 minute specialized skill segment. The athlete can demonstrate each of the skills a number of times. Include serving, passing, setting, hitting, blocking and individual defense. The second part should include some unedited match play from

one of the athlete's best matches. It is preferable for it to be as competitive a match as possible. The length of the tape should not exceed 20 minutes. When the video is sent, it is important to identify your athlete, either by number or by position, to ensure the college coach is watching the right *team* as well as the right *athlete*. You wouldn't want to help a college coach recruit the best athlete from your rival! Lastly, be sure to make more than one copy and always maintain possession of a copy.

In summary, the best way to manage the recruiting process whether the athlete is highly recruited, moderately recruited, or non-recruited is to understand the process both from the perspective of the athlete and that of the collegiate coaches. Better understanding of the process and of the multiple divisions of collegiate playing opportunities will only help in the organizing and counseling of hopeful young athletes.

## **Notes on Role Definition**

This section discusses starters, position players, specialized players, and line-up creation. A large portion of the following chapter focuses on the subtle, behind-the-scenes situations on the bench.

Picking a starting line-up is one aspect of coaching, but utilizing and developing the talents of the entire team is becoming more and more important for a volleyball coaching success.

Obviously, not all the players on a team play the same positions. Not all the players have the same roles. There are hitters and setters as well as more specific positions. There are starters and substitutes. The diversity of players and positions within a volleyball team allows the coach to provide training with different experiences for the participants.

As a coach you should never be static with your line-up. When you are in a preparation period, you need 10 to 11 players for the *different line-ups*. This is the only way in which you can fully test all players and be sure which players are most suited for the tournaments and which players are most likely to be the most stable.

Doug Beal feels it takes up to 200 matches played for an athlete to reach a level where the coach could feel comfortable about that player's capability to play as fully developed.

When you are getting close to a tournament you need to use eight starters in different line-ups from match to match. You need more than six starters to avoid the predictability from the opponents and from the team itself. They must not always know who

will be on the ground. You must not reduce the non-starters to the *second team*. Always be prepared for injuries.

No matter how many players you have on your team, no player must ever believe that he/she is indispensable in any way, even if he/she is.

Using other players than the six usual starters is not the same as not wanting to win that specific match! This is the same as saying that when you start with the six players you regard as the best six, you only have lesser players on the bench for substitute purposes. Starting with other players insures that you have a strong bench.

A specialist is not a substitute player. A **substitute** player is one who enters the game to stay there. This then could happen to anyone of the players sitting on the bench. A **specialist** is put in the match to solve a problem and then is taken out again. This is important for both the player and the team to accept.

Specialists must be aware and understand their **role**. They must prepare for the role. Doug has told players that they have a certain importance within the team, not necessary as a player, but more as a human being in a group.

The specialized player has to have a certain **positive** relation-

ship with the other members of the team. More than the physical ability they bring to the team, these players have a positive influence on the team. This in effect makes them important players, even if they don't play one single minute in a game.

A part of the specialist role is to use the audience in the psychological fight against the opponent team

The team must understand what impact this player has, and the coach must be aware of that impact potential. If the coach does not recognize the specialist player, he/she is bad off.

Most good specialized players tend to be older, more mature players, maybe near the end of their careers. Usually young players think they are used too little. In maturing as a volleyball player, it often happens that you tend to become less specialized and maybe are not used as often as when you were younger.

Look for physical speciality traits in the individuals. Physical specialties, such as size, jumping ability and quickness are some of the several options to identify.

If a player has one exceptional ability, he/she will be a good choice as a specialist. However, a player with only one ability will

be limited in the types of situations. A specialist with only one ability could not be used in too many situations in the game.



- **Rank of Specialist**

The various specialist roles can be put in positions and order of ranks. Doug Beal made the following rank of specialist positions. The top of the list is the most important with the bottom the least important. None of the positions can be left out, as all are part of a volleyball game.

- A. Blocker*
- B. Server*
- C. Attacker*
- D. Passer*
- E. Setter*
- F. Defender*



- **Blocking** specialists are valuable for the team. Blocking specialists have an instantaneous role entering the match. There are

several types of possibilities for using them. Blocking specialists do not need to be strong in attack, as other people can attack.

The **server** is second on the list of importance. It is difficult to sit and sit on the bench and enter the game to serve a winner. The good server is important for the game today.

Third on Doug Beal's list is the **attacker**. This type of specialist is easy to find among the players. The variety of offensive possibilities is the only problem concerning your selection when a coach finds and teaches an attacker. The attacker specialist demands a creative type of character.

The **passer** as a specialist has problems being able to step aside for a ride on the bench and then return into the rhythm of the play. If a passer can not return to the rhythm of play, then he/she has to be substituted.

**Setter** ranks low on the list of players because of the low impact with the training of the team.

**Defender** has the lowest ranking because you cannot make

the ball go in their direction. Defenders cannot change the play. Defenders have the opportunity to pass the ball only on one's own side of the net.

A very specialized type of player is the **practice player**. The way players behave while they are training is critical to success. In the USA team, there is such a player as a practice player. The role of the practice player is important. The practice player is the typical training player, and he/she is able to raise the level of training for everybody during the training session.

Doug Beal places the practice player level of importance for the USA Team before the attacker. This means the ranks of players as stated before actually look like this:

- A. Blocker
- B. Server
- C. *Practice player*
- D. Attacker
- E. Passer
- F. Setter
- G. Defender

It is important that you do not have too many specialized

players on your team. Beal feels the the maximum number of specialized players should be two or less. It is possible to have none. When there are more than two specialized players, you might hurt the team's training, rather than gaining from the involvement of the specialized players.

Training priorities are critical. The specialized players must understand that they have an important role during practice. They must be able to simulate in every drill how they would be used in the game. This means in every event of the practice, such as warm-ups, special drill, cool downs, etc.

The players have to be able to create the situation for themselves as well as for the other players.

As a coach you must spend time training the specialist's situation in special drills at special times. It is a good team-building activity to give the specialist responsibilities.

Coaches need to spend more time in one-to-one interaction with the team's specialists. Specialists should be *able to read your mind* so that you do not have to tell them what to do in a match.

A specialized player who only is used once during a tournament is not of much value to the team. You have to use these play-

ers regularly during tournaments. Often there is no feed-back from the "regular" players, but surely from the specialists.

The specialist is not as important to low level-teams. There seems to be a new tendency for this to change.

## **Position Overview**

The coach should have a starting Setter and one Additional Setter. There is a big difference between the two players. If a team uses two Setters in matches, a coach probably needs to have four Setters because of practice situations. The back-up Setter is preferably not a specialist player.

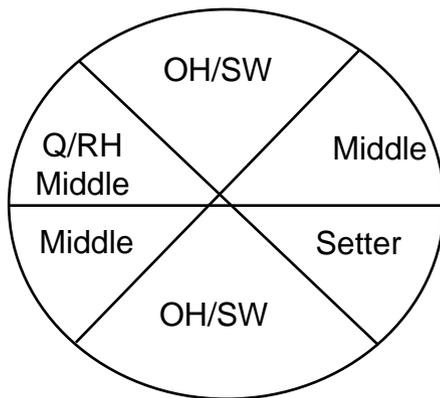
The Middle Blockers, Quick Hitters, Middle Players are the one, two and three starters. The fourth could be a specialist. The third also could be a specialist if he/she is not a starter.

Two or three starters need to be Play-Set Hitters. The fourth could be a specialist, but he/she does not need to be. This depth of your team's talent and positioning depends entirely on the present material.

On the diagonal to the Setter, Beach prefers to place the Release Hitter. You need at least one Release Hitter per team, and most likely two.

## Line-Up

Never change the placement of players for the line-up. Among other reasons for the sake of tradition. It is good to interchange the two middle-players, and the two swing-hitters. Do not move the middle players to other relations to the setter or any other player. This change is difficult on the players and the way they play, especially with attack combinations in particular. Find other ways to solve problems on the court, whenever they have to change from what they are used to.



The above figure looks like a pie chart. Coaches call it "the wheel." It shows the six positions on the court and the rotation order.

Players need to be in a position in the line-up with a good relationship to one another to maximize the team's strengths and minimize the weaknesses.

### **Notes on Selecting a Setter**

In most cases, the setter's position is the key to the team. In most college and high school programs, the **best athletes** on the team should probably be the Setters. Coaches often ask, "If my best hitter is my best athlete, should they hit or set?" If no one else is able to set consistently, the "big hitter" will not be effective anyway. It is probably best to make the best athlete the setter, thereby ensuring that some of the other players will get consistent opportunities to swing at the ball.

Contrary to popular belief, the Setter does not have to be the shortest player on the team. Usually, this designation is made because the smaller player is not as good a hitter as the taller players. In fact, small setters are effective, crafty hitters, but often not very good blockers.

Most small setters however are **quicker** than their taller counterparts, and this skill is required of all Setters. Even though a team

may pass nearly perfectly, a Setter that can chase down an errant pass and make a great set out of it or scramble on a transition dig to make the play, can be the key to any team.

When choosing the Setter for a team, there are many factors to consider. Sometimes you will be limited in what you have to choose from, and these factors will be less valuable, but should you have the talent, here are a few of the things to look for in the Setter .

*Self confidence* . The Setter needs to believe that he or she is a great player and can run the offense successfully. Sometimes they must take risks. They must know they can set anything.

*Leadership*. The Setter is usually the floor leader calling play for the hitters, and changing or adjusting passing formations. They are often the focal point of the team.

*Intelligence*. The Setter must be able to understand the game strategy with the help of the coach, and follow instructions. They must be able to realize who are the opponents weak blockers, who are the strongest hitters on their own team in each rotation and by position. They should also be able to tell when their hitters are hot and stay with them, but also keep the other hitters in the game.

*Never-say-die attitude*. The Setter must go after every ball,

never giving up on any ball. They must try to make each pass into a hitable set.

*Hands.* Most setters are comfortable with the ball. They have a good feel or a nice touch. This can be developed. Setters should have strong fingers, hands, and shoulders

*Quickness.* Setters need quick feet because getting to the ball early and getting set are the most important fundamentals of setting. Setters must change directions quickly and are constantly running a pattern of setting, covering, and retreating to defense.

*Ability to block.* The Setter should be a good blocker. Setters usually block on the right side against the opponent's strong-side attacker. They must be a fundamentally sound blocker. A Setter who can block effectively is a plus for any team.

A good Setter has speed of release, deception, accuracy, location, predictability and consistency.

## **Notes on Other Offensive Positions**

The other offensive positions you need to consider are Outside Hitters for both the right and left side and Middle Hitters.

## **Left-Side Hitter**

The Left-Side Hitter position should be filled with a player who can jump well and can handle the pressure of swinging at plenty of balls. This is the outlet hitter and usually if there is a broken play or a bad pass, the set goes to the left front position. Many times this player will have to hit against a well-formed, two-person block. Statistics from the 1988 Olympics show that left front hitters receive the most sets and the teams with big guns in this position were the most successful. In most of offensive systems, the outside hitters also are the primary passers. They should have stamina to withstand transition on and off the net numerous times during a rally. A quick arm swing is a plus for an outside hitter because he/she often has to hit around a block. This player must help block in the middle, and at higher levels will often commit with the opponent's middle hitter.

## **Right-Side Hitter**

The person you choose for this position should be a versatile hitter. If you use an offense that incorporates some play sets, often times the right side player will be the play-set attacker, hitting com-

binations in front of and behind the Setter. The Right-Side Hitter should be a good blocker against the opponent's left front hitter. The Right-Side Hitter will often be one of the primary passers. An agile person with quick feet often makes a good right-side player, because he/she will use different approach patterns.

### **Middle Hitter**

A Middle Blocker does not have to be over 6'0" tall. Often a smaller, quicker player will do a better job. In Division I Women's Collegiate Volleyball there have been many great 5'8" Middle Blockers. In selecting middle hitters and blockers there are a few key things to consider. They should have good *lateral movement* for blocking along the net. They should have *flexibility in the shoulder* so that they can move their arms when they are blocking. Middle hitters can *hit a variety of sets* depending on what type of offense you want to use. They may hit only high sets in the middle or may be complex, hitting 31's, 51's, 71's, and slides. You have to select the sets for your offense based on each hitter's ability. If there are only one or two sets that a hitter can execute, he/she can still be quite effective.

Unless you are the national team coach you will probably not have players on your team who fit all of the descriptions of the above positions. Do the best you can with what you have and try to create any offensive system built around the strengths that your team possesses.

### **Notes on Team Roles**

It is important for the coach to understand that every player on the team must have a *specific role*. The communication between coach and player is most critical relative to the player understanding his or her role on the team. The player must accept the role, feel comfortable in the role, and feel confident that the coach will, in fact, use the player consistently when that role is called for - regardless of whether that person is the best player on the team or the number twelve player.

In selecting the team, the coach must keep in mind the systems that are most likely to be employed and that the players are chosen with a specific system in mind. We never will be selecting simply the twelve best players, because the twelve best players will never make the best team. We will be selecting players who can fit

specific roles within the squad of twelve.

We must choose players who can accept the role of substitute, and players who can accept the role of specialist. Players who are willing to

subjugate their own ego for the good of the team will always be more valuable than better players who may not be starting members and will destroy the internal fabric of the team. Generally, we are looking for nine potential starters, three who will not start but who will replace, by rotation, the six starters.

The balance of the squad should be made up of specialists who can bring one or two outstanding skills to the floor. The specialists will have the capability to score points quickly, to change momentum, or to prevent the opponent from gaining momentum.

For example, an outstanding back-court substitute who is also an outstanding server can have tremendous value. A particularly strong front-court player also can be counted on for a string of successful side-outs. It is most important that the coach consider the systems and tactics to be used before selecting the final squad

# *Notes on Team Systems & Tactics*

*The roles of players*, their specialty or position becomes more sophisticated and complex as the team becomes more skilled. The players' roles also change with the team's tactics and systems. It is somewhat difficult to classify players with only one title

## **Terminology and Definition**

The numbering system of offenses defines players' roles and positions. For example, 3-3 system. The first number indicates the primary spikers. The second number indicates the primary setters. Therefore, in a 3-3 system, there are three primary spikers and three primary setters.

## **Basic systems**

3-3 system is three spikers and three setters

4-2 system is four spikers and two setters

5-1 system is five spikers and one setter

6-2 system is six spikers and two setters/hitters

Advanced modifications are derived from the basic systems.

The most common systems of offense are the 4-2, 5-1, and 6-2.

## **4-2 Offense System**

Utilizes four hitters and two setters.

Two hitters and one setter are always at the net.

This simple and easy system minimizes errors and confusion.

## **5-1 Offense System**

Utilizes five hitters and one setter .

Contains elements of the 4-2 and 6-2 systems depending upon the setter's position.

One player runs the team offense.

## **6-2 Offense System**

Utilizes four hitters and two setters with attacking skills.

Setter in the back row assumes the responsibility of running the offense.

Setter in the front row joins the other two spikers to form a three-hitter attack.

Allows maximum variations on offense.

Requires high level of team coordination.

We also can define offenses as having either penetrating or non-penetrating setters.

## **Non-Penetrating**

3-3 Offense System

4-2 Offense System

## **Penetrating**

5-1 Offense System

6-2 Offense System

## Switching

Switching is the act of players changing positions within their line (front or back) to achieve some tactical or player specialization advantage. For example, the setter who begins in position four moves to position three to be in a more advantageous area to receive the serve reception. Or, the ace spiker who is in position three moves to position four to take advantage of attacking possibilities.

Switching occurs in all tactical phases of volleyball. Switching at these tactical phases can occur:

- a. from serve/receive to attack by spikers,
- b. between setters and attackers after serve reception,
- c. by blockers after the serve or in transition from defense to offense,
- d. by defensive players after the serve.

## Serve/Receive Patterns

Serve/receive patterns are defined by their configuration of the number of players involved.

5 person = "W"

4 person = "Cup"

3 person = "Line"

3 person = "Diamond"

2 person

## **Player Positions (Setting up the Rotation)**

Regardless of the basic system of play (3-3, 4-2, 5-1, 6-2) the coach must give careful consideration to setting up his/her line-up for maximum advantage. Consideration for the line-up in order of priorities are:

1. Attack balance
2. Serve receive balance
3. Blocking and Spike defense
4. Setting concerns

## **Serve/Receive Actions**

In basic receiving formations, we are concerned with:

1. Zones of responsibility
2. Receiving
  - Relation to setters' movements
  - Relation to receiving target
3. Movement patterns
4. Overlap zones, or seams
5. Court coverage
6. Difficult areas to serve

Players within each row are approximately an equal distance from the server. Front players receive more serves in “Deep W” formation, less in “Short W” formation.

### **Deep “W” Serve/Receive Formation**

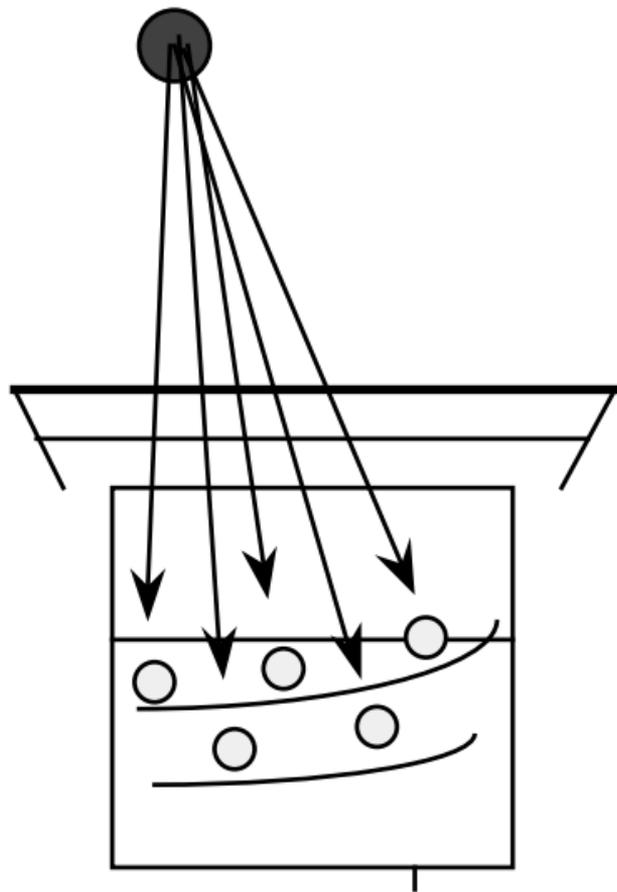
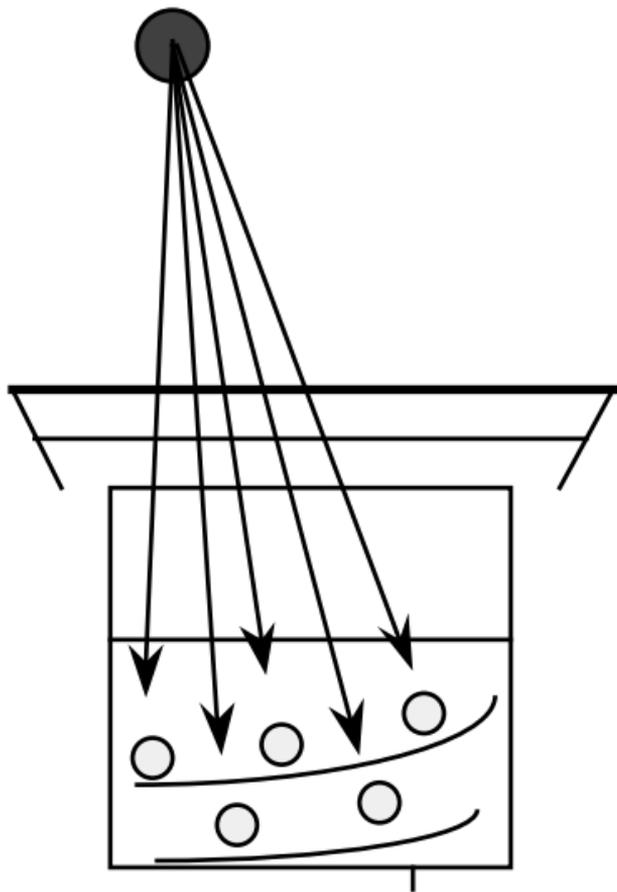
The five players form a “W” to field the serve. The sixth player the setter. The setter would be hiding behind one of the back-row players or placed near the net to play the second hit.

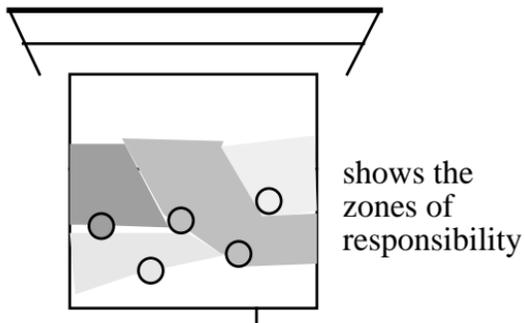
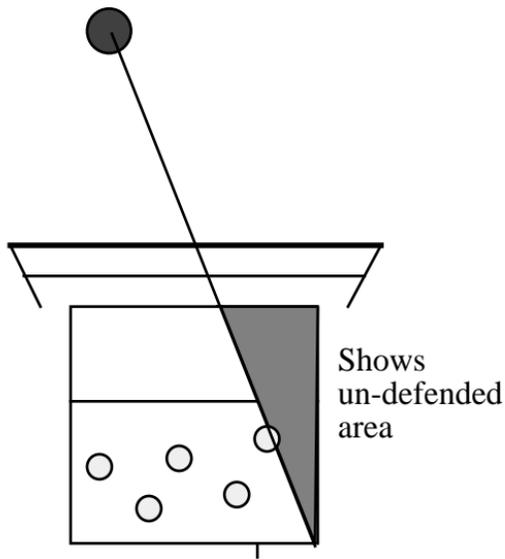
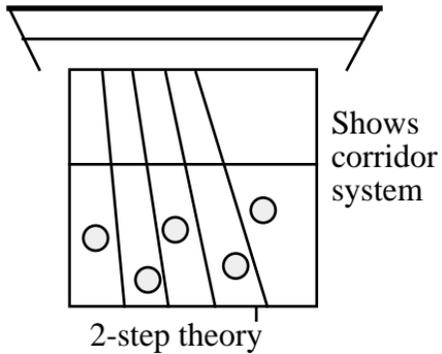
### **Short “W” Serve/Receive Formation**

The short “W” formation, as opposed to the deep “W” formation, is for a 5-player serve/receive formation. The depth might depend upon the server’s speed, tendencies, and receiving team’s skills.

### **Five Player System**

All movement is based on the receiver’s positions in relation to the server, all movement is diagonal to the sides of the court. The lines of receivers are perpendicular to the server, not the sidelines. The far right receiver lines up so that he/she is between the server and the serving corner of his/her own side. Zones of Responsibility.





**Figure a -**

Shows the corridor system. No player should have to take three steps to play the ball.

**Figure b -**

On serve-receive, the team does not have to cover the entire court.

**Figure c -**

Zones of responsibility for the 5-player serve/receive pattern.

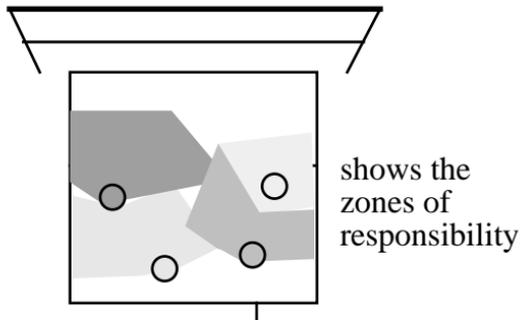
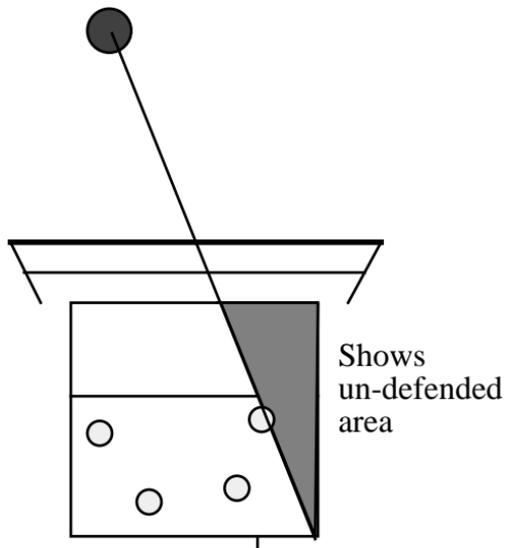
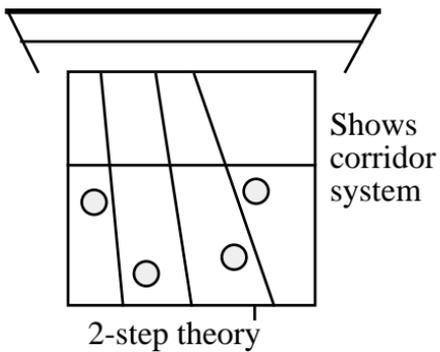
## **Four Player System**

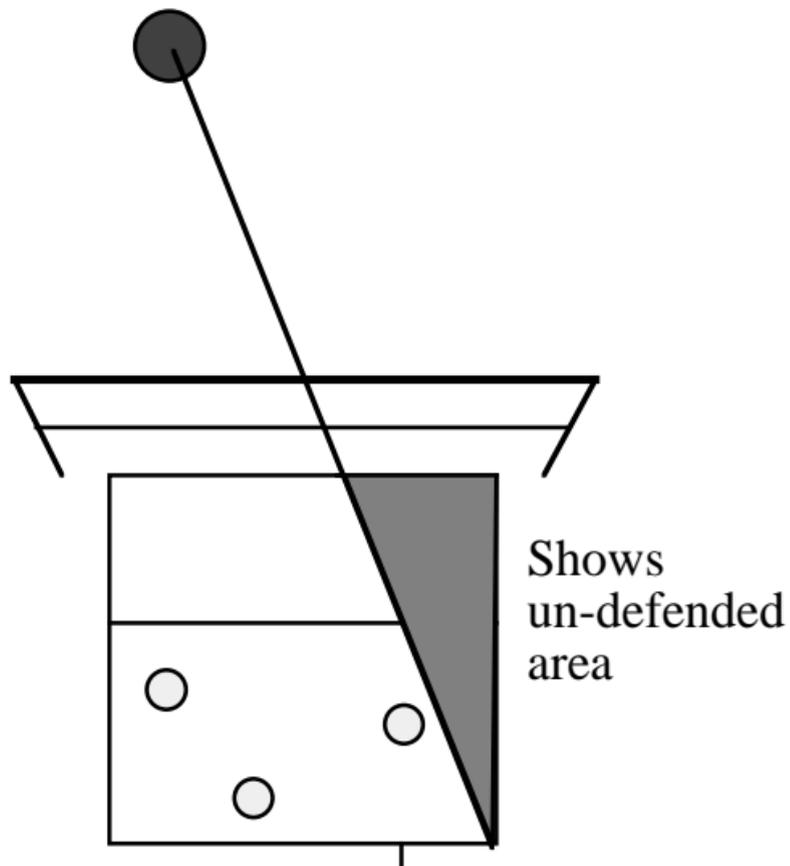
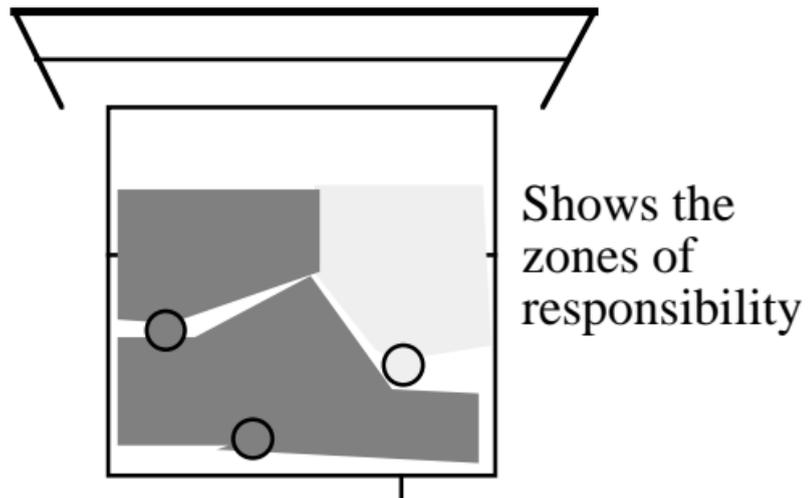
All definitions and descriptions from the five player system remain the same. The zones of responsibility become larger with the fewer number of active receivers.

**Figure a** - The corridor system and 2-step theory for four-player serve/receive. The four-player serve/receive formation is similar to that of the five-player formation

**Figure b** - The undefended area on serve-receive formations.

**Figure c** - The zones of responsibility with four players.





## Three Player System

The Zones of Responsibility are enlarged even more so by reducing the number of receivers to three.

**Figure 20** - Three player serve/receive zones of responsibility.

**Figure 21** - Un-defended area of serve/receive.

**Editor's Note:** Drawings reflect receivers only. Service reception will still require positioning of players not intended to receive. These positionings are covered in more depth in the drawings in another chapter.



## Switching, Penetration & Specialization

Considerations for switches include:

*Serve/Receive target area*

*Offensive sophistication and goals*

*Right-handed vs. Left-handed*

*One vs. two setters*

*Team level*

*Degree of specialization*

*Number of switches affects transition*

*Length of rally affects switching*

# Notes on Practices

*Practices should* begin and end on time. As coaches, we expect our athletes to be *punctual and in attendance* at every practice. So, we, as the coaching staff, should be on time also. Attend all training sessions. Granted, there are some special and infrequent situations.

When planning practices, coaches should know how many athletes are available and attending. Make it important for your athletes to call you or leave a message for you if they are sick, injured, unable to practice or must limit practice activities. For good team spirit, injured players are always present at practice, unless the injury is to last a long period.



**Reasons for keeping players beyond the expected ending time:**

1. If we are scrimmaging and everyone wants to stay to continue playing.
2. If we are particularly terrible, and we want to end practice on a positive note. We will keep the team until they improve their performance.
3. We may ask certain players to remain for five to ten minutes to work on a specific problem.

Planning should take into account how many courts are available and how many coaches you have.

Make sure that everything you will need for the day's training session is available and ready at the start of practice. Check for the items listed below. Some items are used every day. Other items are used less frequently.



**Always in use:**

*standards, safety pads, nets, antennas, ball carts, balls, hitting platforms, flip-sco e keeper,whistle.*

## **In use from time to time:**

*jump training equipment, surgical tubing, medicine balls, cones, plastic trash cans, area markers, Vertec.*



## **Typical Practice Agenda**

- 1. Discussion/Announcement of today's practice goals*
- 2. Warm-up running and stretching without volleyballs*
- 3. Review of old skills and/or fundamentals*
- 4. New skills introduction and repetition*
- 5. Competitive practice (3-on-3, 4-on-4, 6-on-6)*
- 6. Cool-down*
- 7. Evaluation*

Practice begins with a brief *warm-up* period. The warm-up is no more than 15 minutes and includes some jogging, stretching, and short sprints. Do footwork drills at this time especially if they serve as a preparation for the drills that follow. There is no standard warm-up for volleyball, so you may incorporate what you like. Ask your players what they would like to do or what they feel they need.

The warm-up should be followed by ball handling and *funda-*

*mentals*. Every team at every level needs to keep up with fundamentals. Include serving, setting, passing, defense, blocking and hitting at the beginning of each practice. Use simple individual-skill drills or simple combination-skill drills.

A portion of the practice should be spent on *new skills*. These are new techniques that you are working on to improve your team's level of play. For example, approaching from inside the court towards the outside rather than from outside to inside, setting and hitting new types of sets, anything that is new to your team.

Try to make all drills *competitive* no matter how simple they are.

The last part of practice should be mostly six-on-six drills. Sometimes the six-on-six drills can turn into a *scrimmage*, but more often the six-on-six drills are set up with special kinds of conditions, such as wash-drill scoring.

Always follow the training period with a quick *cool-down*. Try to make the cool-down routine, and stop players trying to escape as quickly as possible. Every player should stretch after working out.

The *evaluation* can take place at the same time as the cool-

down. Communicate with the player to close the practice. Evaluate the practice and evaluate your own performance as the coach.

### **Create Daily Objectives**

You should decide what you would like to accomplish at each practice. The practice objectives depend on where you are in your season.

Even in the most competitive times of the season, coaches should not hesitate to throw in a day of skill training. Getting back to some basics can serve to relieve some of the pressures of competition.

### **Organize Players within Practice**

Try to vary your selection and grouping of players for drills. Add variety to practices.

The organization for drills needs to include provisions for *handers and shaggers* for safety reasons and increased efficiency.

Place younger, less-experienced players with older, experienced players from time to time. Younger players learn by watching, and the older players push the younger ones. Usually the best players gravitate towards one another. The best players push each

other the hardest because of their better ball control, level of accomplishment and intensity of play. But coaches should *separate the better players* once in a while to let other team players gain from the elite's expertise.

In many instances, coaches group players *by position* : left side hitters, right side hitters, middle hitters, left backs, right backs, middle backs. Specializing by position allows the team to accomplish much more.

Group players *by skill level*.

Group players for *fun reasons*. Groups according to the player's year in school can develop heated play. Have the freshmen play the sophomores, juniors play the seniors, or play by ages.

## **Make Drills Game-like**

Game-like conditions are self explanatory. Try to recreate game situations in practice. For example, set balls from a dig or a pass rather than from a ball bounced off of the floor . You would never play a ball that had just bounced off of the floor .

## Maximize Meaningful Contacts

Meaningful contacts are *game-like* contacts. To maximize them you should make sure that there are small groups of players, three or four, using more than one ball. In this way players get more opportunities to respond.

Try to stay away from partner drills where the ball travels back and forth in a straight line. This rarely occurs in volleyball. The ball usually travels from one direction to a different direction.

*Avoid* line drills or circle drills where the entire team is involved in one skill, such as passing. Consider the activity level in these types of drills. These drills start with a player passing the ball. The passing is the skill for which the drill is designed to improve. But after the player passes the ball, he then goes to the target line. There he catches the next player's pass. Then he takes the ball to the coach. Next, he goes to stand in line until it is his turn again. This player probably gets one contact every two minutes.

Breaking the group down into smaller groups gives each player *many more contacts* in the same time period. With more frequency, the players can recall immediately what they have done correctly and what changes they need to make.

## **Coach on the Averages**

Give a player many chances to perform a skill before you make corrections or comments. If you comment on the first contact maybe that one contact you saw was not the way the player performs the skill on the average. Possibly the first performance was especially poor or a lucky shot. Watch for a few seconds and see what they do most of the time. Wait a moment before you make your comments.

Let the players digest your suggestions and coaching information. Go on to another player. Then return to the first player after a few minutes. Then you can make another evaluation of the player's progress.

## **Give Positive Feedback**

Make sure that you are encouraging and positive in your approach to each member of your team. Try to avoid saying "don't." Instead, phrase your comments in the positive. Say, "Stay a foot away from the net," rather than, "Don't touch the net."

Be consistent in dealing with the players. You want them to be consistent in playing. This is a two-way process. It has to work in

both directions. The players must always feel that they can come to you with a problem or ask a question.

Give appropriate feed-back to the players, but don't get in the habit of talking too much to the team. Coaches can spend too much time on talk.

### **Repeat Vocabulary Triggers**

Use key words and phrases to teach your team new skills. Each time in the future when the players are working on a skill, use the same key words and phrases to help them.

### **Do Drills**

There are lots of possibilities. Each drill needs to have a goal. Use two or three variations a day. Remember to vary the direction of the initial attack. Too often we only train our teams to defend against a left-side attack. If you can stay out of the drill you can wander around behind the diggers and help them with their positioning.

An entire section on drills is included in this book and drills are covered in detail at the coaching clinics.

## **Drills and Practices**

Get off to a good start for practice and get the availability of the facility prior to the start of practice. Allow some time to start. Encourage a great attitude at practice regarding drills and balls. Players should run to each drill from breaks. Get everyone to “Go for each ball or go home!” Players can be involved in their own attitude adjustment.

Use the court and the net. Players should pass the ball toward the net. Players should set the ball along the net. Positions of the players is important.

Considerations for successful use of drills starts with obtaining the most contacts as possible, especially with younger players. Maximize space limitations too. Often coaches have a spike line with up to 25 players waiting and standing around waiting their turns.

Throughout practices note the type of offense and defense being played. Sequence of movements should be game-like. Consider contacts. Physical conditioning of the athletes can be enhanced through the use of drills.

Control the number of players per drill and have both active learners and shaggers. The number of balls and special equipment needed is important.

Ask what are the coach’s performance goals and is the drill teaching what you want it to teach? A learning environment for drills needs to be positive or have someone designated to do so. Provide feedback on specific skills or cues.

## **Skill or Block Training**

Block training in this instance does not mean block, as in at the net against an attack. Block training is when a team spends a block of time or period of time on one type of activity. Then when the time expires, they progress and move to the next activity. Often team break down practices into blocks of time and each time period stresses a specific skills.

Blocks can be designed by individual task or by rotation. A team may spend five minutes in every rotation on the team chart, but spend an additional ten minutes in the rotations where more points were lost.

## **Catalog the Drills**

Drills can be complex and it can be hard to remember all the different elements. Some type of catalog for drills should be established, perhaps on cards, in a booklet, as computerized printouts, or in your head.

## Demonstrate What You Want

You should be able to demonstrate most of the skills. This does not mean you should be able to perform them in a game. If you can show your players such things as the correct posture of a passer, setter, spiker, digger, the motion of a spiker or the motion of a blocker, even without a ball, your players are going to “Get the picture” faster than a verbal explanation. If you absolutely cannot demonstrate, find an assistant coach who can. Or, use one of your better players for demonstrations.

You may not have been a great athlete or volleyball player, but you can be a great coach. In fact, many times, the most accomplished players do not turn out to be good coaches. There are coaches who were not exceptional athletes who became very good coaches. However, if you are going to be an effective coach, you need to have some basic athletic skills that will help your team. Unless you have an assistant coach who will always be there and who possesses these skills, you need to develop them.

At the lower and intermediate levels, coaches should be able to *toss balls for spiking, serve accurately, hit at players for purposes of digging and blocking and demonstrate body positions and postures.* You

should note, however, that as your team's skills improve, you should eliminate yourself from as many drills as possible. Often because of a limited number of players, a coach must initiate drills, such as serve or toss a ball into the court.

### **Tossing for Hitters**

Only at a very, very beginning level should you toss for your players. Even low-skilled players can learn to toss with some consistency and accuracy. Spiking is probably the most complex volleyball skill. When initially learning how to spike, most players are overloaded with too many things to think about. A consistent toss gives them one less thing to worry about. Coaches should only toss for a quick warm-up. The other players should toss. If the players can set with some consistency, then they should set.

If the coach always tosses, they cannot watch players' footwork and approaches and make any corrections or comments without stopping the drill. If you can remove yourself from the drill, you can pull a player aside and give him instructions while the others continue to spike. That player can then return to the drill while everything continues smoothly.

## Serving

The coach should be able to serve a variety of serves to each area of the court. Coaches should be able to serve *top spin, hard floate , short, deep, and corners*. The players may not be able to serve to all of these areas. Your players should be able to pass fr om all areas of the court. While the rest of the team is practicing serving on another court, the coach can serve to the starting six. Again, as soon as possible, you should wean yourself fr om this serving duty so that you can coach the receivers from their side of the court. If there are twelve players, and you want to work on spiking/ r eceiv- ing on two courts, coaches are sometimes needed to serve.

## Spiking

Many defensive drills are *coach-controlled*. This means that the coach does all the hitting at the players. If you cannot hit at your players with some accuracy and control, you should probably let them hit at each other. Coaches who can not hit well should spend their time coaching since they can not make the drill better with their hitting.

A coach who has good control over his/her own spike can

work his/her players on specific areas and on defending certain types of hits. For example, if we are going to play a team whose big spiker hits sharp cross court, we should practice defending against such a spike. If none of our players can hit that shot, we won't get much practice on defense. The coach may have to hit such a shot.

Many coaches stand on a box or hitting platform to spike at blockers or diggers. Whenever possible, you should use active hitters.

If your second team can not spike effectively at the first team you won't improve much with pass-set-hit drills. Your second string may be more limited in their ability to make great shots. It won't help your team much if you hold practices all week against hitters who can only hit angle if your rival's big gun crushes line. In this case, the coach may have to do some hitting to give the team the practice they need.

If you must stand on a platform and toss to yourself, make sure that you toss the ball at least four to five feet above your head. This allows your team to adjust their positions defensively and to read the hitter.

Your team should be looking for *cues* from the opposing

attackers such as position of the hitter 's shoulders, relationship and distance between the ball and the net, the ball and the antenna, the ball and the hitter, the ball and the blocker, the blocker to other blockers, or the absence of all blockers. Taking these things into consideration, the coach should sometimes toss the ball close to the net or behind his/her own head. If possible, move along the hitting platform to create different situations.

This sounds simple. At first coaches are conscious of tossing higher, but it is easy to revert back to low tosses at head level. Players cannot read and react quickly enough to low tosses.

You should be able to demonstrate all the skills effectively. Even if you are not good at executing them, you should be able to show your players the correct posture, form and action that you desire. The barrel roll is one of the easiest skills to teach, and most coaches can effectively demonstrate this skill even though they could not perform it in a game.

Athletes respond much better to a simple picture than to an explanation. If you absolutely cannot demonstrate the skills, you should find an assistant coach, one of your players or a videotape that can show what you are trying to achieve. And remember stay

out of the drills as much as possible. You'll see more and be able to coach more effectively.

### **Notes about Assistants at Practice**

The primary goal of any coach is to make *every practice* as good as is possible. He must make the learning environment special so that high level, efficient learning takes place. In order to achieve that goal, the coach's first task should be to gather the best possible group of assistants. Once an assistant joins a program, the head coach is confronted with a new question, "What should this person's role be?" The coach must ensure that the role of the assistant is *more* than that of a designated ball shagger. Significant planning must be put into using the assistant's skills. Each daily practice plan should include a list of duties for each person. If this is done, more will be accomplished in practice and more than one person will be tuned into the heartbeat of the team. This will allow better evaluation of practice and of personnel.

Each head coach has to measure how much input each individual is granted. This is certainly dependent upon the skills of the assistants and the scope of the role of the head coach. For anyone to truly feel involved, they should be involved in the every

day planning of the season and the practice sessions. The head coach must also measure the amount in which the assistants should give verbal input in drills or to specific individuals

Care and planning should be given *from the start*, based on the career goals of the assistants. If their goal is to be a head coach, then they should see their role grow as they are exposed to the breadth of the head coach's job. As the head coach, it is our duty to give back to the growth of our sport in the form of training new head coaches!

Each person on the staff has the right to perform the lead role at certain times. They can be the leader of a drill, the key vocal person in a drill, video taping a single player in a drill, taking still pictures of the whole group doing a specific skill or taking performance stats. The significance of a particular role can expand greatly if the head coach merely says that it is important.

Perhaps the most important way we can ever use the talents of an assistant is by setting up practice so that the players can feel the *focus* of someone's eyes on them. It is easy to see that more watchful eyes in practice will heighten the players' focus and intensity and make learning more efficient.

The single most important method of teaching we use in practice is called "single item focus training." This method of setting the scene for a drill makes great use of all help and greatly increases the amount of improvement in any one drill. An example of single item focus training is as follows:

This drill is used to focus on team and individual blocking in a six vs. six situation (Game-like). This is a wave drill with three players, front and back row, on each side of the net. Ten different plays are initiated by a coach who serves, or tosses a free ball, to one group. The groups are informed that the primary focus of the drill is on blocking and that the coaches will be standing at the end line of the court to constantly evaluate each block attempt by the three blockers on that side. Each play is continued to its finish and the blockers are in constant focus. The other players are informed that they have one or two secondary items they are to focus on. This drill is not much different than the ordinary six vs. six drill except that it uses all help in an efficient way and it gives the drill and players a clearer focus.

A great deal of thought should be given to reconstruct drills so that the assistant's time and skills can be used. It takes a great deal of time and thought in planning a season with additional help, but the benefits are great. Benefits for the program and, ultimately, the sport.

# *Notes on Scouting & Game Day Success*

*Too often* coaches take the philosophy that they only need to concentrate on what happens on their side of the net, not concerning themselves with the other side of the net. They are doing a disservice to themselves and their team. There are at least three scouting tips that should be implemented at any level of competition.

## **Scouting Notes During a Match**

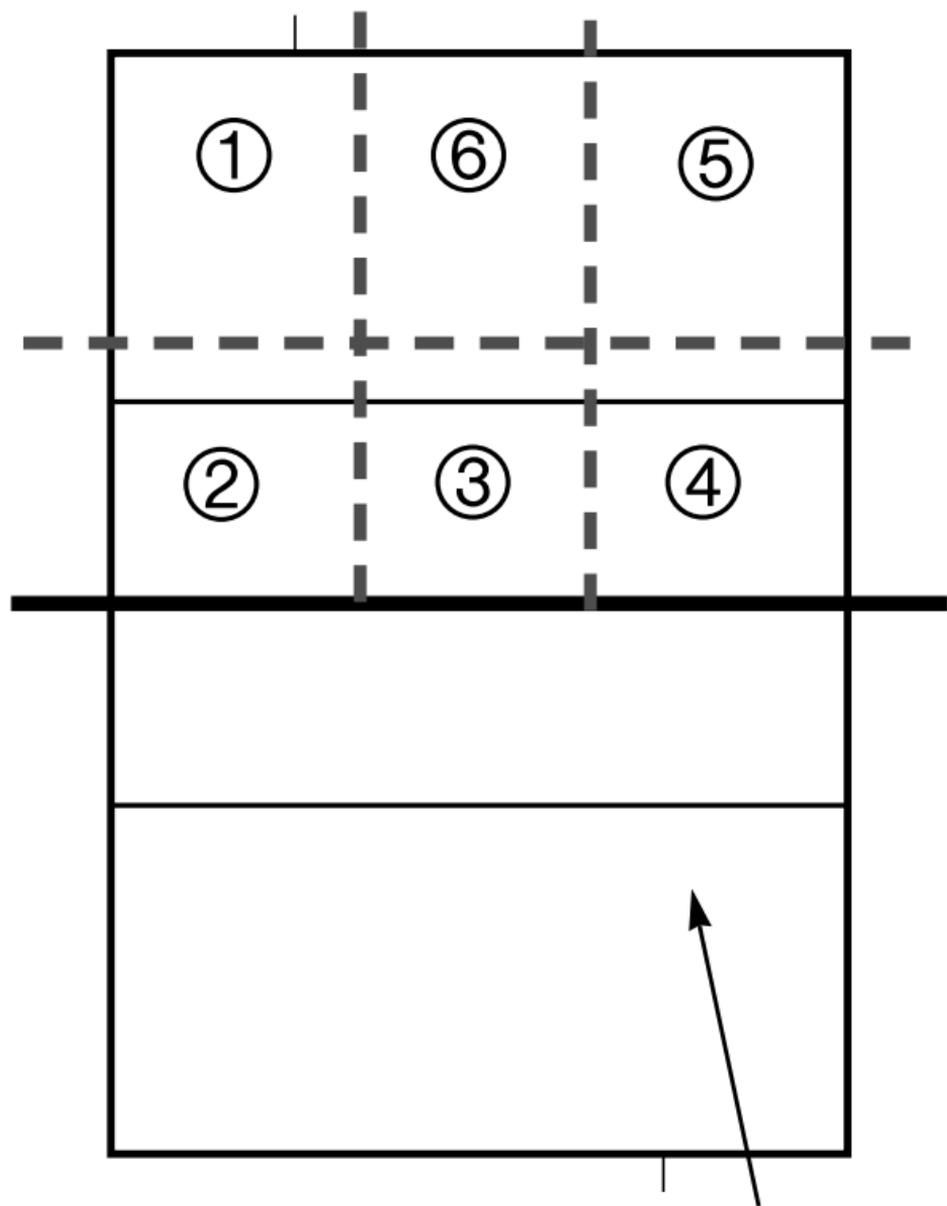
If you have not had a chance to scout a team prior to a match, it is relatively easy to identify the players who are receiving, hitting and defending well (or poorly) as the match progresses.

## **TIP #1 - Opponent's Serve Receive**

On every team there are some players who receive serve better than others. It seems logical that we would want the opponent's players who don't receive well to pass most, if not all of the balls, and the players who do receive well to pass few, if any. After identifying these, you should then instruct your players to serve certain areas of the court based on the information you gather. This can be a tremendous advantage for your team and is a scouting tactic which is easy to implement.

One method of implementation is to give signals to the server prior to each serve indicating the exact location to target. The advantage of the coach signaling the service target area is that it removes the pressure from the player of remembering who, or where, to target. This helps to prevent "information overload" for the players. This can be done easiest by dividing the court into six areas, each area designated by a number, one through six. The signal can be concealed behind a clipboard with one hand showing the number of the area desired and using a fist for the area six.

## Serving Zones



Signal serving areas to your players from the bench. This can reduce information overload and allow your team to better apply its scouting knowledge.

### **TIP #2 - Tipping**

In every defensive system, there will be certain areas of strength, as well as weakness. It is important to exploit the weaknesses and avoid the strengths of the opponents. This can be accomplished even if the opponents have relatively strong individual defensive players. Tip zones can be identified to take advantage of areas on the court that are not covered by defensive players. Of equal importance, is the identification of the areas in which defensive players are standing and making sure your players DO NOT tip to these areas.

Following are diagrams for tip areas for two basic defensive systems. If your opponent is playing some type of person-up defensive system, it will be difficult to score on any tip that is directly over the block. The open areas will be to the geometric center of the court, and sometimes a little deeper into the middle back, close to the net and inside the middle blocker, or perhaps

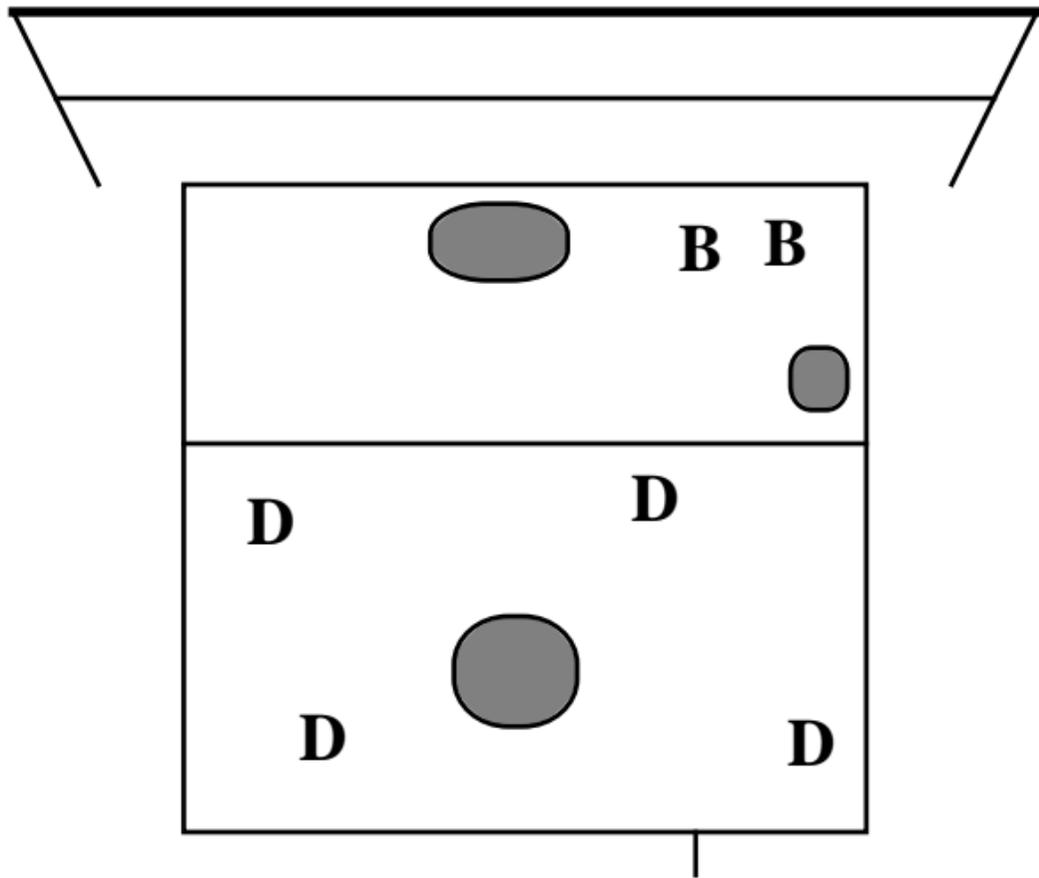
right on the line. The obvious tip that will not be open is directly over the blocker.

If, however, your opponent is playing a perimeter, or person-back defense, then the most effective tip is directly over the blocker. The responsibility to cover tips from your left front hitter is usually split between your opponent's right back player and left front player. The tip over the middle blocker is extremely difficult to pick up in this system. On the other hand, a ball hit or tipped anywhere deep in the court would be easily picked up.

A team that plays a defensive formation with the middle-up can cover tips directly over the blockers. Players must tip in the middle of the court near the net, behind the blocker along the side-line, or in the middle of the back row. The B = Blockers and the D = Defensive players.

Tiping into a defense with the middle-back

Have your players tip over the middle blocker when the opponents play a perimeter defense.



### **TIP #3 - Opponent's best hitter**

It is usually easy to identify the best hitter on the opposing team. At all levels, but particularly at the high school level, hitters will have favorite shots. These are the shots they will try to hit most of the time. Taking this shot away, either by putting your best blocker on that hitter, or by putting your best defensive player in the area the opponent likes to hit, will often frustrate the hitter and greatly reduce his or her effectiveness.

The above three scouting tips can be applied to almost any level. They should be applied at high school, college and international levels.

### **Notes on Scouting in Advance**

Scouting involves two main areas. The first is the *gathering of information* on the opponent. The second is *assimilating* that information and developing a game plan specifically for your team.

One of the most common tools for gathering information is a "sideout chart." There are many different variations of this chart but the main items of information gathered would be, who

passed the ball, how effectively did they pass it, what play pattern was run, who was set, where did they hit and what was the result. There is one chart kept for each rotation, thus totaling six charts. Some coaches prefer to do this on one sheet of paper with six courts drawn on the paper; others prefer to use a separate sheet for each rotation.

Use one form for each rotation. Put the rotational order in the wheel on the top left. The wheel looks like a pie chart. Each of the six positions or spokes on the wheel represent a player on the court. Put the player's number in the wheel's position.

On the first court, diagram serve/reception pattern and play patterns. On the second court, diagram alternate serve/reception formations if the team uses more than one.

On the bottom section, place the number of the passer, the grade of the pass, the play and the shot. For grades of passing, most coaches use a scale from 0 to 3. As for the play description, write what sets and where the attacking players approach seemed to be headed. Circle the set that was actually made.

In the shot section, document where the shot was hit and if

it was a kill. The serving target can be a number, i.e. specific player, or it can be a position on the court.

From the completed information from the scouting chart, you should be able to *formulate a game plan* for where you want to serve in each rotation. You will also know what the opponent's favorite plays are, who they are most likely to set and where that player likes to hit. You will be able to organize your block and defense to take away their best shots. You will find in each rotation there are certain players who almost never get set (in which case your blockers can practically ignore them) and certain players who get as many as 90 per cent of the sets (in which case you should always have a double block on them). It is rare for a team to be so balanced that all players are effective.

Note whether the defense *changes* throughout the match. Does the setter play a different defense from the other right back player? Are there particularly weak defensive players and, if so, in what positions?

Pick out areas in which your team will have success *tipping*. Observe the speed, or lack of it, with which the players make the transition to their defensive positions after a serve, do they

watch where the serve goes or move into position? Often, when players watch their serve, it results in arriving late to the defensive position. Your setter can tip the second ball to this position and gain an easy sideout for your team.

Strengths and weaknesses of your opponent's blockers should be noted to assist in developing an offensive game plan. Observe their *middle blockers* to see if they have more trouble going to one side or the other, whether they commit block in the middle, whether they move laterally quickly or if they are often late in closing the block. You might find that some middle blockers block the middle, or quick, very well, but don't close the outside block effectively. In this case, it would be advisable to set outside, either front or back, and make the middle blocker move. If the middle blocker is small, it might be to your advantage to set middle and run inside plays more frequently.

Observe the *outside blockers* to see if they have any particular strengths or weaknesses. There might be a relatively small outside blocker who you will want your team to hit over, or conversely, there may be an outside blocker who is very good who you would want to avoid. Take this information and develop a

specific offensive game plan. It is not important for your whole team to receive this information, but it is essential that your setter receive, understand and implement the plan.

Observe what your opponent's *serving tendencies* are. Do they have anyone who jump serves an effective topspin? Do they effectively serve short? Whatever information you gather, it will be important for your players to practice receiving the same kinds of serves that they might see from their opponents during game conditions. This may prevent your team from giving up strings of points just because it hasn't seen a certain kind of serve before.

There are several other miscellaneous bits of information that are important to obtain. You should note what rotation your opponent starts in. Then note whether it changes game to game. Many teams will often start in the same rotation each game. Some teams may rotate one position depending on whether they serve or receive. And, other teams may rotate two or more positions if they lose a game or if they are trying to change match-ups against their opponent. If a team always starts the same, then it will make it easier for you to get your ideal match-up.

Note the key substitutes and their particular strengths and weaknesses. When they sub in a particular player, is he/she set right away? What is the main purpose of the sub? Many teams will develop a specific pattern as to what they will do immediately after a timeout. This information could be helpful at a critical time in the match.

This is a lot of information to gather and process. Sift through it and determine what will be valuable to you. You also need to have an idea of how much information your players and team can handle and still perform at a high level. It is possible to give them too much information which can hinder their performance. It will be a challenge for you to determine just what to give them and what to keep for yourself.

Scout and develop game plans for every match possible, *not just the tough games*. Your team must practice implementing game plans and easy matches are the ideal place to do this. By paying attention to what goes on on the other side of the net and teaching your players to pay attention as well, you will be able to take advantage of your opponent's weaknesses and your team will perform at a higher level.

## Notes on Exploiting Tendencies

The objective of scouting opponents is to obtain information that your team can exploit for competitive advantage. A team should learn six major issues in its scouting quest.



### Know Your Competition's ...

#### **Six Major Issues in Scouting:**

*Serving targets*

*Setter tendencies*

*Attacker tendencies*

*Blocker deployment*

*Coaching tendencies*

*Strengths and weaknesses*



After you gather information in the above categories you must par e it down to a few keys that ar e easily understood and applied by your team.

After you assess your opponent's strengths and weaknesses in each category compared to your team, you must decide whether to

try to neutralize the opponent's strengths or exploit its weaknesses.

Scouting information leads to how you are going to try to match up. Matching up your line-up against the opponent's is sometimes called, "Spin the Dial."

### **Serving Targets**

You need to decide who or where you are going to serve in each rotation. You look for: 1) weak receivers 2) vulnerable court areas 3) target areas that disrupt the attack routes.

### **Setter Tendencies**

More difficult to chart than serve receive, you need to know: 1) favorite hitters 2) early, middle, late game and match choices 3) likely choices after hitter is blocked, or makes an error 4) setter's range and set selection off a bad pass.

### **Attackers' Tendencies**

Use a simple shot chart and plot the attackers' shot selection, and relative success. You need to know: 1) where does each hitter usually hit from 2) what percent of sets does each hitter receive 3)

who are the sideout hitters 4) who are the “for points” hitters 5) where does each hitter prefer to hit the ball 6) each hitter’s behavior after being stuffed 7) which hitters tip.

## **Blocker Deployment**

Most teams are very consistent in their deployment of blockers. Usually, the attempt is made to put front-row players in their preferred attack positions. You need to know: 1) Who the short, low jumping blockers are and where they play 2) A feel for the middle blockers’ mobility and their ability to block the middle and then get outside. 3) If any *commit* and/or *stack* schemes are used.

## **Coaching Tendencies**

Like players, coaches are creatures of habit. You need to know:

1) Does the coach ever spin the dial? If so, when? Every match? After a game loss? 2) What are his/her substitution habits? 3) What does their team usually do after a time out? 4) What are the outstanding characteristics of this coach’s teams?

## Strengths and Weaknesses

List outstanding strengths and/or weaknesses of the opponent. For example:

- 1) Two strong, hard-hitting, attackers
- 2) Weak serve receive
- 3) Poor tip coverage
- 4) Strong blocking in the second and third rotations
- 5) Junk ball offensive philosophy

## Obtaining, organizing, and applying information

Ideally, you or one of your coaches should scout. Usually the team you want to scout is playing at the same time you are and at a different location. Therefore, you need to find a person who is *willing* to scout. Also, you need to be able to *decipher* the information you receive. Finally, you need to be able to put the information into a *useable* game plan.

Let us take a closer look at these three scouting components:

(1) **Personnel.** You need to find a person who is willing to scout for

you all season. You must get consistent information. You need to train this person. They must understand your system of gathering data and how you use it. This training must occur before your competitive season starts. Have your scout take information on your team for practice.

(2) **Analysis.** You and your staff must be comfortable with the information you receive. It must be useable. You should prioritize what tactical aspects of volleyball you and the team understand and what you can execute on the floor. Take out the nuggets from the scouting report and invest them in a worthwhile game plan. Seek out other tidbits of information for your own game book to be released as appropriate during the match between games or at timeouts. Analyze an opponent by rotation. Think of a volleyball game as six little games - one per rotation. Keep points for and against, per rotation, for analyzing your team's and your opponent's strengths and weaknesses.

(3) **Game Plan.** The result of gathering information and analyzing it should be an easily understood, useable plan that your team can execute. For example, serving is the easiest area to provide specific applicable, instructions. Each server should know who or where the

targets are. They should know what type of serve is most effective. Because serving is the single skill each player exclusively controls, it is the easiest to manipulate. Serving could be the extent of your game plan.

All teams can scout for serving information, however, most teams playing at the high school level are capable of blocking and attack schemes. These areas should be the next area of focus.

The most important task of the coach in game plan preparation is to always present the information in the same way - keeping it simple, using keys, and giving time for the players to study and practice their assignments.

Remember to keep back information that you may apply during a match that, if given to the team early, may clutter the basic plan. For example, you may be able to predict an opponent coach's move after a game loss. Your players don't need to know the specifics until the situation presents itself.

Scouting does not have to end with your scout. Use every morsel of potential information. Review newspaper reports. Follow or keep league statistics. Hearsay can be valuable too, but find confirmation

Use video. The ideal game plan presentation is one that provides video footage with the written plan. Further, if you have the where-with-all, make a *rotations tape*. A rotations tape puts all the first rotations together, one play after another. Then the sequence of the tape moves to all the plays of the second rotation. Seeing all the plays of the same rotation together makes the assimilation of information much more efficient and easier for the players.

If you don't have a scout but you do have someone who can set up a video camera, you can get the information for a game plan off the video. However, this can be time consuming and laborious.

It is a good idea to have a trusted outsider scout YOUR team so that you get an unbiased look at how an opponent may play against you.

There are many scouting and game plan systems. The key is to have one that works for you and your team. Useable game plans are the result of organized scouting and preparation. Complete preparation leads to consistent, successful results.

The importance of scouting increases as your team's ability gets higher. At the lower levels, coaches should be concerned 95 percent with how their own team performs and only five percent with their opponent and adjustments that might be made to defend opponent strengths. As your team gets better that ratio changes so that at the top level approximately 30-40 percent of your preparation should be directed to the specific tactics you expect your opponent to show you. This involves extensive scouting from both a statistical and a general empirical, observational point of view. There follows several examples of the type of information the USA Men's Team used in the months leading up to the 1984 Olympics and during the 1984 Olympics.

### **Notes on Statistical Evaluation**

To completely gather information on your opponents, it is helpful to have statistical information on all of their players' performances on each skill. This material should be weeded with the empirical observation and the rotational information given in the preceding sections to form the complete game plan and scouting report that will be used to make strategy decisions for your match.

There are few coaches who don't have a winning record on paper. Every coach has to determine starting line-ups, players'

roles, and rotational orders. These are duties that must be done at the beginning of each season. Going into the first match no coach can absolutely predict how their team will play; even if the coach has years of experience; even if a coach has a host of returning players. Many factors determine what will be the production on the court each season. The coaches who seem to be consistent from year to year either have an endless supply of fabulously athletic, mature, socially, emotionally, and physically trouble-free, human beings, or they are great detectives. They seek out the facts and determine which factors they can manipulate to improve their team. Occasional success usually means great athletes. Consistent success usually means great preparation. Great preparation means **continual detective work**.

“Don your two-billed hat. Stick in your monocle, and go to work.” In pre-season practice, you determine how your players are playing, their physical condition, what roles they will fill, what works best together, your starting lineup, and the offensive and defensive systems you will use. On paper your charges look like a winner. You are ready for the season debut of your juggernaut. Everyone anticipates a crushing first victory. On paper, you are

invincible. Then, in the first match... **boink!**...Your outfit get smacked. Maybe your team does the smacking. In either case, as soon as possible after your first and succeeding matches, you and your staff must become detectives: Why did we win (or lose)?

## **Points Per Rotation**

The first evidence you must uncover is how many points were scored in each rotation by your team and your opponent. You and every other interested party knows the match and game scores. It takes some investigation to find out how it breaks down by rotation.

To find out this critical information you need a copy of the official score sheet. Remember: *You are entitled to one.* It is the responsibility of the official scorer to provide you with a copy. However, they are not obligated to hunt you down. Make sure one of your staff is assigned to get a copy of the official score sheet after every match.

The score sheet will show you in what rotation each point was scored and who was the server. Figures on the next pages show you an example of how you can graphically display this information.

## Figures For Scouting

The inside circle represents the opponent's rotation. Outside circle represents our team's rotation. The numbers are the player's jersey numbers. The middle-front location is pointed at high-noon on the dial.

### Figure a

Game 1 Score:15-13

Number of rotations in the game = 20

### Figure b

Game 2 Score: 11-15

Number of rotations in the game = 15

### Figure c

Game 3 Score: 8-15

Number of rotations in the game = 11

### Figure d

Match Score: 35-43

Number of rotations in the match = 44/45

## Game 1

<u>Server</u>	<u>Rote</u>	<u>Team</u>	<u>Points</u>	<u>+/-</u>	<u>PPR</u>
#11	1	Us	3	+3	(4) 0.75
#1		Them	0		(4) 0.00
#6	2	Us	4	+2	(4) 1.00
#5		Them	2		(3) 0.66
#7	3	Us	1	+1	(3) 0.33
#9		Them	0		0.00
#4	4	Us	2		(3) 0.66
#10		Them	5	-3	1.60
#3	5	Us	3	+1	(3) 1.00
#2		Them	2		0.66
#14	6	Us	2		(3) 0.66
#7		Them	4	-2	1.30
	<b>Total:</b>	Us	15	+2	(20) 0.75
		Them	13		(19) 0.68

## Game 2

<u>Server</u>	<u>Rote</u>	<u>Team</u>	<u>Points</u>	<u>+/-</u>	<u>PPR</u>
#11	1	Us	3	+2	(3) 1.00

## Game 2

<u>Server</u>	<u>Rote</u>	<u>Team</u>	<u>Points</u>	<u>+/-</u>	<u>PPR</u>
#11	1	Us	3	+2	(3) 1.00
#1		Them	1		0.33
#6	2	Us	3	+1	(3) 1.00
#5		Them	2		0.66
#7	3	Us	2		(2) 1.00
#9		Them	3	-1	(3) 1.00
#9	4	Us	0		(2) 0.00
#10		Them	1	-1	0.50
#3	5	Us	2	-0-	(2) 1.00
#2		Them	2		1.00
#14	6	Us	1		(2) 0.50
#7		Them	6	-5	3.00
	<b>Total:</b>	Us	11		(14) 0.78
		Them	15	-4	(15) 1.0

### Game 3

<u>Server</u>	<u>Rote</u>	<u>Team</u>	<u>Points</u>	<u>+/-</u>	<u>PPR</u>
#11	1	Us	4	+4	(2) 2.00
#1		Them	0		0.00
#6	2	Us	2	-0-	(2) 1.00
#5		Them	2		1.00
#7	3	Us	0		(2) 0.00
#9		Them	1	-1	0.50
#9	4	Us	0		(2) 0.00
#10		Them	6	-6	3.00
#3	5	Us	2		(1) 2-00
#2		Them	3	-1	(2) 1.50
#14	6	Us	0		(1) 0.00
#7		Them	3	-3	3.00
	<b>Total:</b>	Us	8		(10) 0.80
		Them	15	-7	(11) 1.36

## Match Totals

<u>Server</u>	<u>Rote</u>	<u>Team</u>	<u>Points</u>	<u>+/-</u>	<u>PPR</u>
#11	1	Us	10	+9	(9) 1.10
#1		Them	1		0.10
#6	2	Us	9	+3	(9) 1.00
#5		Them	6		(8) 0.75
#7	3	Us	3		(7) 0.42
#9		Them	4	-1	(8) 0.50
#4/9	4	Us	2		(7) 0.28
#10		Them	12	-10	1.71
#3	5	Us	7	-0-	(6) 0.85
#2		Them	7		(7) 1.00
#14	6	Us	4		(6) 0.66
#7		Them	13	-9	2.16
	<b>Total:</b>	Us	35		(44) 0.79
		Them	43	-8	(45) 0.93

After you determine how many points were scored in each rotation you need to calculate if you were plus or minus in each rotation. Using the wheel graphs as the example you can easily compile the information found in the table graphs. Notice in the first game that this team was plus in the first and second rotations, minus in the fourth and sixth, with the third and fifth winding up as a wash.

Next, determine *how many* rotations each game required and ferret out the ratio of points to serving opportunities by match, game, and rotation. For example, the first game went 20 rotations, the second, 14, and the third finished in 10 for *your* team. Total the numbers for the three games. The four figures are the compilation of the match represented in the wheel graphs found in earlier figures. Note, teams do not always rotate an equal number of times in a game.

### **Making Sense out of the Evidence**

So what information can you uncover from the facts? You can learn many things about your team and the opponent. But, you must ask the right questions:

\* Were the points scored...

-By service aces or poor passing resulting in a weak attack?

-By stuff blocks?

-By offensive transition from dug balls?

-By unforced errors?

You will need someone to keep a sequential account of how points are scored or take it off a video and compare it to the PPR.

\* Were points scored because...

-The serve was tough to handle?

-The receivers were weak?

-The front row was big and blocked well?

-Balls were dug and the team attacked well in transition?

-Unforced errors unrelated to any particular tactic?

\*Did any change in the pattern of scoring occur because...

-of substitutions?

-of altering the starting rotation? (match up change)

- of a dramatic official's call?
- of an obvious tactical change?
- of a rift between players?
- of an act of God? (Lights go out; net caves in; etc.)
- of anything else?

You must ask these questions of both your team and the opponent. You need a statistical system which will corroborate your empirical findings. You need to analyze each rotation with this or a similar list of questions.

### **What You Can Discover**

You may come to the conclusion that you were outmanned or womanned in this particular match. Sometimes it is as simple as the adage, "You can't serve water with a fork." You hope not. You hope you have enough ladles to fill the glasses. But if you come to the conclusion that, based on your discoveries, you can make your team better, then the scrutiny of the facts is worth it. Using the example presented in the figures you can glean the following information:

## On Your Team

You are scoring well in the first and second rotations. (By noting how the points were scored you can conclude where the strengths lie.) However, you must weigh the evidence in your favor against the possible liabilities of the opponent.

You lost the match in the fourth and sixth rotations. How were the points scored against you? Why couldn't you score? You subbed #9 for #4 (presumably in the first game) trying to show up what you estimated was a weakness. Did the move satisfy your expectations?

If you changed your match ups by starting in another rotation, could you have improved your point scoring (or preventing) opportunities by better blocking, digging, attack, and/or serve receiving?

Are the fourth and sixth rotations inherently weak because of your personnel and their relative rotational order? If so, what aspect of the game is lacking?

These are just some of the examples of information you can find. It can tell you what rotations and skills you must emphasize in

upcoming practices. It will give you hints on game plan adjustments during battle.

### **You can learn much about your opponent:**

They are very weak in the rotations one and two so they are slow starters. Can you take advantage of that fact? If you changed the match ups could you perhaps even out the duel in the fourth and sixth rotation but not lose the advantage found in the first two

After losing the first game the opposing coach did not change personnel or starting rotation. Is this a pattern?

And so on.

You should know how many points per rotation you need to average to win. You must keep your opponent below that average, of course. The USA Men's Team knows from years of collecting data that they must score at least 0.50 PPR and hold the opponent below that number. International matches usually take many more rotations to play than high school or college matches.

This detective work must be done after every match so that you can understand why your team is performing at its present level. Even if you are winning you need to understand why and

capitalize on it. If you are losing, the sleuth work is a must if you want to change. The greatest case of all that can be made out of this process is that it is a *sure-fire way of learning more about volleyball*.

## **Team Meeting**

Hold a team meeting on the day of the game. It is important for the coach to establish in the minds of the players the game play. This can be done during a meeting early on the day of the match. This meeting should review the scouting report, the match ups, and the tactics that will be employed during the match.

It is imperative that the coach not overload the athletes with too much information, but *highlight* the two or three elements that will be the difference between winning and losing. It also is important that the coach focus on those aspects that will allow the team to win and emphasize only those elements of the game plan. The rest of the information is simply available for the total preparation of the player. It is recommended that this meeting take place early enough in the day so that the players may assimilate the information and use it during their individual preparation for the match.

# Home Game Management Check Sheet

Opponent

Date

Official #1

Official #2

Line Judge #1

Line Judge #2

Ball Crew

Scorekeeper

Operator

Announcer

Equipment:

30 practice balls

4 game balls

2 ball charts

measure stick for net height

visitors locker room key

video camera

tripod

2 blank video tapes

microphone

12 bench towels

4 court towels

15 visitor locker room towels

2 water coolers

cups

flip scoreboard (back-up)

Supplies:

score sheets

roster sheet

pencils

Statistical Sheets:

Passing/Hitting

Opponent Offense

Pts per Rotation

## **Pre-match Physical Activity**

It is recommended that the team take a *short* workout at least four hours before the match. The duration of the workout can be anywhere from 30 to 90 minutes. The pre-match physical activity has many purposes.

The workout is to attune the body physically and physiologically for the intense activity that will follow later in the day .

A second reason is to allow the athletes to become as comfortable as possible with the specific surroundings and environment that they will be competing in during the match.

The third reason is to gain confidence that they are “peaking” at the appropriate time and that they are all performing to the maximum of their abilities.

The fourth is to run through the specific strategies and tactic that will be employed in the match. The workout should be relatively easy with the athletes simply breaking a sweat and not doing excessive jumping or strenuous exercise.

## **Pre-match warm-up**

It is better for the athletes to spend a short amount of time in

the sports hall just before warming-up. Allow the time for some light food, doing final dressing, massage, athletic/medical taping and rehabilitation before the match. The warm-up should begin at least thirty minutes to one hour before the match, depending upon the ceremony and the specific pre-match protocol that will be employed. There are several points regarding the warm-up that are important.

It is recommended that the athletes conduct the warm-up on their own. It is important that the coach or trainers not be involved because the athletes start to depend on their trainers for performance. They must learn to depend on *themselves and each other*.

Drills which are conducted in warm-ups by trainers do not require the athlete to make the choices which are required by our sport and which are necessary for success.

The warm-up should involve some light dynamic activity followed by range of motion and stretching activity, followed by intense dynamic volleyball related activity.

The final part of warm-up should be spiking, blocking an serving, particularly the type which will simulate the actions to be employed in the game.

The team should ignore, as much as possible, the opposition.

### **Final Instructions**

Immediately before the game is to begin, the coach should gather the players together so that the last things they hear before walking onto the court are the *two most important* elements of the team strategy and tactics. They must firmly have those elements in mind so that they will execute the game plan correctly, particularly at the start of the match. Frequently the first several points can dictate the outcome of the match. If your team can establish its own tempo and rhythm, as well as the success of its game plan and specific match ups, the possibilities of winning are greatly increased.

### **Notes During the Match**

#### **The Coach must . . .**

The coach must have the specific game plan prepared for the match, in writing.

The coach must have specific substitute patterns worked out for the match.

The coach must have two or three alternative rotational match

ups pre-planned for the match.

The coach must determine the success or failure of the strategies and match ups during the first set of the match

The coach must show confidence at all times that there is a way to win any match.

The coach must constantly remind the players during the course of the match the strategies and tactics to be employed. The key element is to constantly re-focus the players' attentions, which will naturally stray off the plan, back to those tactics which will cause the team to be successful. Remind your players about blocking assignments, opponent attack tendencies, serving strategies and defensive positions. Constantly focus and re-focus the players' attentions.

The coach must keep statistical charts on the bench to be used during the time-outs and between the games.

The coach must prepare the substitutes in advance. The substitutes must maintain a constant warm-up during the entire match so that they can be physically ready to perform.

The coach must periodically discuss the evolution of the match with the substitutes, particularly if they have never been

used so that they may be mentally prepared for the flow of the game.

The coach must have a “flowchart” kept of the game on the sidelines so that he/she may understand the momentum shift and better select the opportunities for time-outs and substitutions.

The coach must be prepared to balance desire to win the match as quickly as possible, with the expectation that certain players will become fatigued. It may be important to rest a player even when the team is performing well. This is one of the reasons why it is critical that all twelve players have a role to play and can be useful contributors to the team as a whole.

The coach must never be afraid to substitute.

The coach must have confidence in all players. If the coach does not have confidence in a player he/she should look to change that player because the coach will be handicapping the team by not being able to use all of the available resources.

### **Notes for Time-outs**

A coach has only two contacts with the team during each game. This limitation makes those :30 to :60 second periods important.

The first thing a coach should try to evaluate is whether the team can accept information. This is usually the case when they have control of themselves emotionally. If not, then emotional control must be addressed.

Players should be taught techniques which allow them to reduce their pulse and generally calm themselves down or fire themselves up. Performance is related to pulse so this is a good place to begin. The team should have tools with which to control their state of arousal. The team's tools for arousal control can be practiced just as skills are practiced.

If the team can accept information, here are a few examples of informational items to give them during the time-out:

- **Time Out Topics**

- *Rotational information*
- *Hitter tendencies*
- *Specific situation reminders*
- *Refocus on pre-game goals*
- *Performance feedback, especially on what is working*
- *How to deal with specific failures*

## **Game Momentum**

A time-out is principally used to change momentum. Under no conditions should a coach ever call a time-out if his/her team is playing well and winning the match. A time-out can be used to bolster the morale of the players by reinforcing that their strategy and efforts are going to be successful in the long run.

If a team loses two or more consecutive points a time-out can be called. If a team loses three or more consecutive points the time-out should almost be automatic.

A time-out can be used to re-organize tactics which have become disorganized. A time-out can be used to adjust strategy or tactics based on information that has been obtained by the coaching staff on the bench.

A time-out can be used to allow for a physical break in the match if the team has become fatigued due to long rallies or long playing time. The time-out should, however, be principally a method of halting the opponent's momentum or to alter strategy and tactics.



## **Game Substitutions**

Substitutions are structured by the coaching philosophy as well as the personality and talent of the team. Humanistic coaches often like to use lots of players whereas authoritarian coaches often like to use fewer players. However a team chooses to substitute, it is imperative that everybody is happy with their role. Further, it is important that the team values each individual's role, regardless of what it is. This is the coach's job. More than anyone else, the coach establishes values for the team.

## **Rally Scoring Preparation**

Rally scoring is a topic that seems to ignite passion in all coaches. It seems that coaches are either passionately for or passionately against rally scoring.

Every other country in the world has accepted rally scoring as a rule and they all sought to make it work. But in the USA, the Americans are still discussing, complaining and deciding whether or not to adapt the rule. Americans are very arrogant.

Regardless of individual opinions, it seems that rally scoring is here to stay.

Rally scoring provides the astute coach with an opportunity to coach under some unique parameters, and knowing what's what may determine the match.

In 1989 when rally scoring just became a rule and nobody knew much about it, Bill Neville, the USA Men's National Team Head Coach instructed Jim Coleman and Brad Saindon to come up with a fifth game scenario. The USA staff was determined to be more prepared than any other staff. The staff took notes every time it saw a rally score game in tournaments, scouting, college or club matches.

The staff wanted to know:

- How many real points (points scored while serving) did each team score. Especially, how many real points did the winning team score?

- What was the real score of the game?

- How many rotations did the game go?

- Did the team who served first or receive first win?

- Did the right team win? This is a subjective evaluation of whether the best team won or did the "hot" team with the momentum win? Was there and upset?

Each coach should study rally score games at the level of competition in which his or her team plays. Rally scoring is an important factor in who wins or loses matches.

## **Real Points for Rally Scoring**

Rally score games need to be studied in terms of real points. The two teams will have either the same number of side outs or a difference of one. The receiving team will always have the same number of side outs, or one more than the serving team and visa versa. Points scored as a result of side outs tell us very little, the game will always be determined by real points. The notion that rally scoring takes away the value of siding out is ludicrous. Siding out prevents the opposing team from scoring a real point, and the game is always determined by real points.

The notion that serves should be easier in the rally point games is absurd. To win, the team needs to score real points and serving tough is an important ingredient to scoring. Perhaps a team should serve tougher in the fifth game.

Of the 200 or more games that the USA staff studied, six points seem to be the magic number. Six points is the number of real points occurring with the most frequency for the winning team. If a team gets to six real points first, victory was assured 98% of the time.

## **Rotations in Rally Scoring**

A rotation is defined as each time a new server goes back to serve on one team. Because the number of side outs will be the same between teams (plus or minus one) the number of rotations will also be the same (plus or minus one). To come up with a solid fifth game scenario, one must plan for a certain number of rotations. Nine rotations is the most common number of rotations in a rally score game.

Incorporate two sets of information in one solution. The winning teams need to score six real points in nine rotations. This give a scoring average of .667 points per rotation. With the six rotations in volleyball, the team will be in three rotations twice and in three rotations only once given that the game goes a total of nine rotations. A coach needs to know what rotations the team will score points in and what rotations the team will lose points in. A historical perspective is needed for each rotation as well as a perspective as to how the team is doing in this match on this night. This perspective on rotations might impact the rotational order in which to start the team for the fifth game. Get the team into the rotations that score points and minimize the rotations where the team gives up points. Hitting the good rotations twice in the same game might make the difference in the match. Staying out of one rotation, or getting into one good rotation might be the deciding factor. Maximize the team's odds in rally scoring by using the available rotational information to an advantage.

## **Serving and Receiving in Rally Score Games**

At the start of the rally score game, a coin is flipped to determine who serves and who receives. One can easily figure out the possible scenarios. The team that serves first maximizes the number of opportunities it has to score real points. However, the team that serves first must score at least one more real point than the opponent who is

receiving first. This fact is mathematically determined and is a constant regardless of whether or not there is a 17 point scoring cap. The requirement of scoring one more point may be more significant at higher levels of volleyball, and depending on the flow of the first four games. A smart team will probably elect to receive first in the rally scoring game.

Coaches should probably chose to serve first with the best scoring rotation coming up to maximize the number of time the team gets into those rotations in the game. If receiving first, start the team where the rotation is sure to result in a side out, but have the team in a rotation that is able to score upon siding out as well. Whether these rotational considerations outweigh any match-up plans is an interesting coaching dilemma, but remember, the rally scoring game has a finite number of rotations to score points.

When serving, a team may want to gamble a little bit to increase the chances of scoring points. An attempt at a service ace, a commit block, or a risky swing for a point may be appropriate in the fifth game when otherwise unwarranted.

## **Substitutions in Rally Games**

The substitution pattern of a rally score game can be completely different, and can significantly impact the outcome. Plan for a game that lasts for nine rotations, a very different situation to use the 12 substitutions. One of the best plans may be in maximizing specialization, or in other words, taking full advantage of each player's best skills. If you have a great server, get him or her in and out as needed. A great blocker with few other skills can be shuffled in and out when serving to gain an advantage. Likewise, a great passer, or a hitting specialist might be shuffled in and out when receiving to help in siding out.

## **Training for the Rally Game**

As in all other phases of volleyball, don't ask a team to do something in a match that wasn't worked on in practice. It is a fairly easy task to incorporate rally scoring into practice, especially if you keep score in drills as a usual course of events. Try to play some rally score games every day whether they are six on six, triples, or rally score systems designed for a particular drill.

Rally scoring is as much a mind set as anything, and experience and familiarity go a long way towards actual success. What better time then practice to give your team experience in this scoring format? A team should also have practice in the substitution patterns that may be used in rally score games. Make certain that each individual clearly understands his or her role in the game.

Coaching a rally score game is interesting and exciting. While a coach can't ever impact the human element of the sport, coaches can put teams in the most advantageous situation to increase the odds of success.

Coaches, "Let's quit complaining about rally scoring and go to work learning more about it and how to use it to an advantage." Study and the information will flow and give the advantage to those who have done their homework.

# Fan Support in Volleyball

**T**he first basic ingredient needed to establish fan support is a good team. Note, a good team is not necessarily a great team. Furthermore, a good team does not even need to be a team that wins a lot. You need a team that provides something for the audience. Fans want to see determination, hustle, tenacity and heart. These qualities have nothing to do with crushing spikes or spectacular digs.

The team must possess enthusiasm and excitement and must show the fans that they are enjoying playing. If the team plays hard and doesn't give up, the fans can forgive a loss. but, don't be fooled! Winning is also a key ingredient, but it isn't the only ingredient.

Try to get people into the gym. many people have not seen volleyball at a competitive level and are not familiar with the game as it is played today. The first year of any big promotion to increase fan support should allow everyone to be admitted to the games for free. Or, if you must, charge only a nominal fee. Then the following year, raise the admission prices a little.

Special promotions such as two for ones, lady's night or boyfriend night, coupon and product give-a-ways always work well. A local sponsor may be willing to provide some product for a give-away during the match.

At the University of New Mexico, a city recreation league was started for the purpose of generating fan support for the team at the University and as a means of fund-raising. The volleyball program secured the use of the University's 13-court facility on Saturday and Sunday evenings. What began in 1987 with 22 teams is not Lobo League Mania with 190 teams competing in 16 divisions. The league play has allowed the varsity team to meet both goals. More than 2,000 league players are now true Lobo volleyball fans and the revenue from the league has helped supplement the team's budget.

Not every team and head coach can operate a Lobo League Mania type venture, but at UNM, the first season began with a modest amount of good administrators and excellent facilities. This combination drew more and more players into the league.

Some ideas for fan support work better in some areas of the country than in others. Find something special about the volleyball team, the coach the facility, and then promote those special characteristics. Also, refer to a number of good publications that are available on marketing and promotions for high school and college sports.

# *Notes on Passing, Setting & Spiking*

The chapters on the Underhand Pass and the Overhand Pass are excerpted from VOLLEYBALL: The Keys to Excellence, a *Sports Illustrated* Winner's circle Book by Douglas P. Beal, Ph.D. to be published in 1992.

# Notes on the Underhand Pass

*If you reduce* the game of volleyball to its bare essentials you'll find that it requires six basic skills: underhand passing, overhand passing or setting, digging or individual defensive skills, spiking, blocking and serving. These skills fall into two categories. There are any number of ways to do it, but it is best to separate the ball-handling skills of passing, setting and digging from the point-scoring skills of spiking, blocking and serving.

Although the three ball-handling skills lack the dazzle of the other skills—you'll rarely see their stats reported in the papers after a game—these skills do spell the difference between winning and losing points. They also determine the level of volleyball that you and your team are capable of playing. To play volleyball at its highest level, your team must be able to execute these basic skills with consistency.

Coaches frequently talk about the need for consistency. Consistency is the level below which your team will not play. The best way to determine your team's level of consistency is to examine their execution of the skills. If, as a team, you can receive serve, if you can pass the free ball, if you can accurately overhand pass, if you can control your digs, you will always be competitive.

Some of the best athletes who have ever played volleyball have been known primarily for their ball control skills. The great ball control players like Olympic gold medalists Karch Kiraly and Mark Waldie never appeared to be in a hurry to play the ball. They always seemed to play the ball effortlessly with plenty of time to make their necessary moves. In reality, what they did was to refine their movement and ball-contact skills so well that they consistently placed themselves in the best position to receive the ball and to redirect it. They mastered body movement before and between contacts, and they understood the concept of redirecting the ball. They made it their responsibility to better the ball—take it at any speed and in whatever place it came to them from the previous contact, control it, and then direct it appropriately.

You'll need to spend a great deal of time perfecting the ball-control skills. They are the most difficult to master, requiring

finesse, touch, consistency, body control, and the ability to execute them from any body position in any part of the court—with your opponent trying very hard to keep you from succeeding. Since the ball may be moving very rapidly, in varying trajectories, and may be directed at or away from you from different positions along the net or from your own court, you'll frequently need to run a long distance and to dive or roll on the floor. If all this is not enough, your efforts are seldom rewarded with a direct point or side out. You'll have to settle for knowing that you made it possible for a teammate to record a kill. The teamwork aspect of volleyball is at its most obvious in these three ball-control skills.

With hard work and lots of practice, you can learn to handle the ball expertly. You'll develop the necessary physical skills for their execution and you'll develop confidence in your ability to handle any play. You'll make pinpoint passes, deliver sets your teammates will crush, and find yourself getting to balls that previously you had to watch hit the floor. Since there's always a place on the court for a player who has great ball-control ability, you'll be a welcome member of any team.

## Underhand Pass

The move is given many different names: passing, serve reception, forearm passing, bumping, and probably several others. They all mean the same thing. The term underhand passing is preferred because that term most closely describes the actual execution of the movement.

The underhand pass is used principally to receive serve. Although it is technically legal to receive with any type of technique other than a block or a spike, you'll rarely see a serve legally received with anything other than the underhand pass. Thus, for all practical purposes, you must master this passing technique if you intend to play competitive volleyball. You'll find that the use of the underhand pass as a secondary setting maneuver, when you can't use the overhand method, to handle many transition plays such as a free ball or a down block and for easy defensive plays. The underhand pass is also useful in a wide range of cover situations, such as when your spiker hits the ball into the block and it rebounds back onto your side of the court. In this situation, you'll use the underhand pass to keep the ball from hitting the court, thereby maintaining control of the ball.

The underhand pass is perhaps the most predominant play in volleyball, but this wasn't always so. In fact, many great players throughout the 1964 Olympic games never mastered this technique. Back in those days, it was seldom used except in a rare emergency when the ball couldn't be taken with the overhand pass. Over the past 20 or 25 years, however, referees have so interpreted the rules that the underhand pass has emerged as virtually the only way to receive serve or to handle any ball traveling at a moderate or greater velocity. It is almost impossible to play the game today, regardless of your position on the court, without being highly skilled at underhand passing.

This emphasis on underhand passing has created some unfortunate situations. First, balls that could be more accurately and effectively played with an overhand technique must be taken underhand. This is often the least efficient means to play the ball and discourages the use of skills that would permit better ball control and greater accuracy. Some leaders in the sport would like to see a loosening of the rules to permit more latitude in ball handling. For now, however, if you're in doubt you'd better play the ball underhand. You'll hear the referee's whistle less frequently.

The emphasis on the underhand pass also places great demands on both coaches and players. It is difficult to teach a player to contact a moving ball on their forearm; in virtually every other sport the ball is contacted at the end of the racket or club or whatever body part is used to strike or catch the ball. In volleyball, the forearm contact point requires that athletes have outstanding hand-eye coordination and body movement to extend their arms and fingers slightly past the position where the ball would normally be contacted for other sports. It takes a great deal of training and repetition to become skilled in using this unusual and difficult contact point.

For Americans, who frequently are not comfortable with soccer, another sport that involves rebounding the ball off various body parts, underhand passing is demanding because the ball is never caught or trapped. The ball is always redirected. This continual redirecting means that proper body position before contact with the ball is crucial. To accomplish this, you must assimilate a lot of information about the speed of the ball, the position of your body and the location of your target before you hit the ball. In a way, underhand passing is like bumper pool with your body.

The underhand pass is a difficult technique to learn, but a essential one. Since great receivers are extremely rare in competitive volleyball today—only master setters are rarer— the more skilled you are in underhand passing, the greater the role you'll play on your team.

## **Mechanics of the Underhand Pass**

### **Ready Position and Pre-Contact Movement**

The ready position for the underhand pass in volleyball is similar to that of other sports. Your feet are slightly farther than shoulder width apart. One foot, preferably the right regardless of whether you're right or left handed, is slightly ahead of the other , and your weight is over the balls of your feet. Your knees should be bent a little and angled inward a bit. Keep your hips and shoulders forward, with your arms held low in front. This is essentially the position you'll want to be in when you contact the ball.

It would be nice if you never had to move to make a pass, but in volleyball you'll seldom make a play without first moving toward the ball. For any pass to be accurate, you need to get into

position so that you can play the ball from the ready position and along your body's mid-line, your exact vertical center and the optimal plane in which to make contact with the ball.

To get a feel for pre-contact movement, get in the ready position and bounce on both legs: forward, backward, and to each side. Don't close down your base of support by letting your legs collapse, and don't let your feet cross. If you do either, you won't be balanced at the moment of ball contact. Next, take one or two steps and then bounce into the ready position. The goal is to be comfortable moving as rapidly as possible over half the distance of the court, then bouncing into the ready position just before you play the ball. This is such an important skill that you should practice the movement in every direction and under all game conditions.

## **Passing Rhythm**

When I talk about rhythm, it has nothing to do with dancing (although I have seen players execute some pretty fancy steps trying to track a particularly nasty floater serve). Rhythm is the coordination of all your movements, culminating in the pass. At contact, you'll want some of your body's motion to continue through the

ball and toward the intended target. This momentum either can come from your entire body, if you take a forward step, or just the movement of your arms. Most successful under hand passers generate this passing movement from their shoulders with a shrugging motion. They avoid exaggerated arm swing and dramatic running through the point of contact.

It's important to hyper-extend your elbows so that they lock. Combined with shrugging your shoulders and forcing your hands downward to lock your wrists, this hyper-extension straightens your arms, creating a single lever with your shoulders as the fulcrum.

The complete shoulder shrug and arm movement is very much like the movement of a baseball player bunting a ball. It is a short, controlled jabbing motion that does not have an extended follow through.

## **Understanding Angles**

At the point of ball contact, the angles created by your body position at the ankle, knee, hip, shoulder, elbow, waist and wrist joints, affect the flight of the ball. By altering any one of these

angles, you can control the underhand pass. Understanding how to effectively manipulate these various angles to control the ball will allow you to more easily execute and improve the underhand pass.

## **Hand Position**

Everyone you talk to will recommend a different way of holding your hands when you pass the ball. How should you hold your hands? Well, the answer is both *irrelevant* and *important*.

The answer is irrelevant because the hands should never contact the ball in the underhand pass. Their surface is far too hard and irregular to permit accuracy. You want to use the broad, flat surface of the forearms. The answer is important because if your hands are in the right position, you'll naturally present the best possible forearm surface to the ball.

When deciding how to hold your hands, there are two considerations: (1) *What position is most comfortable for me?* and (2) *Which position exposes the best contact surface to the ball?* You alone can answer the first question. I'll help you with the second.

The best contact surface will be the flattest, largest area that you can hold together effectively. Because you want to hit the ball evenly and simultaneously with both arms acting as one striking surface, it's important to keep your hands together. For this reason I

favor any hand position that puts the heels of the hands in contact and even with each other. Experiment with the positions shown here. Note that in all of them the heels of the hands are touching and level, the hands are clasped so that they do not come apart at the moment of contact, and the thumbs are parallel, permitting a flat, broad surface. Don't ball your hands into fists because the muscle tension will present an irregular surface. Remember, comfort and function should be your guides. Don't be afraid to change hand positions if you're having difficulty contacting the ball evenly on both forearms.

### **Pass the Ball Close to the Court**

Pass the ball as close to the court and as low in its trajectory as possible, contacting the ball with your forearms at or below waist level. In order to do this, and to make contact as low as possible, you'll need to widen your base of support and bend your knees to lower your center of gravity. This position offers many advantages.

First, you'll have a longer period of time to study when and how to play the ball before you actually play it. If you rush or jump, or try to play the ball in a high position, you'll lose mechanical advantage and the movement of the ball will dictate your movements. Wait as long as possible, then play the ball. Waiting also

gives the back and forth movement of the floater serve a chance to stabilize, making it easier for you to play the ball.

Second, waiting allows you to adjust the various angles of your body, giving you the greatest possible control of the pass. Passing the ball low to the ground forces you to bend your legs, which is important for accuracy and control: the more you can make use of your body levers, (not just your arms, but your legs, waist and hips as well) the better your opportunity to make adjustments and the better the potential for accuracy and control. The most important angles are those under your arm, between your forearm and your body (keep these angles as large as possible), behind the knees and at the hips.

Third, you will be able to extend the length of time of the actual contact with the ball (an important factor in all ball-control skills). The longer you can legally maintain contact with the ball, the better control you'll have over it. Passing low to the court allows you to maintain maximum ball-to-body contact as you follow the ball toward your target.

## Playing the Ball

The best position to be in for an under hand pass is directly behind the ball, with the ball aligned exactly along your body's mid-line. Keep your right foot slightly forward, and use your hips to split the difference between the path of the incoming ball and the direction of your intended target. Obviously, in a real game, you'll seldom be able to play the ball from this ideal position, but always try, and whenever you have the opportunity to handle an easy play, such as a free ball, do your best to be in the right position.

It's important to have your right foot slightly forward when you're passing the ball underhand, no matter what position on the court you're playing from, because it facilitates transferring your weight in the direction of the pass. Also, because the server is to your left or in front of you, you normally make your pass to the target from left to right. Therefore, having your right foot forward keeps your body open to the ball and facing the target, allowing more freedom of movement. Try to avoid keeping your feet even with each other, which puts you off balance. I know that some coaches teach that your left foot should be forward when passing from the left side, but I don't think this is necessary for proper execution, and it adds another element that must be practiced.

Underhand passing is a skill of movement: movement forward and toward the target area.

## **Tracking the Ball**

In order to keep the ball from hitting the floor, you need to watch it constantly and to adjust your body position so you can intercept it. This is called tracking the ball. Accurately tracking is a key component of all the ball-control skills.

Always watch the ball. Keep unbroken eye contact with it from its last contact with a player until it reaches you. Train yourself to actively watch the ball, not just see it. Try to pick out unique characteristics of the ball you're using - the brand name, a defect, something written on the ball or its rotation. As the ball approaches your contact point, don't move your head to watch it hit. Use your peripheral vision for that, moving only your eyes. Always try to keep your head as still as possible.

## Learning Progressions and Training Exercises for the Underhand Pass

There are a number of progressions you can follow to become skilled in underhand passing, and many of them can be performed alone, allowing you to work on developing your skill when a partner or a team isn't around with whom to drill. Any exercise where you repeatedly pass the ball to yourself in a small area, with the object of handling the ball as cleanly, consistently, and accurately as possible, is an excellent way to learn ball control.

Pick an open area and toss the ball to yourself, contacting it on your forearms and trying to loft it 3 to 5 feet above your head, five times in a row. At first, avoid having to move much to pass the ball. When this exercise becomes easy, vary the height and increase the number of consecutive contacts. Then increase the distance you must move in order to play the ball. A variation of this exercise is to pass the ball into the air, let it bounce, and pass it again. This allows you to relax your grip and your stance between passes, more normally mirroring actual game conditions.

Another exercise uses a wall to repeatedly rebound the ball

back for you to pass. For variety, let the ball bounce before you pass it. This type of exercise can become extremely complex and is an excellent way both to learn the pass and then to train yourself to excel at it. Gradually add body movement, which will force you to develop accuracy in directing the ball to a new target because you will have to move greater and greater distances to get to the ball.

The final exercise is much like the first, but requires a partner. Have the partner toss the ball to you, then pass it back to the spot where your partner is standing. Plan the trajectory so that the ball will land directly on your partner's head. Vary the distance between you so that you become comfortable passing both short and long distances, with both flat and high trajectories. Next, have your partner toss the ball to you, and then pass it once to yourself before passing it back to your partner, who should do the same. Concentrate on varying the height of your pass to yourself. Start with only 6 inches (yes, only 6 inches) above your head, then progress gradually to 10, 15 or 20 feet. You can modify this exercise by moving your body a quarter or half turn after the first contact.

These exercises are designed to make you comfortable passing the ball under varying conditions. Experiment with variables like

the height and trajectory of the incoming ball; the angles of your ankle, knee, hip, shoulder, elbow and wrist; the position of your body relative to the intended target; and the amount of movement necessary to reach the spot from which you'll pass the ball. If you practice these exercises rigorously, I guarantee you'll be comfortable passing the ball under virtually all conditions.

### **Variations on the Underhand Pass**

Of course, you'll seldom be able to play a ball from the perfect body position. You may have to pass a ball that's outside your body line, or one that is particularly high or low, or one that isn't in the right position for that overhand set to your spiker. In these cases it's important to be able to adapt to the situation by using one of the following variations on the underhand pass.

### **Passing to the Side**

Sometimes you just can't quite get to the ball, and you find yourself reaching outside of your body's mid-line in order to play

it. What should you do?

First, step to the ball with the foot closer to it. Don't cross your feet to get to the ball. This is one of those exceptions where if the ball is on your left side, it is better to lead with the left foot, even if the intended passing target is to your right.

Then, make sure you stop traveling just before you contact the ball, (don't continue to move), even if the ball is outside your mid-line. Play it where it is.

Form the platform with your arms just as you would for a regular underhand pass: hyper-extend your elbows and wrists, and clasp your hands. Smoothly swing this platform to the side, perpendicular to the direction of the incoming ball. Don't swing at the ball—you won't be able to control it. Let the ball rebound from your arms.

Control the trajectory of the ball and its direction by using your shoulders: dip your inside shoulder and raise your outside shoulder. This is the key to successful passing from the side of the body. If the ball needs any extra force to get it to a distant target, use your shoulders, lower back and legs.

Never be satisfied with playing a ball outside of your mid-line

if you could have played it from a better position. Make that extra effort. Never let laziness dictate the type of technique you'll use.

## **Passing the High Ball**

There are two situations that fall under the definition of high ball. The first is a ball that has a very high trajectory, like a free ball that your opponents have passed over the net in a particularly high arc. The best way to play this ball is to get to the spot where you think it will land and wait for it. Just wait. It'll come down, I guarantee. Remember the principle of playing the ball as low to the court as possible? Here's your chance to put that principle into action. Any ball with a high trajectory should be an easy play. If it's not, it's probably because you weren't patient enough and didn't let the ball come to you.

The second situation in which you'll have to play a high ball is when you must back up to pass, and after backing up as much as you can, the ball is still at shoulder height or above. This is a much more difficult play. Remember that at some point you must stop your body movement in order to contact the ball; don't continue to

back up, or the ball will handcuff you and hit you in the chest. Instead, turn to the side, and play the ball much as you would the ball that is outside your mid-line: dip your inside shoulder and focus all your attention on angling the contact surface of your forearms toward the target. Keep your feet comfortably apart, and move your arms forward from the shoulders toward the target. Above all, keep your eyes on the ball.

## **Passing the Low Ball**

Sometimes the ball will drop to the court three or four steps short of the spot you've anticipated. Move forward very quickly to get this ball, leading with your arms and hands so that you can contact it as soon as possible. Just before the moment of contact, stretch out with long steps, so that you are as low as possible yet still in a stable position. Reach for the ball first and worry about where it will go second. If it hits the floor, it won't be going anywhere. If you can direct the ball, do so by dipping your inside shoulder (the one closer to your target) toward the target area. Frequently you'll have to finish by hitting the floor with a roll or a

dive. The chapter on backcourt defense describes how to execute this safely.

## **Underhand Set**

Even the best setters can't set every ball over hand, so it's important to learn how to accurately set the ball under hand. If you find that you must set the ball under hand, don't try to do anything fancy in order to fool the defense; just give your spikers a good set and let them worry about the block.

The error most frequently made in underhand setting is not getting the ball high enough to give the attacker time to approach and hit it. The best way to avoid setting the ball too low is to keep your arm platform parallel to the court, giving the ball a near vertical trajectory, and to drive up with your legs as the ball contacts your arms. Don't swing at the ball with your arms, snap your elbows, or bend your back to make the ball go high. Your set won't be accurate. Don't try to be fancy. Aim for accuracy, setting the ball high and keeping it from drifting over the net or outside the court boundaries. Remember: if you're having to set the ball under hand,

you didn't have a good pass to begin with. Your job is to better the ball (put it into a better position for your team than when you received it) and to give your hitter something to swing at. You're not expected to perform miracles.

## **Keys To Success**

- Put your arms in the platform position as early as possible so that they are ready to contact the ball.
- Clasp your hands in a comfortable, consistent manner but don't contact the ball on your hands
- The arm motion for passing is most like the bunting action in baseball (not a full swing and not completely stopped), but more a short striking motion that moves the ball toward the target.
- Point your arms toward the target area. Make sure your arms are facing the intended flight of the ball
- Stop your body movement before contact with the ball. Then move through the ball during contact, from a stable base, using your arms.
- Maintain a consistent base of support with your right foot slightly

ahead of your left.

- When your arms contact the ball, move them slightly across your body, left to right, regardless of your position on the court.
- Understand that underhand passing can be controlled with a combination of any of the body's levers, any one of which can affect the direction and trajectory of the ball.
- See the ball to the moment of contact, but don't watch the contact.

Watch the ball.

- Play the ball as far in front of you and as low to the court as possible.

# *Notes on the Overhand Pass*

Can you think of a more unusual sports shot than volleyball's overhand pass? I can't. The overhand requires the touch and accuracy of basketball's jump shot with the lightning fast redirection of soccer's one-touch pass. And really, if volleyball's rules were strictly interpreted, this shot would be illegal. The ball is prohibited from coming to rest on any part of the body. As it is, it is virtually impossible to change the direction of the incoming ball without it coming to rest, even if only momentarily, in your hands. Fortunately, volleyball officials don't enforce the pass rule to the letter, so if your execution is smooth and quick, you'll seldom be whistled for a ball handling violation.

This paramount move in volleyball, dominated the sport's formative years as the technique of choice for virtually every play.

Today, mainly because of rules interpretations, it has been relegated almost exclusively to a tactical use in setting. This is unfortunate because the very ball control and accuracy it provides, which make it the best choice for setting, also make it the best choice for nearly every contact with the ball.

The wizardry of the master setters is truly magical. The U.S. has been blessed with some of the best in the history of the sport: 1984 Olympic gold medalist Dusty Dvorak, 1984 silver medalist Debbie Green, and 1988 gold medalist Jeff Stork. All could perform near miracles with the ball, accurately delivering it with a feather soft touch from any spot on the court to any attacker, at any time, under any conditions. Their ability to take an errant pass and convert into a perfectly positioned set for their hitters, or to take a perfect pass and completely confuse their opponents' blockers, allowing the spiker to make an easy kill, made them true champions and allowed their teams to reach the highest levels possible.

Because this skill has become so specialized, and because players focus on other parts of their game, skilled over hand passers have become rare—and therefore valuable. Spend the time necessary to become accomplished in the over hand pass and you'll bring a new level of ball control to any team, whatever position you play.

## Using Overhand Pass in the Game

You'll use the overhand pass to set the ball to an attacker in well over 90 percent of your sets. But you also should use this technique in a couple of other situations. First, try to handle every free ball with the overhand pass. Teams that do this make the transition from defense to offense more aggressively and are more effective at putting the ball near the net for their setter to run a better play. The result is that they score more points and win more games.

In addition, try to use the overhand pass for *off plays* - those plays defying ready classification. Perhaps you're covering your hitter, or tracking down a tip off the block: if the ball is above your waist level, try to play it overhand. The more skilled you become at this technique, the more opportunities you'll find to use it. And I'll tell you one of volleyball's best kept secrets: you can even receive the serve with the overhand pass. While I don't recommend you try it, there's no rule against it. It's just very difficult to do it cleanly enough to be legal.

If you look for opportunities to use the overhand pass, you'll find them. You'll also find that with practice your passes become

more accurate and more consistent. Forcing yourself to pass overhand adds more movement to your game and will pay huge dividends as you develop as a player.

## **Mechanics of the Overhand Pass**

The overhand pass can appear to be one of the most complicated shots in volleyball. Don't be discouraged, however. It's relatively simple to learn, and continued practice will rapidly increase your skill level.

When you're learning this technique, keep in mind two key concepts. First, you're just redirecting the ball, not fighting it. Position yourself to intercept the ball and think about redirecting it as accurately as possible. Use the same basic ready position you learned for the underhand pass, but you don't need to be so low to the court. Keep one foot in front of the other, about shoulder width apart, and keep your knees slightly bent. Your weight should be forward and your arms up, so your hands are above your head. You should actually be able to watch the ball coming toward you through the space between your hands.

Keep your fingers comfortably spread apart. When the ball contacts your hands, the first two fingers and the thumb of each hand will provide the major impetus for power, distance, and accuracy. The fourth and little fingers act more as stabilizers or guides.

Think of your fingers as miniature diving boards. As the ball comes into contact, its force pushes them back until they spring forward, just the way the diver bends the diving board back until it rebounds forward, launching her into the air. To ensure this diving board action, keep your fingers slightly tensed but not rigid. Don't try to initiate this movement yourself by moving your hands back toward your head at the moment of ball contact. Instead, let the natural elasticity of your finger and wrist joints do it.

Your palms should be parallel—facing each other, not facing away from your body. Keep your hands slightly cupped, simulating the shape of the ball. The distance between your hands should be just enough for the ball to squeeze between them.

The second concept to remember is that the more finger surface you can get on the ball and the longer you can hold the ball, the more control and accuracy you'll have. Obviously there's a limit to how long you can hold the ball before being called for a violation;

therefore, try to get as many of your fingers on the ball as possible. You don't want the ball to contact your palms, but if you can get all ten fingers on it, you're doing well. If you're just learning, don't try to imitate more experienced players who may pass the ball with only three fingers of each hand. As you are just learning the skills, the more surface area you can get on the ball, the better off you'll be.

A good way to get a feel for the contact you want to make is to dribble a basketball. If you're doing it correctly, your fingers will be contacting the ball from the last pad to the fingertip and the ball will be leaving your fingers with a slight backspin. This means that the ball is contacting your finger pads first, then rolling off your fingertips last. This is just what you want to happen when you overhand pass the volleyball.

When you perform an overhand pass, try to contact the ball above your head, roughly six inches in front of and above your forehead. Contact the ball above your hairline. While there is plenty of latitude as to where your hands should be when contacting the ball, the general rule is to contact the ball as close to your forehead as you can comfortably receive it. A close contact provides the play-

ers with additional elbow flexion. The elbow flexion allows you generate power.

At the moment of contact with the ball and the fingers, the triceps side of your upper arms should be roughly parallel to the ground and your elbows should be spaced comfortably apart, neither too open nor too closed. If your arm position is comfortable, there will be little or no tension in your shoulder muscles.

## **Playing the Ball**

Since the ball will seldom come directly to you, you'll need to move to a spot where you can intercept it. The basic movement skills for underhand passing work equally well here. The only major difference is that you won't need to move as low to the court for the overhand pass, since you'll be playing the ball above your head. Instead, move in an upright stance and try to keep your hands up high, at or near the ready position. If your hands are up and ready as you prepare to play the ball, you'll be able to watch it as it approaches your hands. This will put your hands in the correct relationship to your body, keep your head properly oriented to the

ball, and get into a slight crouch, ready for the ball. Many players find it effective to make their last step before contacting the ball a little skip step. This helps to ensure that they are indeed stationary at the moment of ball contact.

To maintain a good base of support, avoid crossing your legs when you chase the ball and when you play it. Play the ball with one foot in front of the other. Finally, try to strike your thumbs and wrists together as you release the ball. This forces your hands to work in concert, ensuring a good follow-through.

If you've watched skilled players perform the overhand pass, especially if they used it to set, you've noticed dozens of different ways to perform this shot. The flashiest way to pass the ball is often not the most accurate and consistent. Accuracy and consistency is what you want, especially if you're setting. Don't try to be the trickiest, most deceptive setter in the world. Instead, strive to be the most accurate, consistently putting the ball in the best possible position for your hitters to hit. Let them worry about fooling the block and defense.

## Learning Progression for the Overhand Pass

The following steps represent a detailed progression that is very successful in reinforcing sound overhand passing technique.

1) Hold the ball comfortably against your body at waist level, with your hands in the correct position. Your hands should be more on the sides of the ball than behind it.

2) Keeping your arms and elbows relaxed, slowly raise the ball, without changing the angle of your arms and elbows until the ball is in the position above your forehead where you expect to make contact. Repeat this several times, until you feel comfortable that the ball is in the best position for you and that your elbows are neither too spread apart nor too close and narrow.

3) Repeat steps 1 and 2 with the best foot and body position possible: one foot in front of the other, knees slightly bent, and back slightly bent forward. Be balanced and stable.

4) Bend over completely at the waist, so you are facing the floor, and hold the ball in front of your eyes. Make sure you have the correct hand position on the ball. Bounce the ball on the floor and catch it when it rebounds toward your face. Then do it again.

Check your hand position on the ball each time you catch it, to ensure that you have the correct spacing and contact position. Repeat this exercise using only elbow flexion, limiting yourself to this one action with your arms. Feel your arms extending and following the ball down and then absorbing it as it rebounds toward your face.

5) Repeat step 4 and add wrist flexion to the elbow flexion. Make only one bounce, then catch the ball. Check your hand position each time you catch the ball. Try to synchronize your wrist and elbow flexion, and make sure your hands and arms follow the ball well down toward the floor and then pick the ball up again before it gets very close to your face.

6) Now bounce the ball several times consecutively. Keep in mind the timing of your wrist and elbow flexion, and think about extending, then absorbing, the ball. This extended contact with the ball will seem very long and perhaps a bit unnatural. Think of it as a similar activity to two-handed dribbling in basketball. It should become more familiar. In game situations, one can't actually contact the ball for this long a period of time though.

7) In this step of the progression, don't bend over quite so far.

Stand more upright and bounce the ball 10 or more times consecutively in a slow, controlled manner. Try for maximum control and correct contact on each dribble of the ball. It's not at all inappropriate during this progression to stop and go back to the beginning, establishing the correct positions. Then come back to repetitive dribbling with both hands and with wrist and elbow flexion

8) The next step is to bend down close to the floor and dribble the ball as fast as possible while maintaining control. Start with 15 seconds and build up to 30 and then 60 seconds. If you do this correctly, with the elbow and wrist flexion working together, it will feel as though your hands rarely leave the ball as you push it to the floor and then absorb it as it rebounds back toward your face. Your head might be only two feet above the floor when you're doing this. The faster you can do this while maintaining control, the better the contact you're making with the ball.

9) Now work on passing repeatedly to the ground from a rather high position. Standing almost straight up, with very little bend at the waist, keep the bend in your knees, and bounce the ball repeatedly to the ground. As it comes back up toward your face, contact the ball, bring it back up, then dribble it back down. You should

actually pass the ball overhand to the floor . Once you can do this steadily for about one minute, keeping good control of the ball, you're ready to move on.

10) The final step in this sequence transfers this entire process to a wall. Start with step 4 and progress through step 9, passing the ball against the wall. Don't stand any farther than five feet away from the wall. Vary the distance you pass by moving forward or backward, trying to control the ball for 15 to 30 repetitions. For variety, you can also pass the ball on the wall at different heights. Practice from a position close to the wall, passing the ball very quickly from a distance of two to three feet or less. Feel yourself extend with the ball, then absorb it. It should feel as if your hands are never really leaving the ball.

This progression of exercises is excellent for reinforcing the correct head position and for learning to maintain extended contact for better control of the overhand pass. This type of practice will get the players a lot of quality contacts in a very short period of time. This can very quickly improve your skill. As you become better acquainted with the overhand pass, begin working with a partner. Start by tossing the ball to each other and catching it in the proper

position. Then progress to actually passing the ball back and forth, to each other, varying both your distance apart and the height at which you pass the ball.

## **Variations on the Overhand Pass**

Although you can use the over hand pass for other purposes, you'll use it primarily to set the ball. The difference between passing and setting is that when you're passing the ball, you're directing it to the setter, who will direct it to the spiker, but when you're setting the ball, you're sending it directly to the attacker. This difference is not in how you handle the ball, but rather in where you direct it. It's a difference of tactics, not technique. Now to discuss some variations on the basic over hand pass/front set.

### **Back Set**

It's always nice to deliver the set to an attacker in front of you—you can see where you're aiming the ball and watch the attacker approach—but sometimes the best place to set the ball is behind you. While in some circumstances you'll have time to turn

around and set the ball, in most cases you won't. In addition, you can often fool your opponent's blockers into keying on the wrong attacker by lining up as though you're going to set in front, but instead set the ball behind you. You'll need to learn to back set in order to do this effectively.

To fool those blockers, your back set should look exactly like your forward set. And this is relatively easy to achieve since there are only three minor differences between back and front sets. First, you want to contact the ball slightly farther back above your head than you do for the front set. Notice, slightly, is a matter of a couple of inches, not a foot or so. The easiest way to lose control of a back set is to contact the ball too far behind your forehead. Contact the ball with your hands at a spot between your hairline and the crown of your head.

Second, don't let the ball drop too low on a back set. Contact the ball slightly higher above your head than for the front set. Don't let the ball come too far forward or drop below the level of your forehead. It is virtually impossible to back set a ball that you've allowed to drop too low.

Finally, you won't be able to follow through in the direction of

the ball as you can with the forward set. Instead, your arms will follow through in a much more upward direction. You provide the impetus for the ball to go backward by arching your back and stepping forward through the point where you contact the ball. This permits essentially the same line of force at the moment of release as you have with the front set, although your hips are in front of the intended direction of the set, in line with your shoulders, hands, and the release point. By varying the angle of your back arch and the speed of your step, you'll control the speed, direction, and height of the set.

## **Jump Set**

Instead of keeping both feet flat on the floor, many players jump into the air to set the ball. Sometimes it's done to keep an errant pass from drifting over into the opponent's court, but for many setters it's becoming the technique of choice for every set. Jump setting gives you excellent control over the set's timing, tempo, and location, and if you're setting as a front-row player, the jump makes you a constant threat to hit the ball over the net instead of setting it.

To perform the jump set properly, you'll need to know a few things. First, this technique is called the jump set, not the set jump. The emphasis is on setting, not jumping. Just like basketball's jump shot, which is performed almost identically to the jump set, your goal is to make a comfortable jump, not the highest jump possible. You want to keep good body control and balance in the air. The best way to do this is to make sure you establish a good takeoff position before jumping. This will keep you from drifting to either side or forward or backward in the air. Jump vertically and you'll have better control of the set.

Second, contact the ball at the peak of the jump with your hands held higher above the top of your head than for the front or back set, and release the ball just as you begin your descent. Because you have no solid base of support while in the air, you'll need to generate the power for this set with your arms. While at first you might not be able to set the ball very far, as you become comfortable with this technique, you'll find your distance will improve.

## Side Set

Side setting is a skill you'll use for both passing and setting. Sometimes you'll find yourself chasing a ball that you can't quit get completely behind in order to face your target. When in a dilemma and when faced with the decision of playing the ball with either your hands or your forearms, whenever possible, play the ball with your hands. You'll have better control with your hands.

The side set is used to play those balls that you can't get behind. To perform a side set, make a minor adjustment in your foot position. Instead of having your feet point straight forward, point them slightly away from your body's mid-line, and angle your body to split the difference between the path of the incoming ball and the direction of your target.

You want your contact with the ball to occur at a point between your mid-line and the shoulder closer to your target. When you contact the ball, dip the shoulder closest to the target and follow through with your hands and arms in an exact line with the level of your shoulders. If you're passing to the left, for example, dip your left shoulder and follow through to the left, with your hands and arms in the line created by your shoulders. Often the follow-through action of side setting will turn you around toward your target. If this happens, great. It'll help your control and accuracy.

## **Half-Roll or Collapse Set**

This technique is not used nearly enough today. If you learn it, you'll dramatically improve your effectiveness as a setter because you'll be able to set more balls with your hands. Additionally, practicing this skill will teach you good movement patterns that will carry over into other parts of your game.

Use the half-roll set to play balls that are several steps away and low to the court. Get as close to the ball as you can, making sure that your last step is very large and with the foot closer to the ball. This long last step forces your center of gravity low to the court. As with all overhand pass techniques, your head should lead your body to the point of contact.

Contact the ball outside your mid-line. As you make contact with the ball, begin to pivot your body around the foot planted closer to the ball. Your center of gravity and mid-line should surround the ball. As you release the ball, collapse your legs. You'll wind up making a little half-roll onto your back.

## **One-Hand Set**

The one-hand set is an advanced technique that should see

infrequent use. It is very difficult to do and is frequently whistled by the referee. You'll use this technique to save the ball when it is too high above the net and too close to be contacted with both hands.

Turn your body away from the net and angle your shoulders until they are almost parallel to the net as you face the backcourt. You must jump to contact the ball, probably as high as you can, and reach with your hand (almost always your right hand) for the ball. Make contact with all five fingers, close to the center of the bottom of the ball. Don't let the ball touch your palm. If you're just learning to set this way, you probably won't be able to get the ball to go very far; with practice, however, it's possible to set the ball quite a long way. Remember though, that while you can use this technique to save some errant passes from drifting over the net, it is an emergency shot. The need for the one-hand set can be largely eliminated by moving more quickly to your ready position at the net.

## Keys to success:

- Contact the ball with as many fingers as possible
- Think of overhand passing as similar to dribbling a basketball with two hands instead of one and up rather than down.

- Keep your hands high and ready well before the ball arrives. Try to see the ball coming toward you through the space formed between your hands.

- Try to make every overhand pass along your body's mid-line.
- Over-setting the ball is always preferable to under-setting it. It is very difficult to make a mistake if you set the ball too high. There's little a hitter can do with a ball set too low .

- Always follow through with a full arm movement in the direction of the desired flight of the ball

- Make your forefingers, thumbs, and wrists snap together as you follow through after the release of the ball.

- Strive for a direct line of force from the foot behind you, through your hips and shoulders, to your elbows and hands, and in the direction of the desired flight of the ball

- Develop enough confidence in over hand passing so that you know you can play any ball with an over hand technique, rather than an underhand technique. This forces good movement and will carry over to all parts of your game.

## Notes on Setting

A good setter tends to get a little lazy because he or she can make up for poor body position with his or her hands. By not getting into the same body position each time, the setter becomes more readable to the blockers, thus giving away where they plan to set. These points are also important if you are running a fast offense. If you can train your setter to be technically sound for high outside sets, then you can add more options to your offense. They should be able to progress quickly. You must keep stressing the fundamentals.



### **Three major areas for setters' focus**

1. Pay attention to getting feet to the ball and getting the body under the ball every time to ensure the height of the set.
2. Remember to face the left front position, to square off earlier and not give away the back set by turning and putting the back to the net. This is especially critical on passes off the net.

3. Follow through with exaggeration to hold accuracy of the set.



**Keys to look for from setters:**

Get into position quickly,

Set feet under the ball,

Hands should be above the forehead waiting for the ball,

Ball-shaped hands,

Right foot slightly forward,

Knees bent slightly,

Face the target in the left front position,

Extend arms and legs simultaneously,

Follow through to the target,

Cover.



**Setting Repetitions**

When running setting drills, always have the setter come from their starting position. Rarely will they be standing at the net waiting. They should get used to moving quickly to the ball and stop-

ping to set. Start with easy drills and work up to harder drills. Toss from different spots on the court and vary the trajectory and speed of the toss. Begin by making most of the tosses right to the setter and work up to harder tosses. Have the setter do 20 good sets. The coach should decide what is good with height, trajectory, speed and distance from the net.

Coaches can make variations in each of the drills by varying the height, speed, and placement of the toss. Throw in some low tosses so that the setter must get under the ball. They may have to go down on the floor or even bump set



**With the back-set, work on these activities:**

- Simple back-set,
- Forward movement and set back,
- Backward movement set back,
- On the net and off the net set back,
- Block set back.



## Mental Training for Setters

As she waits at the net for the pass to reach her, Kelly sees the ball, faces her target and sets high and outside to Lisa who promptly gets roofed by two blockers. **TIME OUT!** Kelly approaches the bench, mad at herself for goofing up what everyone (except Lisa, of course) thought was a great set. Only Kelly knows what the approaching head coach will say. "Nice set, perfect location. Wrong choice! What did you do to set that up? Do you suppose any of the blockers were fooled?" Kelly knows from memories of many discussions that these are all the things she should think about on every play; but she doesn't.

Kelly is a well-trained, disciplined, motivated and intelligent setter; but she, like most other setters or quarterbacks, is operating in a state of mental overload. Even Kelly will say she was a better setter before she learned what she knows today. At least then, she seemed to be thinking or sensing things more often. No matter how hard she tries and no matter what she knows, she just can't seem to consistently apply it, particularly in pressure situations.

If Kelly is to move up to the next level, she must change the way she trains or the system must be changed or implemented differently. It is easy for Kelly to understand the ideal thought process and chain of physical occurrences which should occur to make the perfect set:

Transition to the target area  
Recognition of which hitters are where  
Remembering what priority each hitter is  
Deciding who the block will key on  
Remembering where the strong and weak blockers are  
Picking up the ball in flight  
Deciding which sets can be set  
Seeing the middle blocker  
Choosing which set to set  
Doing something to make the blockers think the setter  
will be making a different set than the one actually  
chosen  
Delivering the perfect set

Anyone can see how hard it is to go through this process and set the perfect set prior to having the ball bounce three times. Yet this is not even the hard part. The hard part is that almost the entire responsibility for success is on Kelly's shoulders. The hitter gets the credit when the setter creates a 1-on-1 or a 1-on-0 and she pounds it down for a kill. The setter gets the blame if there are two up and the hitter gets stuffed.

It is fairly easy to see that the training of the setter must happen on several levels. Clearly the most important aspect of training is the physical level. The setter must deliver the ball consistently from anywhere on the court. However, the mental aspect must be addressed or the setter will be greatly restricted in her development. In this area the development is dependent upon the confidence and creativity of the setter and the ability of the coach.

The emotional part of the setter training is very important; but it may be the easiest to address. Fear of failure, reaction to pressure and the burden of too much responsibility can cause all performers to shut down. However, in volleyball, we are lucky. We have the opportunity to shift a great deal of the emotional load by choosing the appropriate offensive and defensive systems and by implementing that system properly each play of each game. Yes, it is possible for Kelly to go to the next level as a setter with an altered training program and then maybe Lisa won't get stuffed as much.

# Notes on Defense

*Coaching comments* directed at the follow-through movement will reap results in the contact period. For example, do a drill and have the players hold the platform for two seconds after passing. This gets results for platform preparation. It is a way to heighten the players' feelings and own feedback in a "time lapse coaching method."

When coaching the passing pattern, comments to the players who are not passing the ball are just as important as coaching the player who does the passing. Coach these support movements and do not always concentrate on the player making the pass.

If the coach is not able to notice the entire passing pattern move as the server contacts the ball for the beginning of play, the pattern is not reading properly, if at all. When the team does not read, it will be unsuccessful and prone to being aced. Have the passers study the server's contact and move on the information.

**Movement** is the primary communicator in a passing pattern.

**Verbal** cues are only reinforcers and communicators in gray areas. Be careful that the verbal communications in passing are not distracting. Pay attention to the tone, conversation and timing of the talk. Do not communicate at the time of contact.

Regardless of what verbal cues a player receives, each individual is responsible to make his or her own decisions.

When training, have the passer look at the **target** area (setter) after passing. This puts a visual lock on the target and concentrates attention to that point.

If the setter can give a visual cue to the passers, the passing will be more successful. It is difficult to be accurate when the target is invisible. Try to get the setter to the target area prior to the passer's contact. Posture and position of the setter can change the passing result.

Give better, more aggressive passers more of the areas to cover on passes.

## **Team Passing**

- Players need to be aware of their position on the court.
- Passers and team players need to be aware of the weaknesses of both the court positioning and individual limitations.
- Make a visual check to the sidelines just prior to the whistle.
- Assume a passing posture.
- Study the server's contact with the ball.
- Make a movement of at least one step in the direction of the serve.
- Continue to pursue a ball until you either pass the ball or you make a decision to not pass the ball.



Commit your body and your attention and concentration to the pass. A passer's attention is more important than the body commitment since it is possible to pass to the target without perfect alignment. If the player is watching his or her own technique too much, the player often loses focus on the contact. Actually, the player's body can become a distraction. When the player is out of position,

the negative feeling of that error interrupts the players concentration of the ball.

If the player makes a decision not to pass the ball, it is important to make a **stopping** movement. This stop is a form of communication to the whole passing pattern. This stopping movement must not be distracting.

The most common error in team passing occurs because one or more players do not make a **decision and commitment** whether to pass or not to pass the ball. Coaches do not give the players enough opportunity to practice making that decision. Part of that commitment to decide to pass the ball occurs as the players look at the last ten feet of the flight of the ball

The best passers do the best job of tracking the ball. Two critical points of **eye fixation** on the ball are at the start and finish. Focus to a higher degree at the point of contact with the server and in the last, ten feet prior to passing.

Passers should move to the ball with the head steady. A **steady head** will give the player better eye contact with the ball. Continue to hold the head steady as the contact is made with the ball. Passers should assume a posture that moves the eyes closer to the bumping surface. It is difficult to track the ball below eye level

Passing **posture** with the eyes closer to the arms minimizes the distance between eye level and the contact position with the ball. Hold the hands and passing contact area within the peripheral vision of the passer's vision. The visual relationship between the ball and the arms will aid in the passer's hand-eye coordination.

There are many good defensive teams, many ranked in the top 20 in the NCAA, which do not necessarily have winning records. Since digging the ball is not necessarily correlated with winning, it perhaps deserves a closer look.

Many of the good defensive teams that are not winning do not convert the dig to offense. The object of any dig is to ultimately improve the team's position in the rally. This can only be done by getting a good swing at the ball on the third hit.

If your team is digging the ball but not winning rallies, or games, consider these points.

The defense is not focused on the target. Try to encourage target consciousness during the training. Giving result oriented experiences in practice will help. Get the team to focus on the setter. Setters can get the team's attention by verbalizing, directing traffic and body posture.

The first thing that will help to organize the rally is to **make the team aware of the setter as the target**. If the setter can verbally and visually cue his/her teammates, the ball will go to the target more regularly.

Have the setter call the name of the player who is going to play the ball. Keep the voice conversational and be careful that the timing of a vocalization is not distracting to the defender. After calling the name, give directions, "Alice, right here!"

The setter should be aware of the defensive release cue. When the setter is not being hit at, the setter is to release to the target area. On the way to the target and once within the target, the setter makes a physical position which is open, as large as possible, and not critical. Setters should not cower or creep in place, nor should they set up too close to the net.

Many teams that have an identity of being scrappy actually enjoy having their setter diving all over the gym because it adds to the movement and energy of being scrappy. In the beginning stages, scrappy teams resist calmness, i.e., digging the ball to the target.

To improve upon the phase between the dig and the spike, **get hitters to make themselves available** in the rally. The hitters should be aware of their responsibility to be available as hitters at all times during the rally. This can be accomplished by body posture and positioning. It also must be communicated. Any time the setter is not setting from the target zone, the hitter should in some way make the setter know of the hitter 's availability.

**Setters need to deliver** the ball from the dig to the hitters. Many times when a team has a pattern of being unorganized in the rally, the setter is frequently making saves. When too many saves become somewhat of a pattern, the setter just tries to get the ball "up." The setter should incorporate an attitude that every played ball is a set ball.

Setters should attempt to deliver a ball that allow the hitters a good opportunity to make a good swing.

Give the setter **priorities**. A top priority might be to give the best possible set. Another less important priority might be to give the best set to the possible hitter.

Long rallies belong to teams which have hitters who can swing hard at the ball without being err or prone. Many teams which may

be aggressive defensively, tip or freeball as the rally extends. Try to train a team which is aggressive in all phases of the game.

Defense is a reaction skill therefore trained responses are paramount. Individual, group and team responses to stimuli determine success. Defense is relentless. Defense is eager. Defense is joyful in effort. Defense molds the shape and character of a team.



**Goals:**

1. Keep the ball in play.
2. Get a good swing at the ball.
3. Score a point or side-out.



Begin by training the team to perform good, reliable standing defense. This includes dig/block in body line and rotational dig/block. A team should have a high success rate of scoring points, at least three, when the opponent hits to a standing defense. This is what we prefer to happen and this is what containment tries to accomplish.

Floor defense and pursuit defense are more advanced skills and the success rate of scoring points from these two types of skills are well below 50 percent.

## **Defensive Theory - Containment**

Containment is controlling the opponent's response and efforts in a match. Of course, complete control is not the key. Control of the tendencies or patterns of a match make a team successful. Focus on patterns or tendencies which are effecting the outcome of the match.

Containment is accomplished by these areas: posture and skill; positioning and responsibility; reading and cueing; refusal to fail.

**Posture and Skill.** Alignment of the striking surface creates ball control. When coaching this factor, keep in mind that follow-through is the single biggest factor that effects the contact point.

**Positioning and Responsibility.** Based on what commonly happens and what the strengths and weaknesses of the team and its individuals are.

**Reading and Cueing.** This is a factor that can be taught. As cues are identified and the appropriate responses become a trained

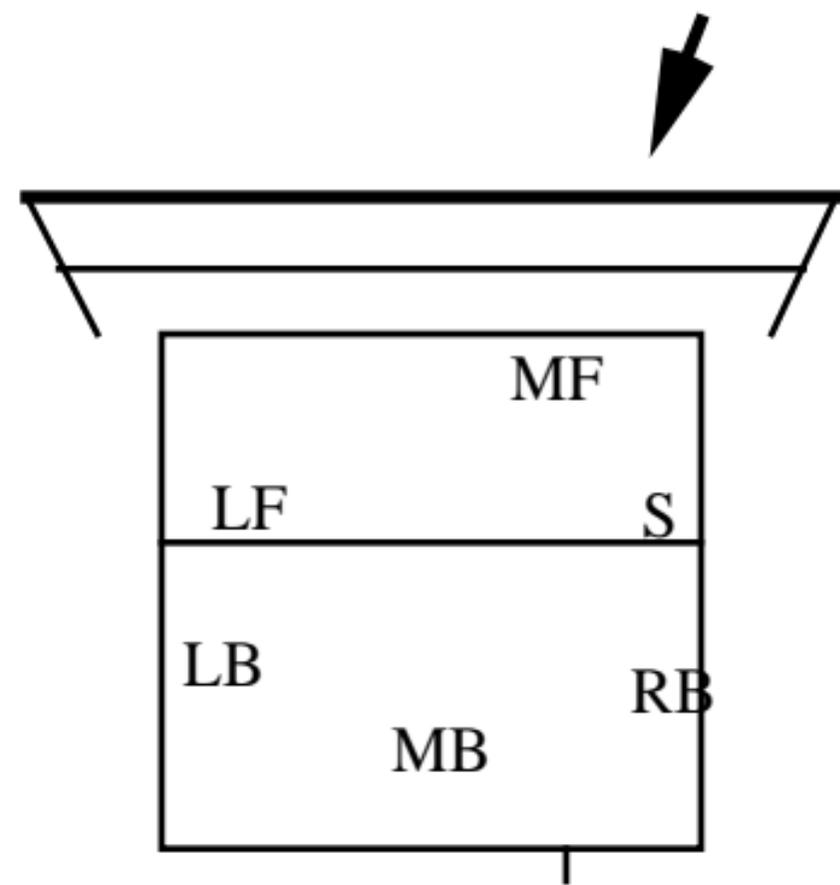
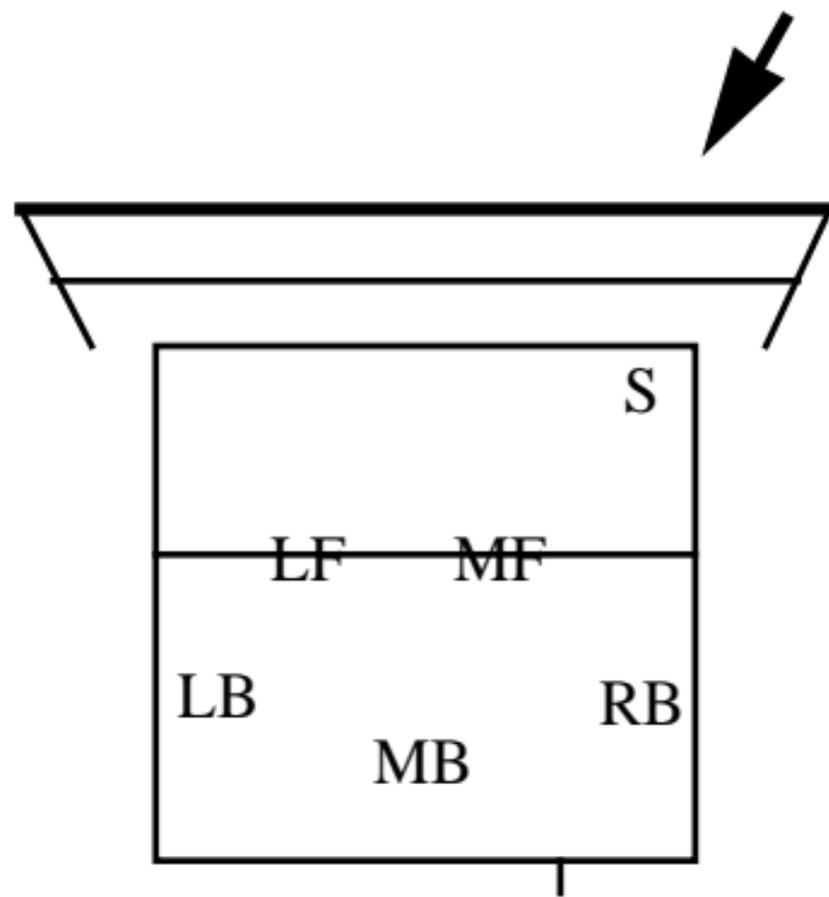
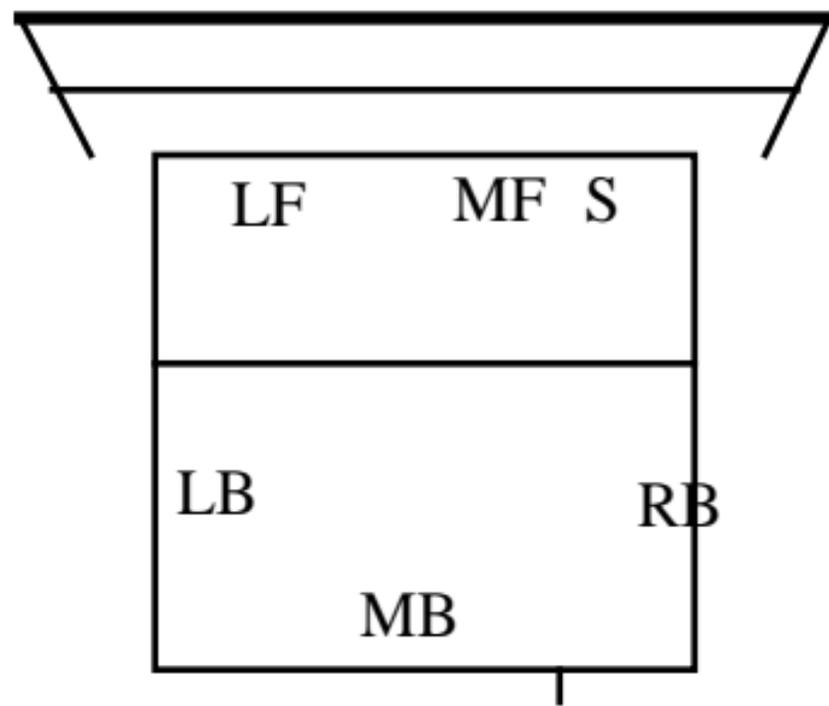
response, the team is seldom surprised and maintains a good rhythm, pace and flow.

Failure. Defense is a reaction skill and therefore experiences a great deal of failure. It is necessary to identify what types of failure are alright to experience. What should happen in defense is not as important as what does happen. The attitude of a defense is more important than its success. The defense needs to develop a culture that says, "We have a Refusal to Fail."

## **Perimeter Defense**

The middle blocker has the option to block. At low and intermediate levels, this person who opts to block is probably making themselves a target for the hitter. At the lower levels, it is best not to block, but rather pull off the block and get in position to handle all of the balls that hit the tape and dribble over the net. If you have an exceptional blocker, then he/she should be allowed to block.

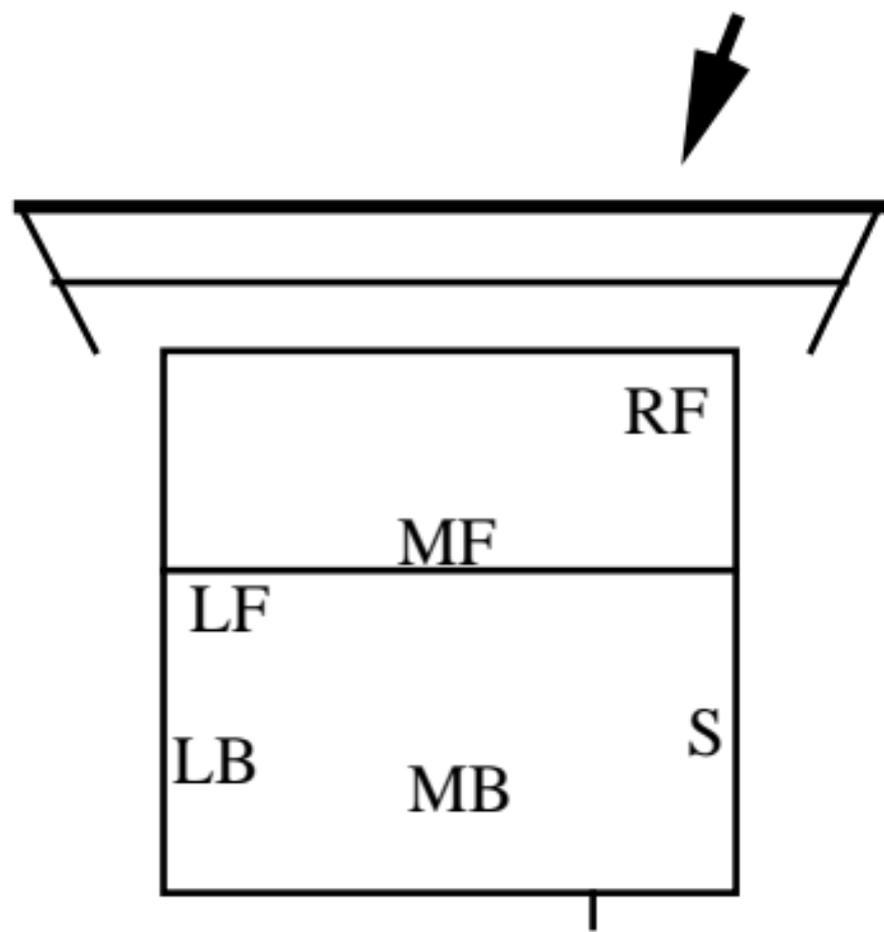
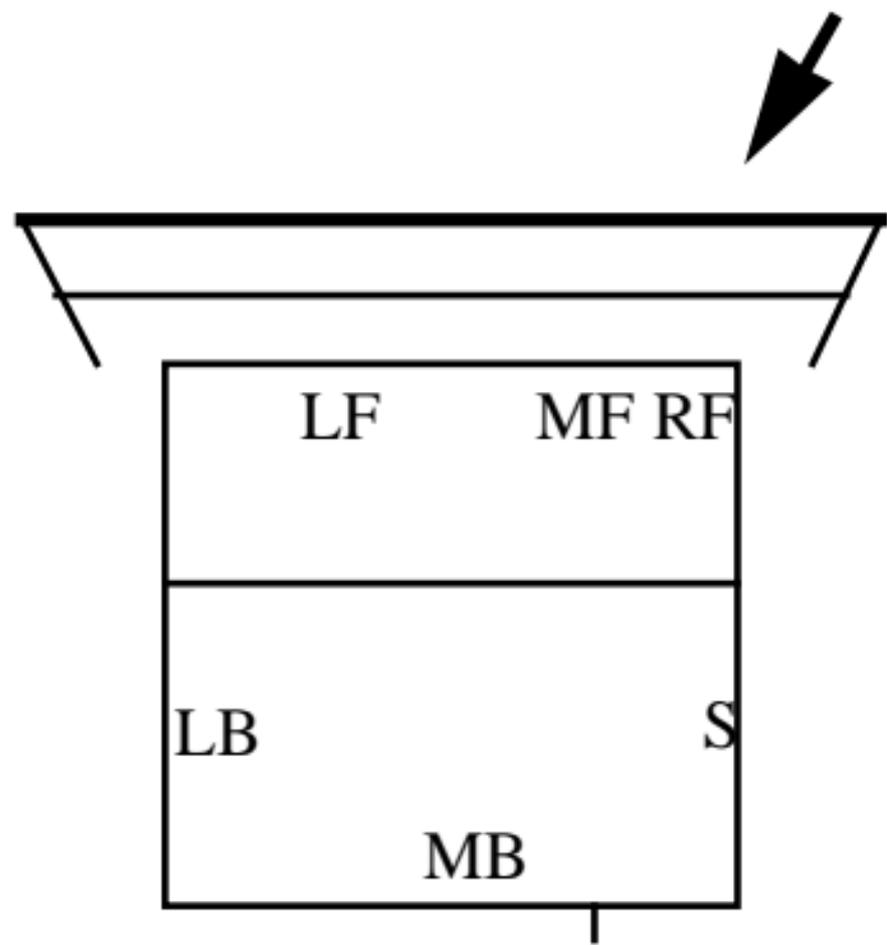
At higher levels, there should be a blocker in the middle in position ready to block. The player must determine the threat of the hitter and his/her own ability to block the ball. If the attacker is not a force to contend with, the team is better off playing floor defense rather than having the chances of the blocker getting used.



The Setter stays at the net if the Middle Blocker does not block. The setter pulls back to the three-meter line if the middle person blocks.

Some teams give the right front the option to block. This might be dependent on who is the better blocker. Either way is acceptable. Whatever fits your personnel best is the way to go.

The left back and right back should stay near their sidelines, but the middle back should step up about one meter into the court. Most of the balls hit from off of the net will have top-spin that brings them down into the middle of your court.



## **Positioning for Down Ball, Middle Attack Perimeter Defense**

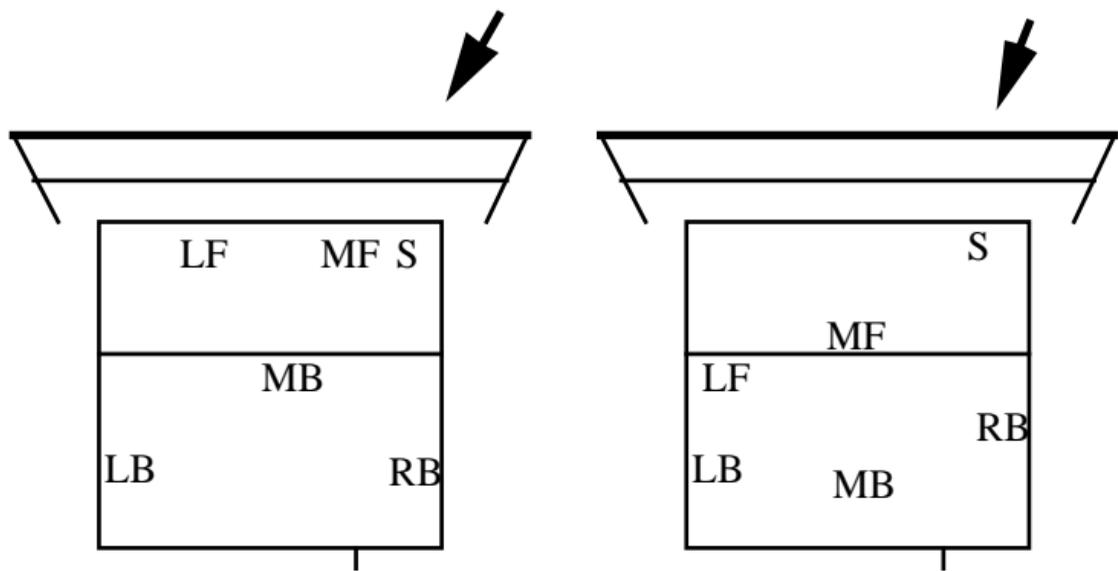
In this situation, the middle blocker again has the option to block. If the middle blocker decides not to block, he/she should back off the net a few feet and stay low. Do not fall back to the 3-meter line, so as not to interfere with the middle back's position.

## **Down block positioning when the setter is in the front row Man-up Defense**

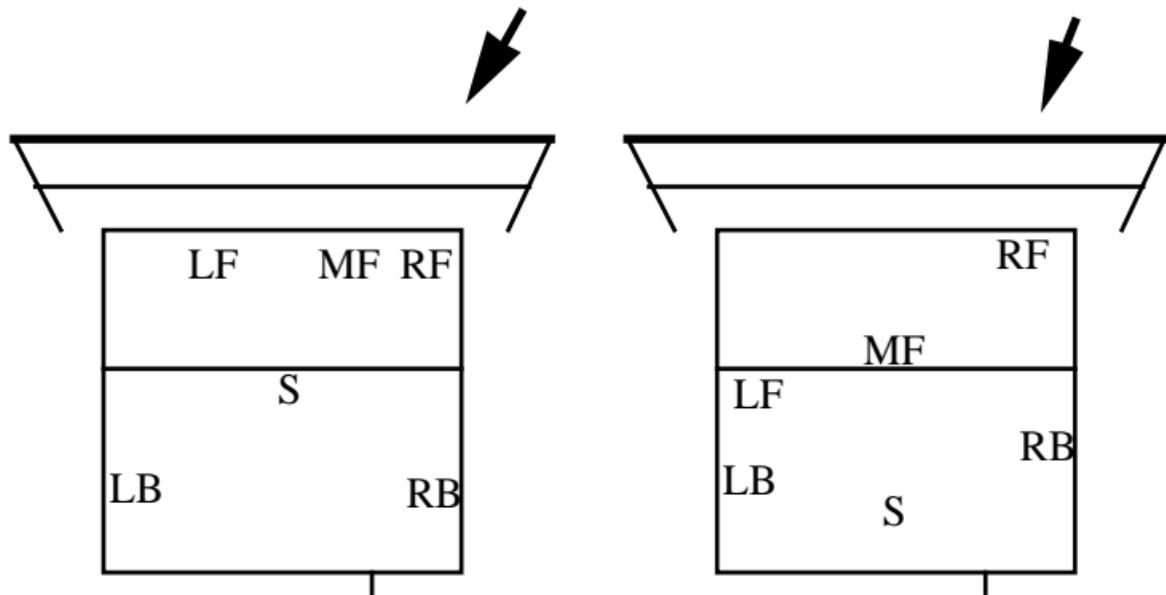
If the middle blocker stays at the net then the setter drops off, and vice versa, just as in the perimeter defense. The player who is playing the man-up position should drop back deeper into the middle back position. See Figures 60 and 61 on the next page.

## **Down block positioning when the setter is in the back row Man-up Defense**

The positioning is the same as the above diagrams. When the attack is coming from the middle, the down ball positioning is still the same.



Man-up defense with a right side attack with the setter in the front row. A double-block is used on the left. On the right side the setter is in the front row. A single block is used and the MF player backs off the net.



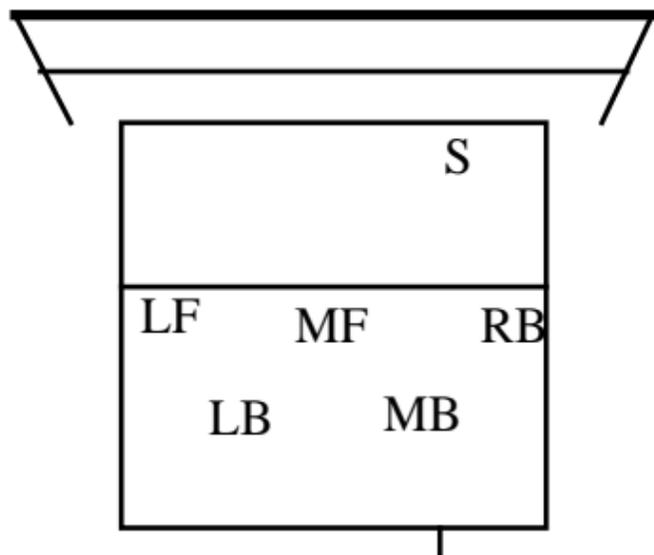
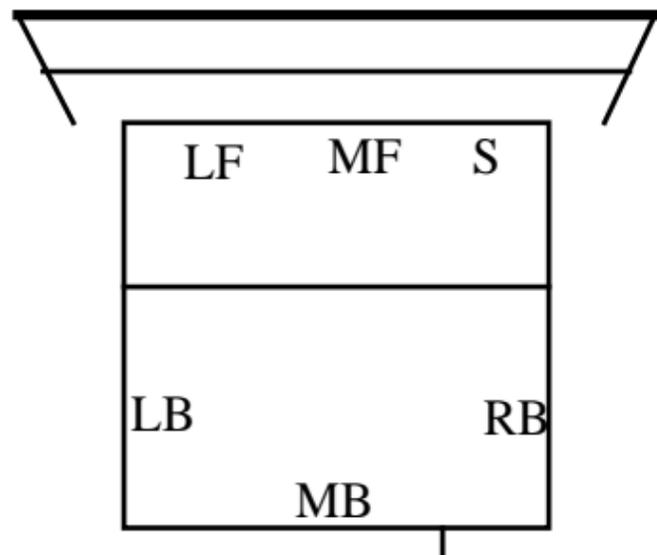
Man-up defense with a right side attack. Setter is in the back row. Left image show a double-block, the right images shows a single block and the MF backs off the net.

## **Free Ball Positioning when the setter is in the front row**

### **4-2, 5-1 systems, Perimeter defense**

It seems at times that the term free ball is a misnomer. When your team starts running around in a panic whenever someone yells, "Free ball!" you begin to wonder if we should develop a new term. Many times the easiest play turns out to be a disaster because everyone relaxes too much.

When the setter is at the net, they stay there when a free ball comes over the net. The middle front backs off to the three-meter line, and the other players move into a five-man receive pattern. The middle back shifts to the right and the right back move up the right side line.



Free ball starting positions with middle back, perimeter defense and front row-setter.

## **Free ball positioning when the setter is in the back row**

### **5-1, 6-0 systems, Perimeter defense**

When the setter is at the right back position, the setter releases and penetrates toward the net on a free ball. The middle back player shifts to cover the right side, just vacated by the setter. The left back moves into the court away from the left sideline. The front row players back away from the net to the three-meter line. Again, the five-man serve receive pattern is formed on the "Free Ball."

See Figures on the next page.

## **Free Ball positioning when the setter is in the front row**

### **4-2, 5-1 systems. Man-up defense**

The setter stays at the net and the middle front and left front back off to the three-meter line. The person in the man-up position backs off to the right back, the right back moves up the side line, the Left Back comes off the left-side line about one meter. The players form a five-man serve/ receive pattern.

## **Free ball positioning when the setter is on the back row**

### **5-1, 6-0 systems, Man-up defense**

Often, teams will put the setter in the man-up position, thereby making it easier for the setter to penetrate to the net. In this case, the setter simply moves to the net from the three-meter line. The front row players back off to the three-meter line. The left back and right back move off of the side lines into the court.

If the setter is playing right back, deep, and another player is in the man-up position, the transition is a bit more difficult. In practice, the team can work well together. The setter releases and penetrates to the net. The man-up player drops back to the right back, The left back moves into the court away from the left side line, and the front row player backs off to the three-meter line.

# Notes on Attacking

*Being able to hit quick sets* is especially contingent upon the position of the arm as it moves to the striking position from the movement of the jump to the swing. The arm must go directly to a striking position. This striking position will allow the arm to move through the stretch reflex with the maximum efficiency. The beauty of the following series of drills is their application to both normal spiking fundamentals and the quick attack. The same drill can be used with spiking fundamentals.

First, find the player's striking position. The **striking position** is the point within a spiking action where the movement of the arm swing is only forward. To find this position, have the player stand on a chair at the net. The coach tosses the ball underhand at a position inside the hip and shoulder of the player. The player tries to hit the ball on the way up.

The coach tosses the ball up to the hitter. The player on the chair hits the ball to the ground. Observe the elbow to see if it

always moves through the same zone. If not, more movement exercises and repetitions without the ball are necessary. An intermediate step to hitting the toss would be hitting a stationary object such as a medicine ball. Be sure to ensure technique.

The elbow controls the arm swing. If the elbow is consistent and always moving through the stretch reflex position, the hitte will be more accurate.

The coach should not throw the ball until the striking arm is in position. Once the arm is stationary, the coach can toss the ball upwards. The coach releases the ball at a lower position than the contact with the ball and player.

Toss the ball so that it continues to travel and climb approximately 10 to 15 feet above the player 's head, if the swing misses the ball. Players will swing and miss the ball especially in the beginning. Misses will not occur as frequently after the striking position is found.

With the athlete standing on the chair or platform near the net, have the the player bring the arms into the striking position keeping the hands in close to the front of the torso. Practice moving the striking hand directly to the striking position.

Coaches should watch for any movement in the arm swing other than forward. Toss the ball with more acceleration after the arm is stationary. Let the athlete use the other arm in whatever way seems natural.

A progression to this drill has the coach tossing the ball past the spiker. Have the spiker hit the ball as it is traveling upward at faster speeds. If the spiker misses the ball, it should travel 10 to 15 feet past the spiker toward the ceiling.

Another step is to have the tosser become a setter. Toss the ball back to yourself and then set it to the player on the chair or platform.

The next progression removes the chair or platform. Have the player stand on the floor standing at the net with the arm in striking position. Have the player hit the ball over the net from a toss. Keep the striking arm's elbow high. Do not let the elbow drop before, during nor after the drill. Athletes should begin to use the left arm for balance, coordination, and jump. The athlete will begin to do this without much prompting. The player will jump to hit the ball in this drill from the beginning. Allow standing jumps only, no steps or approaches.

## **Spiking with Movement - Two Ball Series**

Start with the player still in a standing position near the net. Perform this drill with standing jumps and a small step or small hops. Coaching the feet is not the emphasis. The athlete is to carry the attack arm in the striking position during the entire sequence. The coach can prompt the play by standing slightly behind the player's hitting arm and touching the elbow as it begins to drop. As the movement becomes more demanding, the arm will move around more. The elbow will want to drop slightly as the upper body is used in jumping.

Toss the first ball in position, the second ball to the left, right front, or back. Two balls are sufficient in the beginning. As the player gains control of his/her striking position, more balls and more demanding movement can ensue and the arm can be carried more loosely.

## **Training Hitters - Problem Solving**

A slow arm swing can come from the inability of the player to get the arm into the proper position to initiate the swing. Train the movement with repetitions for nerve pathway conditioning.

Start the movement training from the striking position. Use elastic or rubber medicine balls. This trains the movement and increases flexibility and utilizes the stretch reflex

Start the training from a gravity position. Move only forward and upward.

Utilize the full jumping arm swing, full, straight, relaxed arm swing backward and into the ground. Draw arms in close to the mid-line of the body on the upswing.

The straight, full-forward arm swing is an advanced skill and to be used only when the player is able to repeatedly attain the proper striking position. This can be determined by watching the elbow. Does the elbow move through the stretch reflex position

Jump or stand facing a padded wall. This will ensure the tight movement of the arms on the upswing.

Training the arm swing with quick hitters can continue at the net. Have a tosser and a spiker in the striking position. The tosser tosses the ball and the spiker hit it over the net using a jump without an approach. The toss should go no higher than the hitter can reach, which is usually up to two feet above the net.

The next step is a repeat, but the hitter's arms start in the gravity or relaxed position, not in the striking position.

Advance to the next task by having the hitter start in the flamingo position, standing on one foot. Swing the back foot toward the net and bound on both feet for the jump at the net for the spike. The tosser releases the ball upwards just as the hitter places both feet on the ground prior to the jump.

Later the drill can be continued but have the hitter jump before the tosser releases the ball. The last progression of the drill has the tosser becoming a setter. Have the setter toss him/herself the ball and then set the hitter for a spike.

Training quick hitters often means running the quick hitters in drills of less than perfect passes. Have players practice by standing on a chair or platform near the net. Have the setter toss the ball to him/herself and then set the ball to the hitter. Be sure to have the highest point of the flight of the ball be the same point where the hitter contacts the ball. The hitter should hold the arms in the striking position before the set is made. As the drill continues, the setter moves across the floor to different locations around the stationary hitter. The hitter spikes the ball as the sets come from different angles.

To increase the drill, have a coach toss the ball to the setter . The setter is moved to different angles, distances and positions.

Another option is to remove the chair or platform and have the hitter stand on the floor . Start in striking position, then move the arms to a relaxed gravity position. The setter tosses the ball to him/herself. The setter puts the ball to the hitter who jumps and spikes over the net. Later the hitter can start in the flamingo position. Conclude the progression by having the coach toss the balls to the setter.

## Offensive Notes

Offense is setter controlled - or rather setter limited. The setter that has the ball in front of the body makes it easier to set the ball forward. The closer the ball gets the easier it is to set it backwards. Coaches should coach against limitations in forward, direction and backwards setting. The vertical component is either behind or below. If the player releases the ball below he/she is good at rather vertical ball trajectory. If he/she is behind the trajectory is lower.

Movement characteristics of the offense have approach patterns. The attack patterns are dependent on whether the players are good at abducting or adducting his/her arms.

Every offense has movement characteristics and typical approach patterns. These lanes should be built with regard to the available players and their talents.

The outside/in attack on the left side is easier than on the right side.

Disappear-reappear attack is difficult for the blocker to see from what position the attacker is coming.

Back-row players do not come on top of other players.

It was common for the USA plays in the early '90s to prefer a

straight-line approach rather than circular approach. The farther the ball is from the setter the faster the arm swing of the attack. If you jump set and release while you are descending, the ball may be still in the air for some time. This ball is easy to hit.

### **Step approach**

The four-step approach has two advantages. The four-step approach allows for maximum acceleration. It has been shown that there is a high correlation between power and jumping in a four-step attack. Every time a foot hits the ground it is counted as a step. The four-step approach's other advantage is that it is easy to modify or adjust the approach. In the middle of the court, there are often three-step approaches, but the four-step is used otherwise.

## **Left vs. Right side of the court**

In most plays the combination and original plays occurred on the right side of the court. Today it is not important if the combination occurs in the left or right side of the court. Doug Beal feels it is more important to have the players flowing. The players will be better if moving from left to right or right to left. A directional flow is important.

Range of combination plays with three characteristics are the spread, cross and inside. The spread or wide/non-crossing type of attack is the first priority. The crossing plays are the second priority. This approach pattern has a physical crossing of players close to the net. Crossing plays are fairly easy to block if you use a read block system. The inside play, also called the wide cross is the third priority. The players cross near the three-meter line. The USSR has been dominant with this type of play.

If a team does not use any of these patterns, the set might be high on the edge of the net, to the safety player. It is important that the attacker can adjust, so the setter should not concern him/herself too much about where the ball is placed.

## **Different types of attackers:**

**QH** = quick hitter, 1st tempo

**PSH** = play-set hitter, 2nd tempo

**SH** = swing hitter, 2, 5-3rd tempo

**BR** = back-row hitter, 3-3, 5th tempo

**RH** = release hitter, 4th tempo

## **Parallel Approach**

The recovery is parallel to the net. Recovery perpendicular to the net is too limited. The more perpendicular, the more you're in the prime field of sight for the blocker. The USA team likes the inside/out parallel to the net. The blocker has to move, or is likely to do so, in a mirror of the attacker. This makes it difficult for the blocker, the aim of the attack.

## **Two Quick Hitters**

In order to make two quick hitters consistent in their decisions, one should be on one side of the setter, one to the left of the other. They should not mix. Rules have to be made if you use this system.

Call system: QH 1st, PSH 2nd and SH 3rd. BR on call. But it may be other ways.

If you play against a team that is stack-blocking, you have to be able to make your attackers change direction!

## **Position of Feet**

Left foot contact is slightly past the setter. This is called the break step. When the setter contacts the ball, the left foot is set to the ground. The PSH must watch the flight of the ball in order to do this. The distance from the net is a little bit in front of the 3-meter line. On the straight line approach, the attacker sets off a bit from the net and floats parallel to the net a distance of up to two meter away. In this way, the ball may be hit in several positions.

Ralph Hippolyte has found that inside drifts are not a problem for women. The drift travels from left to right. The other direction is more difficult

## **Middle Attack**

Three tempos are clearly defined. They are: quick, medium, slow.

In the quick attack, the attacker has to have left the ground when the setter hits the ball. The hitter must keep primary concentration on the ball, not the setter.

In the medium, the ball and the attacker are going up together. The medium tempo middle attack is quite effective, but a really

good blocker will have a good chance against this spike. The setter and attacker are equal in a medium tempo middle attack.

In the slow-middle attack, the ball leaves the hands before the attacker leaves the ground. If the block is good, the attacking team is in trouble. A team should always try for the quick tempo. If you fail, you still have to jump. The attackers have to be trained to go as fast as possible, and must not stop. Always complete approach and jump.

## **Notes on Systems and Names**

Every team needs common terminology and a common communication system.

### **Define the systems**

1. Two attackers high-outside system
2. Two attackers high variation system
3. Three attacker system
4. Quick attack options
5. Combination plays
6. Back row system

### **Transition to offense:**

1. From serve reception
2. From “Free Ball” position
3. From “no block” position
4. From defense behind block

One basic numbering system for communication between the Setter and Spiker has the first numbers according to the position of the ball along the net. The second number describes the height and the speed of the set of the ball.

These numbers are the front row attack zones. Each zone is one meter wide beginning at the left sideline. The center of the court divides zone five. The Setter normally positions near the division of zone six and seven. This figure is one of the most basic in all of volleyball and is a critical key to understanding systems. For new players to the sport, these zones should be one of the earliest lessons.

### **The second number describes the set.**

0 = normal high ball, four to six meters above the net

1 = 30 cm. above the net

2 = 60 cm. above the net

3 = 1 meter above the net, etc.

9 = an extremely high set, six or more meters above the net



### **Multiple Attack System**

Develop a cumulative effect by continually initiating the patterns the same way every time. A general scenario of the attack pattern will force the blockers to pinch inside due to the attacker's inside moves. Then get the set to the outside of the end blockers. This will force the blockers to reach away from the court to block the ball.

A secondary scenario or goal is to split two blockers to allow the Playset Hitter to go one-on-one with the blocker.

Have all the attackers run their patterns all the time.

Continuous movement in the Playset roles is essential to developing the cumulative effect.

Each attack approach requires specific footwork and attack angles. Generally the attacks are three or four steps and end on the left foot. Individual differences are possible if the desired effect is attained.

The setter jump-sets every ball. The offense should be designed for this. The passing is designed for the jump-sets. Pass the ball to the top tape of the net.

It is the attacker's responsibility to establish the correct positional and timing relationship with the setter. It is the setter's responsibility to establish the same, correct position each time. The players must understand and be able to execute effectively the individual and team offensive tactics.

There are an infinite number of combination plays

.....

### **Combination Plays:**

Crossing patterns, usually right to left movement

Reverse plays, usually left to right movement

Double quick plays, two or more quick spikers

Left side plays

Right side plays

Center plays

.....

All successful combination plays involve coordination between the serve receiver who must accurately pass the ball to the setter target. The setter must control the rhythm and timing of the release of the ball and select the spiker most likely to score. The spiker must watch the ball as it is in the air to the setter and the other spiker for accurate timing. The spiker must time their approach to correctly coincide with the speed of the pass, the location of the pass, the setters' contact of the ball and the approach of the other spikers.

## **Communication**

Put the two numbers together. The first number indicates the position along the net where the ball will land. The second number indicates the height of the set.

## **Three Attacker System**

The setter establishes his position in between zone six and seven on the net. The spikers move positions relative to the setter. The usual line up includes one ace spiker, one quick spiker and one all-around spiker.

The setter penetrates to the net from the back row and can use all three spikers. The spikers will change positions as necessary to specialize and confuse the block.

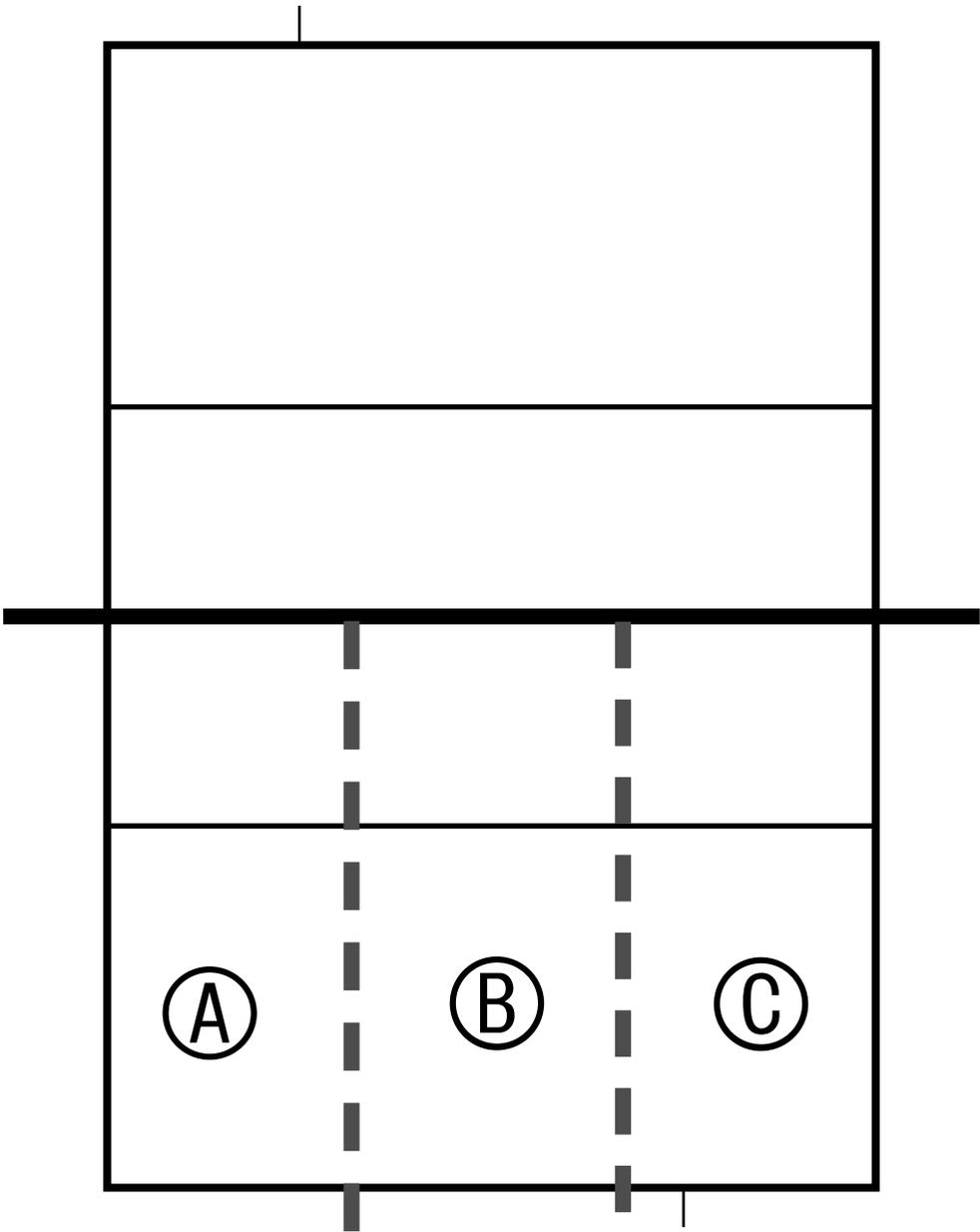
The setter (S) moves from the back row to the front row to make the plays. Three options are available. The sets are the two digit numbers over the net. The curved arrows over the net represent the angle and path of the ball headed to the spiker.

## **Back Row Attack**

In the back row, it is difficult to pinpoint the positions so four zones are preferred instead of the nine zones as used in the front row. The back row attack can be behind the quick spiker, away from the two front court spikers, or in the slot between the two spikers.

Back-row attacks use a four zone communication system, A, B, C, D. A back row spiker, BR, can follow a quick hitter, Q. A back row spiker can go to the other side of the court, either far right or far left. This can keep the blockers at bay or be a surprise to the defense.

In the fifth play illustrated below, the back row spiker moves to the middle of the court for the attack. The front-row players make their motion out to the sides of the court making an opening.



Backrow Zones

## Transition Offense Considerations

Change to offense from serve / receive or defensive maneuvers.

Counter attack coordination.

Positional reorganization.

Quick spiker role: get up quick, threaten on any good pass, fast approach, change positions.

Setter priorities: who sets, the best choices for back row setters, or hitters as setters.

Trick plays when a spiker sets or hits on the second pass (free ball situations).

Reorganization of attack and player movement.



Transition categories are #1, a good pass with complete offensive possibilities and #2, limited possibilities with rules of adjustment in effect.



## **Transition goals**

1. Threaten with maximum offense potential.
2. Put ball into play as quickly as possible. Take advantage of disorganization on the other side of the net as they change from offense to defense and vice versa.
3. Attempt no switches until ball is hit by the opponents.
4. Switches should be for offensive strength, movement.
5. Setter must verbally direct transition.
6. Transition is usually a point scoring opportunity. Be risky.

Transition Offenses - In bad pass situations, the setter must search for the widest angle and the best available spiker. In many times, a non-setter must help in this situation.

## Combination Play Offenses - Multiple attacks

The "51X" series gives four options to the play set spiker .

The "31 spread" series splits the center and the left blockers.

The "71 Reverse" series isolates the left side blocker .

The "31X" series isolates the right side blocker .



Called the "51X," this series of play options gives four options to the play set spiker who is playing in the right front position. First comes the Quick hitter in the middle front. Second is the Play Set Spiker. Third is the Release hitter (LF).



The "31 Spread" series splits the center and the left blockers. The Quick hitter is the first attacker moving in the middle to a 31 set. The Play Set spiker is at the LF position and is second. The Release Spiker is the third.

The “71 Reverse” series isolates the left side blocker. The Quick hitter is first, but this time on the right side front moving on a 71 set. The Play Set spiker is in the middle front position.



The “31X” series isolates the right side blocker. The Quick Hitter is first from the left-front position. The Play Set player is second from the middle. Third is the Release player on the right side.

## **Second Ball Attack**

In a second ball attack the ball goes over the net directly on the second contact. The front row spiker gets the back-row pass on the second contact and may either hit directly or jump-set to a teammate.

The ball comes over the net to the back-row player (D) and is passed to the left front player. The LF player moves away from the net off the block and then to the net to make the attack on the second hit.

The ball comes over the net, perhaps in a “free-ball” situation to the MF player. The MF passes to the LF and then moves to the

LF for an optional and possible third hit or for coverage.

This set play could be used on a serve/receive situation. This play raises the question, "Why don't we pass left?"

## **Playing the "Free Ball"**

### **Free Ball Positions**

1. Keep players away from the sidelines.
2. Encourage back row to play the "free ball"
3. Back row players cover for the setter.
4. Run normal serve receive offense
5. Positions are close enough to the net to not allow short ball to drop to the floor .
6. Players adjust the coverage depth to receive the ball coming across the net according to the point of origin on the other side.
7. Setter immediately releases from defense position to set.

With a back row setter, form a "W" receive pattern. With a front row setter, form a "W", and the setter goes to the normal offensive position. The front row setter switches to the center-front.

Figures show free ball coverage with the setter in the back-row and with the setter in the front-row.

## **Spiker Coverage**

Direction of spike and placement of block will determine much of spike coverage. Watch direction of blockers' hands and shoulders, approach of spiker and direction of attack. Spiker coverage begins with the attack and the block. Players need to be aware of their responsibilities for coverage as well as the play development.

## **Two Spiker System: Outside high sets**

Setter must always follow the set. Everyone must cover. Try for two rings of cover; one close, one deep.

Shows the spiker coverage on a high-outside set. LF is making the spike. Shows the coverage for a RF attack. Shows the coverage with the MF player.

## **Attack Coverage**

Players on the attack side should expect every all to blocked. Coverage is best in simple of fenses and poorest in more complex ones. The setter is always the key in spiker coverage. All the players must learn to read the spiker and blockers. Coverage read elements are listed below.

### **Coverage Read**

1. The speed of attack
2. Angle of blockers' hands
3. Height of blockers
4. Depth of blockers
5. Angle of attack

The counter attack occurs from a cover position. The setter directs the play. Any player may set. The Quick Attacker must create movement. All the spikers must retreat from the net.

Shows center attack coverage on a two-spiker system. The quick hitter spikes a 51 set and faces the blockers on the other side of the net. The MB defensive player moves up behind the quick hitter.

Shows a 10 set to the LF player against a blocker . The Quick hitter moves to the net for the approach and then heads to the area under the block. The Setter makes the set and then moves close to the action but slightly away from the net. This is a three spiker system of coverage.

### **Three Spiker System of Coverage**

On quick left-side, the Quick Spiker lands from the fake and turns to the left. The Setter moves behind the Quick Spiker to middle position. The back row players fill positions. Coverage is weak in the deepest zones.

On a three spiker system with a quick center spike, the Setter and front row can help with coverage. The two back-row players get close cover. The Quick Hitter has no time. Good deep coverage.

The figures below show the movement for the attack and then the spiker coverage.

# Notes on Blocking

*Begin by teaching* the players solid Standing Jump blocking skills. This includes squat jumping skills with minimum arm movement, and hand form and movement along the plane of the net.

The goal in this phase of teaching is to get the most efficient skill. This allows a movement which has the most chance for movement and timing efficiency. The key to accomplishing this is to keep in mind: Minimum distance = Minimum Time. Note: this is because acceleration is not the primary factor.



## **Standing before the jump**

Body posture

Weight shift

Use of gravity and acceleration

## **Blocking technique**

Hand form

Body posture

Minimum distance

Outside hand penetrates farther

Inside hand follows/ form

## **Floating**

A floating block is not so much a problem for the defense behind it, as the fact that the area of the court that is being protected is changing. This can be corrected by Body Floats. In body floats the body floats around stationary hands. The hands do not float

## **Hand Hint**

The higher the hands are held to the contact point throughout the blocking movement, the shorter the time required to perform the skill. This gives the blocker a distinct advantage in reading predictors, and gives the hitter the latest possible ability to do the same. Yea! Also, more time allows for more pursuit, and more standing blocks. Big Yea!

## Pursuit

Pursuit blocking occurs when a player cannot position themselves in a standing position prior to jumping for the block.



- Lateral jump,
- Lateral slide,
- Free form, with body control,
- Side step,
- Cross over.



The hitter has some intentions, and the blockers should try to read what is on the hitter's mind. These factors should be watched to assist the blockers in setting better blocks:



### **Notes for Better Blocking**

Hitter's approach angle; Height of contact; Acceleration of arm swing; Timing of arm swing; Depth of set; Width of set, Speed of set, Preference and tendencies



Setting the block is a fundamental skill. Move both feet simultaneously. When one hitter is against one blocker, the blocker tries to make the hitter change the spike strategy. Make the hitter alter his or her intention. To block the spiker's angle, set the blocker's center line of body on the hitting shoulder. To block line, blocker's inside hand is on the ball. To force the line, move inside the contact point as far as the hitter is left with only a straight line.

Down block positioning when the setter is in the front row.

## **Notes on Blocking Systems**

There are many systems for blocking. Tactically, coaches have to choose the system that fits their personality and the opponent.



### **Systems of Blocking**

Read / React

Read / Commit

Read / Switch

Man to Man

Stack Series

The **Read/React** system is the most basic and primary system. **Read/Commit** is the second system. **Read/Switch** is a very poor third system. The Read/Switch is a choice and a possibility.

The Read/React system is described more and more these days, but not so well. To understand this blocking system, we have to realize that it is a system.

A system means that every player has a component role to play. Every player must be viewing the same cues to get the same reaction. If the players do not read the same cues, then they can not get the same reaction. If the players are looking at different people, you are going to get different reactions. Some players can not be looking at the passers, while some players are looking at the attackers, while others are looking at the setter. The system is based on visually looking at the same cues. This is an important element for the system.

**Logical basis for a Read System of Blocking:**

Statistics show that Blocking is difficult

Blocking is difficult statistically. For example, let's start with serving. A coach can say to a server, "You should get the ball in the court 90 percent of the time." The 90-percent statistic is a number just picked for this example. But, the service number of 90 per cent is a reasonable assumption for a high-level team. If there is a 90-percent-rate of success in serving, what can be expected in blocking? There is a big difference statistically.

As another example, successful spiking should be 50 or 55 percent. Meanwhile, successful blocking should be around eight percent. The blocking component of the game, has a low percentage of success compared to other components with the possible exception of back-row defense. Blocking is difficult. Coaches have to understand that. Do not set up a blocking system and expect it to succeed to levels of 75, 85 or 90 per cent.

With blocking systems, the coach is hoping for statistical change in the opponent and some cumulative effect with the sum of the relationship with back-row defense.

We do not usually talk about the success or failure of blocking by itself. The numbers are too small. If you were to count the number of times an individual attempted a block during a typical set,

there might be more than 100 attempts with only three successful. There might be four, five or six successful attempts. But anyway, the percent is small. If we are trying to evaluate our system of blocking, we have to look on some other things.

Our players have to understand that you have great success as a blocker without blocking every ball. Or even blocking one-out-of-two, or one-out-of-three, or one-out-of-four, etc., etc.

### **More Blockers are Better**

More blockers are better, and that is not always the case in other parts of the game. Defensively, we might not want three people in the two-meter area, but in blocking, we probably do. Blockers equals hands. So we would like to have two or four or six hands in front of the ball.

In the U.S., for many years we were teaching that if the blocker was not in excellent position, then it was a waste of time to block. We thought that you should not block if you were not right in front of the hitter before the hitter gets to where he/she will hit the ball. This older thinking has two fallacies.

First, blockers do not always know when they are in the right

position. It is difficult to know if you are in position. The game happens too fast. The players take everything in at increasing rates and they get overloaded.

Second, players can block the ball when they are not in a good position. It is wrong to say that the attacker is never making a mistake. The attackers are making lots of mistakes, but if we do not block, we are not giving them the opportunity.

More blockers are better. We are looking for some small statistical change because of blocking that affects the opponents' offense. Blocking lets us look for some psychological, perhaps maybe real cumulative effect, that implies some change over time. If the spiker is always hitting the ball against four or six hands versus only two hands, or no hands, there is some cumulative effect over time. The blockers force the attacker to select a more difficult shot. The blockers ask the attacker to hit the ball at a little wider angle and to be aware of the first line of defense

Attackers make errors! If you think that the attackers make errors, it means a lot of things can happen. Blockers do not have to chase the ball. Blockers do not have to take away 100 per cent of the net. This means we will dig some balls. The attacker sets the ball

out of bounds sometimes. The setter and the attacker do not time things correctly some of the time. The attacker hits the net sometimes. Blockers make the setter deal with the cumulative effect.

### **Defend the Center**

Defend the Center. Actually, the term is not too accurate, so we would rather say, "Defend the less critical area." Critical area has a specialized meaning. The accuracy required by the setter and the attacker is greater at the ends of the court. There is less of a margin of error by the offense. So, we do not worry as much about those areas.

For the best teams in the world, the areas are probably fairly small. But for the lesser teams, maybe the area at position two is much bigger. The concept is correct.

We do not begin our blocking tactics by defending the outside of the net. When we block at the outside of the net, statistics tell us that the area where the ball is being hit is in the middle and that the direction of the ball is in an angle past the middle blocker. If you do some analysis, you will see why we defend the center.

## Do Not Guess

Don't guess. Guessing means: "Close your eyes and hope." If you guess, there is no system. Guessing is only a react system. React automatically means slow. If we react, we loose. If we "Read / React" we are not guessing. Then we are using some timing parameters. Timing parameters are valuable.

The implication is that there is more time than we think to block. This means we have some time and that late blocking is alright when we get in some kind of late or neutral situation.



### **Blockers should not guess because:**

- There is a time lapse between the touching of the ball by the setter and the delivery of the ball into the hitable area.
- There is another time lapse between the arrival of the ball into the hitable area and the contact by the spiker.
- There is a third time lapse between the contact by the spiker and the instant that the ball crosses the net.



A neutral situation means that we stay neutral relative to moving in any direction. In a neutral situation we do not lean to one side. In a neutral situation we do not have to change direction to the other side. Motor learning theory tells us that changing direction is too slow.

## **Cut Off Angles**

We would like to cut off angles. One of the things that is important is to cut off angles with lateral blocking movements. You can jump with lateral movement, which is good, and you can jump with perpendicular movement, which is not good.

Lateral movement is along the net and perpendicular movement is facing the net directly up and down.

We are interested in penetration in perpendicular direction, and we are more interested in penetration in lateral direction.

I think that the reason for that is that the ball goes past the block, not over the block. We can't worry about the ball that is hit over the block, we have to worry about the balls that hit to the outside of the block. If we have a physical incapacitation relative to the opponent, then we have to look for taller players, or try some other sports.

Mostly we have to learn, how to defend the net, and that is keep the ball out of directions. When we teach our spikers to spike, we teach them to spike the ball around the block and some times over the block, but you don't normally teach over the block.

The cues for advanced blocking are not the variable cues of the direction of the attacker, the arm swing, the distance of the net, the eye focus and those things. The advanced cues are the general sequence of viewing the passer relative to the ball, relative to the play of the ball, relative to the setter touching the ball. I think that it is difficult to coordinate the blockers to be precise and react to the same setter cues as to the exact direction and timing of the hitter contacting the ball. At the highest level it is possible, but even then, I think it is difficult. But I think it is not so difficult to teach them to react to a sequence that occurs and that we all can describe approximately the same way.

To know if a player is spiking a ball and for all of us to agree where he/she will hit it is difficult. But for all of us to agree that he/she is hitting it, maybe with the right or left hand, that is not so hard. Maybe we all can describe the type of set that he/she is going to get. This is informative and, I think we can teach that.

## **Do Not Chase the Setter**

The offense wants the blockers to chase the setter.

## **Do Not Chase the Quick Attacker**

The position of all three blockers is important, but the most important of all is that the Middle Blocker is in the middle of the court. The distance between Position Four and Position Three is closer than the distance between Position Three and Position Two. Blockers Three and Four are closer together than Two and Three. You can use that system against the majority of teams. Mostly the opposition sets the ball to our right side.

Position Two has to get out quite quickly. If you train your blockers intelligently, based on the offensive system that most teams play, you are spending about 75 percent of the time teaching blockers to move to the right. About 25 percent of the time they go to the left. This is seen in any high-level match, men or women.

A modification is needed for teams that hit quite a lot of back row. That type of movement is mostly two or three meters inside the sideline and not to the wide left sideline. Back row blocking is usually right in front of blocker Position Four.

Very good teams actually set the ball pretty far out and force the blocker to move. This is why most teams do not have good success blocking them. We do not see much back row sets to the middle or to our right side of the court.

### **Visual Clues - Watch the Passer in Blocking**

Ralph Hippolyte talks about an important concept, "Everybody has to take one step towards the direction of the action of play." Your player's can not be body-neutral in the back row. We want the blockers to see the pass. The blockers are going to receive lots of information about the offensive play by what happens with the passer.

We do not want blockers to watch our own service. Blockers do not ever have to see the serve. Instead, watch the passer. These are the early questions that **cue the blockers**:



#### **Cue for the blockers:**

What side of the court is the ball being passed from?

What is the direction of the pass?

Is the ball high or low?



To learn even more, the blockers cue from the pass trajectory. This information tells our blockers what might occur. Notice the trajectory of the ball.



### **The Ball Tells All**

Is the pass close to the net?

Is the pass left or right?

Is it fast or slow?

Will the Setter have to jump-set the ball?

Does the Setter have to move away from position?



Sometimes we break completely out of the system because the pass dictates the offense. If the passer is 50 feet off the net, the chances of running something quick in the middle are almost impossible. Then you do not have to keep the Middle Blocker in the middle.

Generally, teach players to watch the pass to the apex of the arch of the ball. Sometimes the arch is quite flat, so it is difficult to know exactly how long the arch is, but we want to try to teach that concept.

When you train blocking, and when you train most defense, you try to train from the point of view of the ideal of defense. If you can successfully train your players to defend the ideal of defense, then everything else becomes much simpler.

### **Visual clues - Watch the Setter in Blocking**

The most important cue is the setter. The setter is going to tell about the offense. The attacker is not going to tell about the offense. In fact, the attacker is trying to give us bad information. Setters have a limited ability to isolate and fool the blockers. Train your players to know where the ball is going by watching the setter. As long as the blockers are in a body-neutral position and wait until the ball is released, they make very few bad decisions.

If you guess, you are going to get fooled a great deal. Guessing means you are moving before the setter touches the ball. A good setter will see that. A good setter can precede movement in one

direction and then set the ball in the opposite direction. Sometimes you want him to do that, but most of the time I am not talking about that sophisticated situation. We want the blockers to see the setter, and we want to see the release of the ball. We want no movement until the release of the ball.

It is difficult to wait with teams that are running an offense where the attackers are relatively close together and when the time-differential is small. It is difficult, even after the ball is released, to know exactly who is going to hit the ball. But still, if you guess, then your percentage is going to go down.

Movement occurs after the release of the ball.

After the release of the ball, watch the flight of the ball  
Blockers are moving now and watching the flight of the ball

### **Visual Clues - Watch the Stuff in Blocking**

The stuff is what you want to see. The last thing you want to see is the hand/ball contact by the block.

Blocking is difficult and limiting. Coordinate the movement of the blockers as to the hand positions and their relative relationship to the ball. Footwork is more coordinated than hand position.

The more you coordinate, the more limiting you are to one or two of these systems. Teach individual blocking. Believe in common foot-patterns. Don't believe in coordinating two or three blockers together. Do not care who sets the block. It does not matter. I don't want one blocker doing one thing and the other blocker only doing another thing. I think too many things happen too quickly. I think the coordination is only relevant on slow sets, sometimes.



### **Notes for Setting the Block**

- Move with both feet simultaneously.
- In one-on-one blocking, make the hitter change his or her plans.
- To block the angle set the block on the center line of the body on the hitting shoulder.
- To block the line, set the blocker's inside hand on the ball.
- To force the line, move the inside contact point of the block as far as possible so that the hitter is left with only a straight line spike.

The blockers in the figure below show the proper position to force a line shot. In the second figure, the spiker has the angle to place a shot into the middle of the court because of poor positioning.

## **Notes on Blocking Formations**

Many teams begin with a simple blocking concept that only uses one or two front row players who are tall and skilled blockers. It is not necessary to use all front row players in your block until your opponents present attack possibilities with all their players at every position along the net.

## **One Man Block System**

Switch the best blocker to the center of the court, or opposite the other team's best spiker. The other blockers who are in the front row drop off the net for coverage. Back row players are in the other "W" positions. One person blocking system has the best blocker moving to the middle of the court. The other front-row players have coverage zones off of the net near the 3-meter line.

The Blocker is sometimes put across the net from the other team's best blocker. The back-row players form a "W" for coverage.

## **Man-to-Man System**

Each blocker starts in front of a spiker. The primary concern is only for blocking the spiker in front. A secondary concern is helping others with their blocks. Focus attention on the spiker's movement. This system is good against teams with three spikers who rarely cross positions.

## **Two Men Block System**

This is used against more complex offenses or against a team with one weak blocker. Both blockers cover the entire net against a slow, high attack. Non-blockers drop off the net to cover tips. Each blocker covers half the net against fast outside attacks. Defenders cover areas around the block.

Figure below shows a two-person blocking system against a slow attack. The MF player moves back and to the side for tip coverage. The blocker on the other side of the court moves to help form a double block.

On a fast attack, the off-side blocker can not get to the point of attack on the other side of the court to help form a double block. Then the blocker moves back for coverage.

## **Three Men Block system**

Against fast attacks the blockers begin the positioning closer together near the center of the court and closer to the net (.5 - 1 meter). In normal starting positions, keep the outside blockers wide. Have blockers stay 1 - 1.5 meters off the net until setter delivers the ball.

## **Read System**

All the blockers hold the starting position until the ball is set. All blockers try to block against all spikers. Blockers watch setter, not the spikers. The key to success is blocker movement body position. The blockers do not jump with quick spikers nor move until ball is set. The Read System is designed for combination plays and lots of offensive movement. Many balls are touched and "soft blocked."

The figures below show the read system of blocking. At the start, all the blockers hold their starting position until the set is made. All the blockers then go to the attack. Three blockers come together in the middle of the court or to the side.

## **Commit System**

The center blocker matches up with the quick spiker to stop the first attack. The blocker disregards everything but the quick spiker movement. The other blockers are man-to-man or "Read" blocking.

This system is designed for small blockers or against teams that have an effective quick attack and set the first option frequently.

The blocker closest to the quick attack must jump to stop the first attack.

## **Stack System**

Stack systems are developed to respond to specific offensive plays and to try to get as many blockers as possible against the quick attack and other combinations. The system is used against most combination plays in opponent areas #2 and #3. The stack blocker can line-up inside or outside of the commit blocker. The commit blocker must jump. The stack blocker follows Play Set spiker or goes outside to help with Release Spiker against a left stack play. The Read Blocker takes the Release Spiker and helps where possible.

At times, some blockers can be on different systems. One blocker can be a read blocker and the others commit and stack blockers.

## Zone Protection Blocking Notes

The concept of zone protection blocking gives the blockers responsibility for defending any and all attack attempts within their designated zone. Outside blockers are the key players in positioning the block in front of the attacker's armswing. Middle blockers are responsible for positioning "hip-to-hip" with the outside blocker to form the blocking wall.

The standard read positions for blockers are as follows:

Left Outside Blocker - net zone 3 (In).

Middle Blocker - net zone 4.

Right Outside Blocker - net zone 8 (50/50).

The Outside Blocker read position adjustments are as follows:

1. "In": LF Blocker = net zone 3, RF Blocker = net zone 7.
2. "Wide": LF Blocker = net zone 1, RF Blocker = net zone 9.
3. "50/50": LF Blocker = net zone 2, RF blocker = net zone 8.

## **Block Down or “No Block” Defense**

1. The setter must stay in position and play defense.
2. The prime blocker (center-blocker) calls no block and stays at the net
3. The other blockers pull off to the 3-meter line.
4. The back row players pinch into the court.
5. Player in center back moves up 3-meters from back line.
6. Players form a cup in line with direction of spiker’s approach.
7. Right front spiker is usually auxiliary setter.
8. The blocker closest to the spike can stay at the net for tips.

A blocker-down coverage is shown below. The blockers do not get to place their block at the net. The attack comes from the other team from right side.

# *Defensive Systems, Blocking & Transition*

*Players retreat, as ball is set,* to a deep perimeter position around the area of the block. Players #1 and #5 must protect close areas from tips, second ball attacks, over passes or sets and quick spikes. Player #6 should be free to move in any direction.

Basic starting positions for the defense is shown. A double block on the right side attack shows how the other players form a coverage system. The blockers will cast a shadow that protects the center of the court. The defensive players want to cover their positions with regard to the attack and blockers.

The blockers cast a shadow that protects the center of the court.

## Six Back System

Tip is played by defender opposite of spikers approach direction. All players are perimeter. Player #6 keeps very deep. Normal defense used if opponents can hit over the block or rarely tip.

The starting positions are important as the players have little time for movement. On a left side attack, Player #1 or Player #4 must recover tips when the spiker hits away from their position, or block covers their position.

On a slow center attack, use two blockers and have all the players rotate towards the blockers. Usually the left blocker joins the middle blocker, as the right is the setter. Notice the starting positions for the 6-back system and the players' numbers. The movement of the 6-back system when facing a right side attack.

A middle attack against a 6-back defense with one blocker has the following motion: the two off-blockers drop into short coverage, the LB and RB pinch the middle of the court, and the MB prepares to move to either the left or right. A middle attack against a 6-back defense with two blockers has the following motion: the off-blockers drop into short coverage, the remainder of the defensive coverage slides to the side of the assisting blocker.

## **Six Up System**

Tip coverage is by Player #6 in all cases. This system is used when your block is strong and the opponents like to tip or spike softly. The off blocker must move back beyond the 3-meter line quickly.

A middle attack against a 6-up defense with two blockers has the following motion: the off-blocker drops back, the LB and RB stay deep and to the sides of the court, and the MB moves to cover tips behind the block. A middle-back player has all tip coverage on the side attack.

## **Slide System**

The non-blocker covers tips. The balance of the positions are like Six Back positions. This is good defense for tip coverage but hard for transition offense.

The starting positions for the slide system of defense is shown. The rotational order is shown. Players C and O at the front line switch positions. The movement for the tip coverage is by the off-side blocker. This leaves a weak area of coverage.

## **Rotation System**

The player in front of the attack covers the tip. Other players move to balance the court area. The defensive system called "Rotation" has the player behind the block moving forward to cover tips. The MB player moves to the side-line behind the block in the deep court. The off-side blocker drops deep off of the net.

## **Hitting Transition Essentials**

In reorganizing the attack after defending, each blocker should assume or retract to a "load" position in preparation to counter attack. As the Blockers become Attackers, they need to be aware of the proper Load Points, Load Latitudes, and Approach Traffic Lanes.

Hitters are to avoid back pedaling when retracting. By utilizing turn-and-run footwork, hitters are faster, more dynamic, and more capable of changing direction with ease.



The success formula for transition to the counter attack has four major elements. They are:

- Blockers always retract to load positions creating dynamic approach lanes.
- The Setter penetrates quickly to an avenue along the net and the Setter is exclusively responsible for second ball contact.
- Hitters call sets clearly and quickly.
- Hitters commit themselves by making powerful approach footwork.

# Notes on Drills

*Pass-set-hit drills* are, of course, the best types of drills to develop. This is a sound concept. However at some levels, especially if you are the lone coach, it can be difficult to work on passing setting and spiking all at the same time. you may want to work one skill at a time for short periods, and then, combine them in another drill.

Following are examples of a couple of basic drills that can be used at any level. By adding complexity, the drills can be changed in many ways and yet they are still the same basic drills. For lower levels, keep the drills simple, and for higher levels, add more complexity.

## **Drill Groupings**

The majority of coaching should be directed at efforts to raise to the top. The team's better players need to make improvements. As the top players improve, they will pull the middle players

upwards to new levels. The top players' offer modeling to the team. Modeling is the single, most valuable component at practice.

When the top is grouped with lower groups, this should be structured to create leadership opportunities for the top. The top should know of the leadership responsibility and focus on building clearly defined leadership skills

Players should work harder for each other at practice rather than working for their coaches. When players work hard for each other, they will play beyond their ability and win games.

Your best leaders are identified by how hard and how well those around them perform. A good leader somehow frees others to do their best. A leader's teammates do not feel the weight of negative opinions from the leader. Players around the leaders should strive to fulfill the highest opinions of their potentials

Leaders have higher opinion of a person's worth than a person often has of him/herself. It is this exalted opinion that allows lesser players to transcend themselves. It is this ability to see the best in his/her teammates can offer which allows a leader to believe in his/her team's ability. Stubbornly believing in the best that can happen allows the best to happen.

The more often players can play in relation to each other as they will in matches, the more successful and sophisticated these relationships will be. It is important to be aware that relationships, responses, and interactions can operate at trained response levels. This is preferred and only can be accomplished by well-focused repetition.

1. Group the best players together
2. Group for line-up benefit
3. Group for development
4. Other Groups, friends, pride, reward, position

## Purpose of Drills

Drills are used to teach players the fundamentals! Coaches should understand both the whole learning theory and the part learning theory. In volleyball, use of the proper sequence is most important.

## Optimal Whole Learning Sequence

- a. Model the skill
- b. Identify the part of the skill to practice
- c. Practice the part
- d. Move on to the next part
- e. Put all parts together

## Beginning Players and Drills

The beginning players need to have drills that stress progression, repetition, and proficiency.

**Progression** is the sequence of performing certain skills. An example of a progression is as follows: Begin with posture then footwork, then movement, then contact then follow through.

**Repetition** is doing the drill over and over and over again with good skills and getting the players comfortable on the court and with the ball.

**Proficiency** starts to move the players along the spectrum to more advance and game-like conditions. A coach might say to a team or player, we are going to do the drill until we can get 25 good passes, as demonstrated.

## **Defense Drill**

Coach hits from a low platform. Make sure to give yourself high tosses so players can react. Left front starts at the net as the blocker, then backs off to the 3-meter line when the coach tosses the ball.

Goal: Dig eight balls up! If the ball is dug over the net, take one point away. A ball dug away from the court simply does not count.

As players develop in skill, try to take yourself out of the drills, having a player do the hitting or use active players, who hit off of a setter. Only four players are in the drill. Another player is a target at the net. One is handing balls to the coach. Two more are shagging.

The remaining players must be doing something else such as playing pepper or doing a setting drill. Try to avoid having eight or ten players standing around.

To add complexity, have the players dig to setter. The setter must set front or back. To add more complexity, dig, set and then add a left-front hit. To further increase the complexity, add a blocker or blockers: dig, set, hit at block, cover.

## **Spiking Drills**

Tossers toss to left front and right front spikers (three spikers on each side). Spiker hits and goes to the end of the line. Tossers count seven swings for each spiker, or a total of 21. Two handers help the tosser. The others shag. Spikers then become handers, tossers and shaggers, and those groups become spikers. When the groups switch again, the spikers must hit from the opposite side that was used in the first round.

To add complexity, hit line or cross court (work on only one shot in a round). To add complexity, place the tossers in the back court and add two setters. To add complexity, place the tossers across the net and add two passers. To further add to the complexity, hit from an inside/out approach or add a blocker or blockers, or

move spikers inside the court to pass, or the spiker who doesn't pass, calls and swing hits either side.

When conducting a drill in practice, it is suggested that coaches create a must-try attitude with the team. For this reason, if a player does not go for a ball in any drill, the player or player's team must start over.

### **Transition Training Drill**

This is a coverage drill as well as a transition drill. It also can be a conditioning drill. As soon as the spiker hits the ball over the net, the coach tosses another ball to the coverage. The setter has only the option of setting to one hitter.

This is the same drill but it is initiated when the defense is formed. Toss for beginning teams, then hit top spin, then stand on a chair. The setter has only the option of setting to one hitter.

This is a familiar drill to many but normally the setter has the option of setting to any hitter. By limiting the setter's choice to only one hitter, the setter has to fine tune both communication and delivery skills. This makes the hitter work harder to be an available hitter. Do the drill with the setter delivering the ball to the left, then the middle, then the right side hitters. Include back-court hitters if this is in your game plan. Coaches who use this drill will find the organization of the rally will show improvements when it is game time.

## **Drill for Setters and Transition Play**

Coach serves the ball. Side B makes a pass, sets and hits the ball over to team A. The coach can specify deep sets or deep hits to keep the rally moving. The setter moves under the net and is the setter for both sides. Emphasize communication by the setter on the first, second and third hits. The setter directs all traffic. The setter makes delivery of the ball each time he/she makes contact, even if he/she has turned inside out.

Later, this drill can be expanded to include jump sets. The setter should command the drill. A setter is doing a good job when there are long rallies and no confusion between players when playing the ball.

Serve five to ten balls, at which time Side B rotates out of the drill, Side A moves to the other side of the net, and three more players come on to Side A.

## Advanced Players and Drills

With advanced players, make the drills as game like as possible. Set the drills to utilize combination, group, team, pressure, and coach oriented actions.

Single player and **combination** drills are to learn fundamentals. With advanced players, put the application of fundamentals in a sequence as applied to a game situation.

A **group** drill might put five people on the court and instruct them that they must make five passes and put the balls down before they can rotate.

For **team** drills, learn to work as a unit. Stress serve reception. Apply skills just as they would be used in a game. Learn coverage and transition.

Use **competitive** drills:

- a) Rally score
- b) Wash point scoring
- c) Weighted scoring
- d) Handing scoring
- e) Normal scoring

# Wash Drills

Wash is a means of scoring a drill that makes the drills competitive and places emphasis on certain elements of performance. Wash scoring can be applied to any team drill. It places conditions on scoring a point.

Take triples as an example. Teams play to a score of three in order to win; however, a team must win three rallies in a row in order to score a point. If a team only wins two rallies in a row and then the other team wins a rally, then this is called a wash and the attempt to score a point starts again.

Two groups competing against one another do not need to have the same goal in order to score a point. Consider a six-on-six drill. If the starting six are competing against the non-starters, the goal for the starters could be to win four rallies in a row to score a point while the non-starters goal could be set at only two.

The scoring can be adapted to any drill where offense is competing against the defense. The coach sets the conditions for scoring a point based on the relative strengths of the opposing team and the skill that is to be emphasized.

Wash scoring drills can be used with teams whose skills are advanced to the point where competition can be emphasized as well as skill performance.

For further information on drills and wash scoring, other books are available from this publisher.

In **pressure** drills, get the team into a match situation, such as with a score of 13-8 and we are receiving. Perhaps we lost a game last week and the score was 13-8. Hopefully we don't want to lose again. Have the players show the skills and the drills, but also the pride to turn it around.

Pressure Drills in volleyball are often used to push players to a psychological limit. Pressure drills can create tension and anxiety in order to teach a player to cope. Pressure drills help to develop a team philosophy and attitude. Every team should use pressure drills to create a fighting spirit! Use drills to develop a team philosophy and a team attitude.

At Penn State, the program's philosophy comes through and shows itself in the team defensive drills. The principles are to go for every ball and to call every ball. The drills are not just designed to improve the skills. Chemistry can win matches. So does serving and blocking. But put chemistry into the drills.

**Coach oriented** actions in volleyball have the benefit of giving better control of drill. Coach oriented drills get better performance from the players. Furthermore, the drills can be individualistic—as designed by the coach. Overall, coach oriented actions allow the drills to have better ball control.

With coach oriented team drills, the coach can set the pace and make the drills conditioning exercises.

Coach Rose writes all of his practices down in a journal, and he knows how long it takes to do such and such drill 50 times. Every day they do 15 minutes of ball handling drills, 15 minutes of serve/passing drills. Maximize the participation all the time by all the players.

**Player oriented** actions and drills in volleyball have benefits too. Player oriented drills give the player's objectives to force the team's players to challenge each other. Players have to show initiative in player oriented drills.

In summary, coaches are encouraged to be creative and to always analyze drills and practices regarding:

Quality vs. Quantity,

Maximum participation,

Game related tasks,

Opportunity to rest between drills,

Challenges for the players both physically/mentally,

Stay competitive

Obtain measurable outcomes,

Challenge the best to get better.

# Notes on Statistics

## Accountability

Coach Russ Rose learned first learned volleyball by reading and gathering statistics—before he learned to play the game. Coach Rose began his interest in volleyball while taking stats at George Williams College in Illinois. “I’m using stats during a match, all the time. I might miss a lot doing this, but stats are valid, unbiased, and up to date at that minute. Nothing else tells me what others are doing.”

He looks to see if the game plan he set for the team is evident in the game’s statistics. He can understand the numbers and what they mean to his team. For example, he might have a game plan that wants two-thirds of the transition to be run out of the middle. Then he looks to validate the plan through the use of objective stat gathering and reporting.

At times the PSU coach watches the first game of the match without an established game plan. Then he’ll establish one from the bench. He said, “I can blow a match faster than any one of my players.”

Coach Rose sees the top programs gathering data, even in practice. His stats often show him and the team ways to win. “As a coach, I am involved and not just a fan who reacts.”

## Overall Understanding

To study volleyball statistics, have a good understanding of these points:

- First, have a fundamental understanding of the available principles regarding volleyball analysis. There are many different tools that can be used and invented. Statistics go far beyond kills and aces.
- Second, understanding volleyball stats can better prepare the volleyball coach to record and analyze his or her team's performance.
- Third, understanding volleyball stats can help the coach decide what are the most important skills to be measured.
- Fourth, if all the coaches on a staff understand volleyball statistics, the stats can give direction to the staff assignments and take advantage of available personnel.

## Statistics Count

There are a couple different systems of analysis for volleyball stats. First, there is the Ordinal System. The Ordinal System makes it tough to determine performance levels. Often, the Ordinal System can be called and International System, as it uses symbols that anyone can read. This system was first described by Kelle . The system uses grades such as:

(+) = Ace or good;

0 = Error;

(-) = Average or ball in play.

With this International System of symbols, the results are not able to be compared as there are no averages.

Coach Russ Rose can tell his team that we are passing at 2.2 and last week we were passing at 2.3. The numbers give a greater meaning to the statistics and data so that comparisons can be made and more easily be understood. The most effective system is the interval system.

Another existing stat system is the Spiking Efficiency by Coleman/Caplan in 1950. These stats are used only to measure spiking efficiency, and they are similar to a batting average in baseball.

The formula:

$$\text{Kills} - \text{Errors} \times 100 = \text{_____} \% \text{ Attempts}$$

For example:

7 kills - 2 errors

$$\text{over 15 attempts} \times 100 = .333$$

At Penn State, the different positions have different levels of statistical performance that the players strive to attain:

<u>Position</u>	<u>Desired Level</u>
Outside hitters	30-35%
Middle hitters	35-45%
Play set hitters	28-32%

Another stat method is the interval system by Coleman - Neville, which uses a 5-6 point system. Also, Coach Rose has a five-point system. In the Rose system of stats, the following shows the points in its simplest form:

	Server	Passer
Ace	4	0
Free Ball Return	3	1
Two Hitters Available	2	2
Three Hitters Available	1	3
Service Error	0	*

\* In Coach Russ Rose's system, no passer receives credit for a service error. Coach Rose has adapted the traditional system in a way that incorporates the players' contact into the statistics rather than the termination of play. For example, if a spiker hits the ball out of bounds and into the drinking fountain, but a blocker trips and hits the net, Russ Rose does not give credit for a kill to the spiker. Coach Rose keeps his stats specific to the player's contacts, not the opponents response.

## Chart it All

Volleyball statistics are used to evaluate a number of different areas in the game. One should statistically record:

- Serve
- Passing
  - Reception
  - Transition
- Attack
  - Serve Reception
  - Transition
- Blocking
- Setting
- Defensive Digs

## Tools of Data Collection

To evaluate the play, a coach can use a number of different data collection methods. Data Sheets can be used, and they can be organized by showing all the contacts or by showing play by the different rotations. A couple different shot charts and forms that are used at Penn State have been put at the end of this chapter.

Audio tapes can be used by coaches as the game progresses. A coach might say, "Mary served to 3 cross court. Ball set to Joan. Ball

blocked by Kim..." Later the tape can be played back and all the data sheets can be filled out as time permits

Use of the audio tape is better than having nobody doing anything. However, all the value of in-game utilization of statistics are gone if the numbers are not at your fingers while the match is being played

Other coaches use the audio tapes to say things like, "We need to work on transition on the left side." Coach Rose has his second assistant coach act like audio recorder. The head coach talks to the assistant while the match is in progress. The assistant records the thoughts on a piece of paper. Then at the post game meeting with the team, the coach reads his reactions to the team. This gives the team a chance to think about those comments today while the action is still fresh in everyone's minds. Then the team can begin to implement those thoughts in tomorrow's practices.

Video tapes are very valuable for a team, and they can be used to take statistics. But most often, Coach Rose uses the video to give a reliability check of the system.

The true value of video goes far beyond the use of statistics for the players. The kids need to "see the game." A player can understand that a pass to the 10 foot line is not the same as one to the net.

## Assignments for Data Collection

Gives great consideration to the entire staff in making assignments for statistics and data collection. Use many different people for statistic charting. Anyone can gather data when given direction—like an area of the court—even if that person knows nothing about volleyball. For example, anyone can be counting on a shot chart and putting numbers into zones showing where the other team serves.

The responsibilities break down like this:

The head coach charts:

our team's contacts,  
(serving, passing, spiking, blocking, digging)  
substitutions for both teams,  
time outs,  
official's call

Assistant coach #1 charts:

the opponent serve reception  
opponent set/shot selection

Assistant coach #2 charts:

Opponents passing  
The head coach's additional talking, acting like a stenographer

A trainer or a team manager charts:

points earned by rotation

Often coaches utilize players who are on the bench to formally chart and gather statistics for the team. Generally, try to NOT give specific statistic responsibilities to players while on the bench, but do insist that they are always aware of the action on the court and sometimes get assignments, such as position shot selection. The coach can ask the players on the bench to follow something specific on the court, such as what the middle hitter is doing. Some teams have players keep shot charts.

At the Division I level, parents are not utilized to gather stats. However, parents can be a valuable source of data collection if the head coach can make specific assignments and provide proper guidance on the task at hand.

Gives someone, who knows very little about volleyball, the task of charting the opposition's behavior interactions. Asks a data collection helper to look at how the other coach or players interact with play calling. Is there verbal and non-verbal communication taking place on the floor

## Serve Receive Means for Passing

High School	2.00 - 2.10
College Women	2.25 - 2.35
College Men	2.40 - 2.60
International Women	2.36 - 2.60
International Men	2.60 - +

## Hitting Goals

<u>Team</u>	<u>Outside</u>	<u>Middle</u>
High School	.240 - .260	.275 - .300
College Women	.270 - .300	.350 - .380
College Men	.370 - .400	.450 - .490
International Women	.350 - .375	.400 - .425
International men	.375 - .400	.500 - .525

The 1984 USA Men's Olympic Team sided out at 78%. The 1988 USA Men's Olympic Team sided out at 70%. This use of statistics is related to the offense off of the first pass. Traditionally, in the women's game, a normal sideout offense is 40% off of the first pass and 33% off of transition.

## Comparison of '90 and '91 Penn State Stat Totals

This seasonal comparison shows PSU's undefeated regular season performance in 1990, a year when they went 44-1 including post-season results.

<u>Category</u>	<u>1990</u>	<u>1991</u>
Serve	1.85	1.71
Pass	2.39	1.99
Hit	.370	.248
Outside Hitter #1	.368	.176
Outside Hitter #2	.318	.190
Outside Hitter #3	.290	.294
Middle Hitter #1	.483	.309
Middle Hitter #2	.437	.266

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