Winning Volleyball Skills
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Introduction

There’s nothing like the slap of warm leather on your forearms when you dig the ball on a hit from your opposition’s top power hitter.

Or stuffing the middle on a quick hit because you had perfect position and impeccable anticipation. Add in a crosscourt kill or going down the line and you’ve got the best of volleyball.

You are going to learn all of that and more. We are going to take your game to the next level and give you tips on how to get there. You will discover many skills you can use immediately to see swift improvements in your game. But, this is not a quick ticket to success. There really isn’t one of those in sports. It takes work. It takes a commitment. And maybe most of all, you need to master the basics. If you do not have solid fundamentals you have no chance of making it to the college level, let alone the professional ranks.

We are going to start from square one and work our way to the top. We’re going to go through the skills that you are going to need to know in order to get noticed by top-level coaches.

Here are the skills and tactics we are going to cover in this e-book.

- Passing, setting and hitting
- Defense
- Blocking
- Defensive systems
- Offensive systems and play-calling
- Serving and receiving
- Basic rules of the game
- The history of volleyball
- Conditioning
- The different positions – roles and responsibility
- And more!

We’ve even got something for those coaches out there. If you’ve ever had to deal with parents, or trying to motivate your team, you know the challenges that many coaches face.

We’ll show the coaches out there how to handle their team – whether it is development of players, or settling disputes between two teammates.

You’ll discover as you start into this book that it’s a book not meant to be read only once. It’s meant as a guide to be read over and over again. Go through the book each time you’d like to attain a new skill, improve on an old one, or each time you’d like to introduce a new strategy or advanced tactic to your game.

There’s just so many reasons you’ll want to keep this book handy.

If you have been looking for a one-stop resource for volleyball, this is it. We are going to pack as much information as we can into this book, so you can come out as a better volleyball player in the end.

Hayley Merrett
The History of Volleyball

The game of volleyball is only 110 years old and in that short time it has built itself into the second ranked sport by participation in the world – only behind soccer.

William G. Morgan decided in 1895 that he wanted to take elements from four different sports and put them together to come up with his own sport – one that was fast-paced and exciting.

The YMCA instructor needed to come up with a game that required less physical contact than basketball, in order to lure the stiff collared businessmen into the game. The first name of volleyball at this time was 'mintonette'. Morgan put together different parts of basketball, baseball, tennis and handball, and raised the net to 6 feet 6 inches and put teams on either side.

The game didn’t get the name ‘volleyball’ until during one match a spectator said to Morgan that it looked like the players were volleying the ball over the net to each other. The rest as they say is history. The very first ‘volleyball’ game was played at Springfield College.

It wasn’t until the year 1900 that a ball was made specifically for the new game, and the rules were not how we know them today. It took until 1916 for the skill and power of the set and spike to be introduced, and four years later a ‘three hits’ rule and back row hitting guidelines were established.

Many of you might think that the game of beach volleyball, with two people per team, is a game that was recently derived from volleyball. In fact, 75 years ago, the first ever two-man beach game was played. Beach volleyball had one of its first major matches before indoor volleyball had a world championship.
Even though the game had spread across the world in 50 years, there was no international governing body for volleyball until 1947, when the Federation Internationale De Volleyball (FIVB) was formed. The FIVB is still the highest governing body for the sport of volleyball in the world.

Volleyball hit the world stage when it first got to the Summer Olympics in 1964 in Tokyo. The game of volleyball exploded in the Pacific Rim countries, and it was in Japan that the very first televised world championship was telecast. The Japanese had the 1974 world championships in Mexico brought back to a volleyball crazy nation through television.

Beach Volleyball was also given its due, when the FIVB added a world championship series to its slate of events in 1987. Volleyball had gained such popularity around the world as a spectator sport that the World League of volleyball was created as a professional league for players from all over the world. Now, players who graduate from their respective national teams will often play in these professional ranks.

1995 saw the 100-year anniversary for volleyball. The game has grown around the world and is an integral part of sports programs at the recreational, secondary school, and collegiate levels in many countries.

Packed with excitement and action, William G, Morgan came up with a game in his modest YMCA gymnasium that in only 100 years has become one of the most popular sports on the planet.
Volleyball – the game

Chances are if you are reading this e-book, you know a little bit about volleyball already. But if you want to reach the top rung of the volleyball ladder, you need to have a strong foundation. Learning the game from the ground up is the only way to do it.

Think of this chapter as pouring that foundation. You are better prepared to be a top player if you are familiar with every aspect of the game. How high is the net? What are some of the basic rules and rule interpretations? Explain rally scoring. These are just some of the things we are going to cover in this chapter.

The Court and Equipment - indoor

The volleyball court is a rectangle split in two equal halves by the net. Indoor courts are 18 meters long and 9 meters wide, so when the net splits the court, two equal and square boxes are created. In the boxes, there is a 3-meter line, which you likely know as the attack line. This is the spot where the tactical combinations in volleyball are first conceived.
The net divides the court and it set at different heights for different levels of play, and also for men and women. The height is measured from the middle of the court, but it might not be the same as the height of the ends of the net, over the sidelines. The official height of the net must be measured from the middle, but the outside can be as much as 2 centimeters higher. This is because the net may have some slack due to the weight of the net. It is important that the side heights are no more than 2 centimeters out, because it can affect the timing and trajectory for outside hitters.

Here are the net heights for different age groups and for FIVB and USAV events:

**Females**

- 10 years old and under – 1.98 m or 6' 6”
- 11 to 12 years old – 2.13 m or 7'
- 13 to 18 years old – 2.24 m or 7' 4 1/8”
- Adult recreational – 2.19 m or 7' 2 1/8”

**Male**

- 10 years old and under – 2.13 m or 7'
- 11 to 12 years old – 2.13 m or 7'
- 13 to 14 years old – 2.24 m or 7' 4 1/8”
- 15 to 18 years old – 2.43 m or 7' 11 5/8”
- Adult recreational – 2.38 m or 7' 9 5/8”
The official heights for FIVB events are 2.43 m for men, and 2.24 m for women.

Most courts should have an area of about 2 meters around the boundary that is clear of any outside equipment or non-playing personnel. You don’t want to knock out a couple of teeth when you dive to save a ball, just because a folding chair was in the way. The court should also be free from any overhead obstructions for a minimum of 7 meters from the playing surface.

An interesting tidbit is that the lines on a volleyball court must be 5 cm wide. Because the line is “in”, all lines widths are governed under the FIVB official rules. When you are winning that line seems a lot bigger than 5 cm – it’s more like 5 inches!

**The Ball**

Remember it wasn’t until 1900 that volleyball had a ball of its own. It is a unique ball that is made up of several long and narrow leather panels sewn together with a bladder inside for air.

The same ball is used at all levels of play, except for the 12 and under players. They use a lighter ball than all other age and skill groups. The standard FIVA approved ball is as follows:

- Circumference – 25.5” to 27”
- Weight – 260 to 280 grams
- Pressure – 4.3 to 4.6 psi

There are no restrictions on the color of the ball; however, most balls are a plain white, or a color and white alternating on the leather panels.

**Beach Volleyball**

Aside from any rules differences, the FIVB sand court is a different size from the indoor court. Beach volleyball players bump, set and spike on a court that is 16 meters long by 8 meters wide. There are also a few differences in how volleyball is governed especially when it
comes to tipping the ball. Players aren’t allowed to ‘dink’ the ball just to avoid the block, especially if they are on the second hit.

The ball in beach volleyball still meets the standard FIVB guidelines that were stated above.

**The different games**

Although the actual game doesn’t vary between different levels, there are some subtle differences in play.

**Junior high / high school**

At the junior high level, the emphasis is on learning the basics. This is a time when the players are becoming more coordinated and you can begin teaching them the individual skills they are going to need in order to excel in the higher levels.

> An emphasis should be placed on the basics at the junior high level

You will easily notice a high school volleyball team that has a good feeder program from the junior high level, because the basic skills will be considerably more apparent than schools that have only begun teaching these skills when the kids are just entering high school.

Good high school teams can be dynamic and extremely skilled. They differ very little from collegiate teams, except colleges and universities have the luxury of choosing from the cream of the crop. At the high school level, the emphasis is primarily placed on learning different systems for offense and defense. More intricate offensive play calling is introduced and players are positioned according to their strengths.
The volleyball at the high-school level is scored with the rally method, rather than the side-out method.

**Rally scoring** - Each end in play results in a point for the team that has won the rally.

**Side-out scoring** – This is the former system used in many high schools, and still used in some leagues, where a point is only awarded at the end of a rally to the service team – only if they won the rally.

There are no differences in how the rules are applied at these levels, however, some lenience in technique and skill level is given by many officials.

**College volleyball**

This is one of the fastest growing collegiate sports, mainly because of its high intensity and quick action. At this level, the game is intricate, and the knowledge gained at the junior high and high school levels pays off.

The college game is traditionally scored with the rally scoring system as most volleyball games have evolved to this method. No other changes, aside from the pace of the game, are different at this level.

One difference in the game play is the use of officials. At the high school level, it is often parents, unused players or other students who are watching the lines, with only one official on the platform. At the college level, carded officials patrol the podium, the opposite side of the net, and there are two linesmen.

**Professional volleyball**

This is the pinnacle of playing any sport – the professional ranks. At the pro level, players are knowledgeable about the game, their fundamental skills are sound, and they are in tip-top shape. These are the best men and women volleyball players in the world.
Obviously, making it to the professional ranks takes a lot of time, skill and a commitment to being the best. Hundreds of hours of practice on everything from serving to spiking and how to pass the ball have honed the skills of the professionals. If you want to follow in their footsteps, you are going to have to put in the time, too.

The Basic Rules of Volleyball

Every sport in the world has rules – there is no way around them. They are there to ensure the game is played fairly and equally, and so there is no danger to the players who play.

Volleyball has an extensive set of rules that players must know and understand. Every top player knows and understands the rules – inside and out. Part of being one of the best in the sport is understanding the rules and how they are applied. Not knowing could cost a team a game or worse yet, a championship.

Basic rules

Each team is allowed 6 players on the court at any one time. There are three back row players and 3 front row players. Once the ball is in play, the players can move around freely on the court. However, back row players cannot approach the net for a hit, unless they take off from behind the attack line.

During play each team is allowed three hits – not including blocks, and no player is allowed to hit the ball more than once in succession. If a ball is deflected off of a block, either team can still play the ball three times. Teams are allowed to contact the ball three times, each time it crosses the net to their side.

When the ball is in play neither team can contact the ball before it crosses the plane of the net. Players cannot come in contact with the net during play, and no part of their body can completely breach the centerline of the volleyball court. For example: If a foot crosses over the centerline – it is a violation. A partial foot is still OK.
The ball may come in contact with any part of the body. Each time the ball does contact an area of their body, it is counted as one hit. If the ball hits the roof or any other apparatus during the course of play it is treated as a side out and the ball is awarded to the non-offending team for service.

Other basic rules

- The boundary lines are considered ‘in’. If any part of the ball touches this line, the linesman or other official must agree the ball is in play.

- Servers must not step into the court before they have contacted the ball for their service. In the case of a jump serve, the player can land in the court after they have contacted the ball while in the air.

Of course there is a rulebook filled with rules, many of which we aren’t going to cover here. If you are going to be a serious volleyball player, I would suggest for you to pick up a copy to review. I’ve included a free download for you at the end of this book.

Knowing the rules inside and out will give players an edge, simply because they know where and when their team can gain an advantage.

Players by position

Each team has six players on the court – 3 in the front row and three in the back. The front row players are typically your first line of offense and defense. They are the blockers and hitters and often times your setter, however, your setter may also come from the back row.

Front row players – Power, middle and off side

Power – This is your big hitter. The one you go to over half of the time when your team is on offense. Your team’s power is probably the best hitter on the team. They are able to generate enough power
to hit through blocks, but still have the presence of mind to wipe the ball off blocks and even place a tip cross court to an uncovered area.

The power position is usually on the left hand side of the net, to accommodate the majority of players who are right-handed hitters. If your team is lucky enough to have a lefty on the court, you could have the benefit of two power positions.

Even when your power hitter is on the right-hand side of the court in the rotation, the rules allow you to move the power back to the power side after the service.

Here are the qualities of a good power hitter:

- Good leaping ability
- Presence of mind
- Quickness
- Not necessarily tall, but needs to get above the net
- Equally prepared to block as they are to hit

**Middle** – As the name would suggest, this is the player that occupies the middle of the court near the net. They are the player that sets the blocks and also hits from the middle position. They are usually your tallest player in the front row and that helps them set the blocks from the inside of the court.

The middle position is also the position that needs to be versatile and quick. Your middle hitter will likely be called upon to make ‘quick hits’ or hits that are set just above the net, and to defend they have to be able to recognize the quick hits on the other side to set the quick block.

Your middle hitter probably has to be to one player in the front row who’s primary responsibility is to watch the game very carefully, and be at the point of the opposition’s attack every time. They also need to pounce on loose balls that are not in position to be attacked by either team (i.e. – digs, tips, third hit sets or bumps).

Here are the qualities of a good middle hitter:
• Watches the game
• Able to anticipate the action
• Can make the block, then get into position for a quick counterattack
• Tall
• Sets a good point for blocking

Off side hitter

This player, although still a good hitter, is usually the one who ends up being a change up from the standard power hit or the middle hit. They are also used as decoys for crosses and tandems. But, they still do hit, and most of the time they hit well.

Depending on how a play develops and the defensive system of a team, the off side player in the front row can be responsible for cross court tip coverage, if you are only blocking with two players – the middle and the power.

Here are the qualities of a good off-side player:

• Versatile (hit, block and tip cover)
• Good hitter
• Must be prepared and watch the flow of the game
• Good decoy hitter

Setter

We’ve included the setter here because they can play either in the front row or the back row. We’ll put them right in the middle of the front and back row descriptions so they aren’t grouped as either.

Some teams will play with two setters on the court, and in a rotation so there is always one in the back row,

Setters provide direction for the point of attack on the offense.

A good setter can see the entire floor, and makes his or her calls based on what they see.
and one in the front. This limits the potential for confusion, because the front row setter will handle the majority of the attacks, and the back row setter is there as insurance in case the front row setter has to make a defensive play.

Still other teams will play with one setter on the court, and another player who can set if needed. This allows a team to have three players in the frontcourt on the attack when the setter is in the back row. This is an advantage on the attack, but your setter needs a tremendous amount of quickness to get to any errant balls.

We’ll get more into the setter position as we get further into the book. It is an exciting position, but it has a lot of responsibility.

Here are the qualities of a good setter:

- Extremely quick
- Can read opposing defenses to set the attack
- Good orientation – knowing where everyone is on the court at all times.
- Not necessarily the smallest player on the team. Today, setters are used for tips and the odd second hit spike.
- Good peripheral vision – see play develop

**Back row players**

Your back row players are your primary defenders once a ball has been hit. They are the diggers. They are also the service receivers, so the ability to pass the ball accurately to the front is extremely important. Believe it or not the attack starts with a good pass, not with a good set or good hit.

The set up of your back row players will vary from defensive formation to defensive formation. They could also provide some offensive presence with a back row hit.
Here are some of the different priorities of the back row players:

- Cross court spike coverage
- Tip coverage
- Back row hits
- Serve reception
- Line coverage on spikes

Once we get into the different defensive systems, the responsibilities of the back row players will become clear. With each system however, the roles of each player may differ from system to system.

**For the coaches**

It is always a good idea to review some of the basics of positions and rules for your newer players. Too many coaches make the mistake of believing that their players know the rules and they know what happens during the course of a game.

I have seen it too many times where a junior high or high school team is out of rotation, and they don’t know how to get back into rotation. It is too easy not to take the time to coach the players from the very beginning and to make sure they understand their responsibilities on the floor.

Here are a few things that you should make sure every player on your team understands:

- Know the positions and what they do on the floor.
- Basic rules of play – three hits, can't hit it twice, etc. Most of the players at the higher levels will know these, but I have seen many players entering their high school squads with little knowledge of anything more than bump, set and spike.
- They should understand the difference between back row players and front row players.
- Focus on the basic skills. No player is perfect in his or her skill set and everyone can work on honing the fundamentals of volleyball.
With that said, we are going to head into the next chapter and describe in detail how to execute each of the skills you need to raise the level of your play. We will include drills and some expert tips to make you a better volleyball player.
Volleyball Skills

O K, here is where the real work begins. I won’t pull any punches when I tell you that this is not a miracle serum to instantly make you an Olympic player. The instruction we are about to go through will help you build solid fundamentals, and that is what is going to make you a great player.

We are going to cover the basic skills like passing, setting and hitting and we will even get into advanced skills like digs, tips blocks and more. At the end of this chapter, you will have all of the knowledge that you need to start improving your skills and getting on your way to being one of the top players on your team.

Just remember – not everyone spends the time they should on their basic skills. It shows in their play, but it won’t show in yours. You will have the fundamentals in your corner.

Passing

This is the most basic skill in volleyball. It is the most often executed action offensively and defensively during the game. It is used nearly every time a serve is received or a hit is fielded.

Despite it being the most basic skill, it can be the most important. A good pass is imperative if a team is going to set a good attack. A good bump to the setter makes it easier for the setter to get into good position to place a good set.

Far too often, I see players who do the number one no-no even at the high school level. Don’t swing your arms! This is probably the number one reason for bad passing, other than being out of position.
Here is a basic description of how to execute the pass:

- Move into position quickly keeping your hands apart. It will be tough to get into position if you are trying to gain an advantage by having your arms together already.

- Once you are in position, you should have your legs shoulder width apart and your knees should be bent. Drop your behind slightly toward the floor. Straight legs are going to force you to bend at the waist, which is going to make you use your arms to get the ball forward. This is not the ideal way to pass.

- When you see the ball coming your way bring your hands together and form the ‘table top’ with your elbows locked and an attempt to put your forearms together.

- You should try and receive the ball at waist height, but if it is low, don’t bend at the waist if you can help it. Lower your body with your knees.

- When you receive the ball, hit it square in the middle of your forearms and direct it to your target with your shoulders. Try to limit the amount of arm motion – it affects your control.

- As you make contact with the ball, straighten your knees and lift your body up to help the ball into the air. Follow through with your body and try not to swing your arms on the follow through.

- Make sure when you contact the ball that your elbows stay locked. You risk directing the ball toward your chest if you don’t, and that results in a double hit.

- Keep your eye on the ball. Once your eye leaves the ball you risk hitting it with only one arm and having an errant pass.
Positioning is likely going to be one of the biggest factors in being able to execute the above sequence for a good pass. Trying to take the ball to the side of you, or if you have to bend for the ball just increases the chance of miss-hitting the ball.

**Coaches** – Here is a drill that will immediately help improve the passing for a player up to the setter.

- Line up the players in the back corner of the court. You should be on a chair or something else that will help you gain a good angle to hit down to players. Place it up near the net so the players get the look of the ball coming down at them from an opponent’s attack.

- Have your setter stand in front of you, as that would be the place that you would want him or her to receive a good first pass.

- Don’t hit the ball hard at first. You can increase the power later. Just work on having the players get to a position on the floor where they can best perform the pass.

- Things to watch: feet shoulder width apart, body facing toward the target, bend at the knees and a good, flat table top with their forearms. No arm swing and pushing up and through the ball with their legs and hips.

There is no doubt passing the ball is where the entire attack begins. Without a strong pass to the setter, it will be difficult to execute a strong offensive hit.

**Setting**

This is the second part of the three-part attack on offense. The set, or overhand pass is used to ‘set’ up the hit. Without a good set, the attack could suffer. It could be incorrect timing, it could be too close to the net, or it could be too low. Finding a player who can execute all of these skills is a player who is coveted by any volleyball team.
There is more to a set than just putting the ball in the air with the fingertips of the hands. You need to be able to cushion the ball enough to get control of it, to direct it toward your intended target. But, with that said, you have to be able to unload the ball quick enough for the official to not call you on a held ball violation.

Here’s how to execute the best overhand pass:

- Make sure you are ready to receive the pass wherever you are on the court. Be prepared to move quickly to where the ball is passed.

- Get into a ready position under the pass and face your intended target. Put your hands up in front (6 inches) of your face (near the forehead) and create a triangle ‘window’ with your forefingers and your thumb. A good rule of thumb is to be able to see the ball through the window. Make sure the knees and arms are slightly bent, waiting for the ball to come down.

- The rest of the hands should be relaxed and form the shape of the ball. This will aid in cushioning it properly. Once the ball reaches your hands, you send it back in the air with the extension of the arms and straightening of the legs.

- When the ball makes contact with your hands it should be one motion upward toward the ball. Too many setters think that they should let the ball drop in their hands, toward their forehead, before they spring the ball upward. This is not the correct way to set the ball. The setter who employs this method will be disappointed when the official calls him or her for a held ball.

- The hands should follow the ball in the intended direction of the ball. Make sure the shoulders are square to the target.

You will often see top setters breaking these rules by setting behind them, or setting to the side, but that has come as a result of years of practice. They, during their careers, have mastered the proper skills
and have advanced their skill set to include side sets and back sets. For our purposes at this point in the book, learn to provide a proper set from a standard position.

Here are a few things setters should avoid when they are making their play:

- Don’t let the ball hit your palms. If you are slapping at it with your hands, you are not setting the ball properly.

- Don’t play the ball when you are off-balance. Anticipate where the ball is going to be off the pass and get into the proper position to accept the pass. An off-balance pass is going to be off target.

**Coaches** – Make sure that your setters are getting under the ball early. They should not be rushing to the ball at the last moment to execute their set. Watch to see that they are facing their target, not where the pass came from.

**Here is a drill for setters:**

- Players should partner up and stand on either side of the net at the attack line.

- Start at one sideline and set the ball across to the partner then take a few steps toward the opposite sideline.

- The ball should continue to be exchanged from one attack line to the next. The setters should go from one side of the court to the other staying at the attack line. They shouldn’t have to stray from this area, or the setting is not up to par.

- The setters should focus on getting under the ball, creating the triangle and then pushing the ball toward their teammate.
This drill is a great one to help the setters develop their peripheral vision. This is extremely important for the setter to send the ball to the best possible spot for attack.

- Have a middle hitter and a power hitter line up to receive a set.
- The coach will have the ball on the opposite side of the net and will toss it to the setter.
- The setter has to get under the ball but still watch the coach. The coach will point to the hitter where the setter has to push the ball.
- The setter should be able to get under the ball, get the right position and face his or her target to get the ball to this spot.
- To add a few extra elements to this drill try this – add a third hitter so the coach can point at three potential spots. Or, have the coach toss the ball to a back row player who will be responsible for passing it up to the setter. The coach will still have to point where the set should go.

We will get into more great drills later on in the book, but for now, these will help you start to develop some valuable skills for setting.

For the most part, practice is the key to developing a good setter. Not only practice with learning the fundamentals of a good set, but to learn the timing of the hitters that are on the floor, too.

**Hitting**

This is where the action and intensity comes from in the game of volleyball. Very few sports have the climax of a play happen over and over again during a course of action. In volleyball, the hit can happen several times before the play ends. The result is quick and demanding action that makes volleyball such an exciting sport.
Volleyball employs several different types of hits, but they all have virtually the same or a version of the same type of approach and technique.

Here is the proper technique for hitting the volleyball:

- Once the ball is passed the front row attackers should be backed up to the attack line (3m line) awaiting the set.

- The hitters should be in a ready position – one foot in front of the other, arms at the side, and knees bent, waiting for the setter to set the ball.

- Wait for the ball to hit its peak in the air before starting the approach.

- To begin your approach, take one step forward with your back foot, and then a half step so your feet are in a position for you to jump.

- Bend at the knees and reach your arms back behind your body. A good arm swing here will improve the height of your jump and help you get a better angle on the ball at the top of the jump.

- Explode when you jump straight up in the air and cock your hitting arm behind your head. To cock your arm, bring your hand to your ear and cast your elbow behind your head. Point your non-hitting arm at the ball.
• Depending on the type of play your team is running, you should contact the ball about two to three feet away from the net and anywhere from 18 inches to 30 inches above the net.

• The hand should contact the ball just above center on the back of the ball. The wrist should snap toward the floor to make the ball drop.

• Follow through. Players are often concerned that their arm is going to hit the net. But if the ball is contacted at the proper point away from the net, this shouldn’t be a concern. If you are close, bring the ball across the body to avoid contact with the net.

• Land on two feet and cushion yourself by bending your knees. You will need to end up in the ready position so you can assist on any blocks if your hit is returned.

**Coaches** — You should be watching that the approach is correct. That is probably the most important part of making sure the player is going to have success hitting the ball. Many coaches are content allowing their player to develop a ‘comfortable’ approach, and not worrying about getting the proper approach. This is a recipe for disaster as the consistency of that player may suffer.

**Here are a couple of drills for improving hitting:**

This first drill is common for improving where the ball is contacted and the understanding the cocking of the arm and the wrist snapping.

• Stand about 15 feet away from a flat concrete wall

• Raise the ball with your non-hitting hand in front of you. This is about where you should contact the ball in distance away from your shoulders.

• Practice cocking your arm back, getting your hand to your ear and bringing your elbow back behind your head.
• Contact the ball just above the equator and snap your wrist toward the floor. Make sure you follow through.

• The ball will ricochet off the floor and the wall and you should be prepared to hit it again.

This drill will teach you timing and how to get into the proper position to drive the ball to the floor. Make sure that each time you approach the ball, you aim at the ball with your non-hitting hand, cock your arm and drive the ball to the floor.

This next drill deals more with the approach. All of the top coaches will tell you that the approach is key to being the best possible hitter. You can have the best contact with the ball and a great drive to the floor, but if you can’t get up to get the ball then you have no chance to help your team.

• Start at the attack line and in the ready position. Have players at all three positions.

• Use a whistle to simulate the set, and then players should do a one count and then approach.

• There are no balls involved in this drill; this is just an air spike drill. Players need to learn the proper approach without the ball, instead of having the pressure of hitting the ball.

• Have each player practice this drill two or three times before practice as a part of the warm-up. Encourage them to practice this anytime during practice when there is a break in the action.

The benefit of this drill, besides teaching the players how to approach the ball effectively, is to improve muscle memory. The hitter’s body will learn how to properly jump and hit the ball. This will make the hitter more consistent and bring considerable more success.
Serving

This is where each play begins. The service can be one of the best weapons your team has. It can immediately put an opposing team back on its heels and force them to make poor passes to their setter.

At the junior high and high school level, the serve is probably the least worked on skill, but ends up costing teams the most points. So, coaches out there, spend time teaching proper service and you will immediately see the benefit for your team in the win column.

Players use a few different types of service methods: the underhand serve, overhand serve and the jump serve. Each of these can also be broken down into spin serves and floating serves. We’ll describe each one and the mechanics behind all of the serves.

Underhand float serve

This is the most basic of serves, but players can learn a lot about the movement of the ball from this serve. It is primarily used in junior high and at the high school level, with very few players at the collegiate level or the pros using the underhand serve.

Here’s the proper technique for the underhand serve:

- The serving player should stand about six or eight feet behind the end line. Always remember you cannot step on or over this line until after the ball has been contacted.
• The ball should be held just below waist high, and the server should be slightly bent at the waist, and the knees should also be slightly bent.

• In the hand, the ball should be held with the air pump hole pointing in toward the court. The player should contact the ball opposite the inflation point.

• The player can either take one step toward the court, or two, but the ready position form should not be any compromised.

• The ball should be contacted at about waist height and with the heel of the hand.

• Follow through toward the target.

This is the easiest serve to use, but it is also the easiest to return. But, what this serve teaches, is the principle behind the float serve. When the ball is contacted on the side opposite the inflation point, it causes the ball to ‘float’ through the air. It is very similar to a knuckleball, where it doesn’t have any spin and it can be tricky to return.

**Overhand float serve**

This serve is one of the most common at all levels – from high school to the professionals. Only the jump serve may have more popularity, but it is primarily used at the collegiate, international and professional level.

The physics behind this float serve are the same as that of the underhand floater – hit the ball on the opposite side of the inflation point and the ball will float to the other side. What makes this serve more difficult to return is that it usually comes in at a lower height, and much harder than the underhand serve.
Here's the proper technique for the overhand float serve:

- Start about six to eight feet behind the end line. (This will vary with some players who use the overhand serve because they may exert more force on the ball.)

- The ball should be in the non-hitting hand and held at shoulder height.

- When the ball is tossed up in the air to hit, it should be about two to three feet above the head and about one and a half paces ahead, so the player can walk into their contact. The ball should not be contacted while a player is flat-footed and stuck to the floor.

- The ball must be tossed up with little or no spin, so that contact can be made with the proper place on the ball.

- The arm action prior to striking the ball should be similar to how your arm is cocked when a player is going to spike the ball. The hand should be near the ear, and the elbow should be behind the head.

- The only difference when contact is made is the player does not snap the wrist to create the downward motion. The follow through is not straight down and across the body, it is ahead and pulling them into the court.

Coaches – There is nothing better than practice to make a player a better server. Very few high school players spend a lot of time on their service skills, but yet it accounts for so many lost points. Balls are hit into the net, miss-hit, or hit long, costing teams valuable points.
Here is a great drill, that is both fun, and rewards strong service skills.

- Divide your team into two sides. Put them on opposite sides of the net.

- One player from each side has to go to the other side to serve receive for their team. All other players are waiting for their turn to serve.

- Players must serve the ball so their teammate can get it. The first serve is going to be easy, because there is only one player to worry about and they can probably make it to the serve wherever it is on the court.

- The players have to try and serve to their teammate on the other side of the net. The player receiving the ball only has to touch the ball, and it must be inbounds. If this happens, the player who served the ball gets to run to the other side and receive serves with their teammate.

- Here’s the catch. Players must link in some way to the other teammate who is receiving serves. They have to hold hands or shirts or whatever, but they can’t let go of one another. If a serve is errant, it is going to be difficult to get to the ball. That is why serving the ball accurately and over the net is the key to this game.

- Each time a server gets the ball to their serve receivers, they go to the other side and link up with the team. By the end of the game one side should have all five or six players linked up.

To make it interesting, put an extra set of conditioning drills on the line for the losing team and then see who pulls out the best serves.
The jump serve

The jump serve has become the serve of choice in the higher levels of volleyball and it has even made its way down into some high school programs. This is a serve that takes great timing and confidence in your ability to hit the ball over the net.

Servers who employ this serve in their arsenal, and those who are consistent in getting it across the net likely have their own form, or something that feels comfortable to them. This is the type of serve where comfort and accuracy are slightly more important than doing it by the textbook.

We're going to give you the basics for performing the jump serve, but remember, this serve takes a lot of practice to perfect. This description is intended for a right-handed server.

- Start about 12 to 15 feet behind the end line. If you need more space due to your approach, move back to wherever it is comfortable.

- Take a stride forward with your left leg and on the second stride, throw the ball high in the air. Make sure it is far enough ahead of you to accommodate another step and forward jump. This is where the timing and coordination come in handy.

- You take a third step with your left foot and then plant your right foot just behind your left and jump toward the court. Make sure you do not step on the line.
• Make contact with the ball near the top of your jump, and when the ball begins to descend. Hit the ball top center and follow through towards the net.

• Your momentum should take you straight toward the net and not off to one side.

One of the most common problems with the jump serve is the wrong timing. And this can be a result of many errors when trying the jump serve.
You need to know how high to toss the ball and how far in front of you to toss it as well. Here are a couple of tips that might help you.

• Don’t rush your serve. Take a deep breath and make each step deliberate. Once you train your body to do the jump serve it will become easier and easier each time.

• Stay balanced. Your consistency will suffer if you are out of control on the jump serve. Focus on what you are doing and each step of the service.

• You might want to try a one step approach to jump serving and be comfortable with how high you need to toss and how far ahead it needs to be. Then go with a two-step approach.

The jump serve was originally developed to have topspin, but more and more players are using it as a float serve. This gives them an advantage over the standard overhand float serve because they have a better angle to hit the ball. Most contact with the standard overhand serve is done below the top of the net, while the jump serve is done above the net. With a better angle, the server can strike the ball harder and on a downward trajectory and still have the float on it.

Many players find the floating serve to be more difficult to play, especially when it is struck with more power.

Still, the serve it used with topspin and it is a difficult serve to pass. When the ball drops toward the floor, it can take a hard dive with topspin and the player receiving that serve may not be prepared for it.
To put more topspin on the serve, just contact the ball above center and flop the wrist over — rather than snapping the ball to the ground. If you snap it, you could end up with a spike to the back of one of your teammate’s heads. That would not be good.

**Serving is important**

I cannot underscore this more. Even up to the college level, too many serves end up as side outs, without anyone even playing the ball. Every level of volleyball should make sure serves are an integral part of practices. Players should be able to serve 9 out of 10 over the net. Even better, they should be able to serve it to a certain area of the floor to take advantage of a weaker player on the floor.

**Blocking**

This is the quintessential defensive play in volleyball. A good blocking team can wreak havoc on an opposing offense. There is nothing more dejecting than the muffled sound of an attack being stuffed at the net.

The best blockers have a great sense of timing and they can read the players on the other side of the net. They watch their approaches and they can time the block to coincide with their contact of the ball. A good blocker is also able to see through the misdirection of a cross or a fake to be there when the hit gets put down.

Every good blocker knows that they don’t always have to stuff the opponent, either. A deflection that slows down a big hit can be just as effective as a full-blown block.

**Here is how to execute an effective block:**

- Raise your arms above your head with your fingers spread apart and your thumbs pointed toward the ceiling. The more surface area you can cover, the better chance you have of deflecting, or blocking the ball.
On the block, you can extend your arms over the net (it's called penetration). Make sure your hands are no more than a ball’s width apart and keep your arms locked at the elbows.

Jump straight up and down. On the block you should end up in the same spot that you jumped from. Keep your body square to the net. Balance and going up strong is a key to making a successful block.

‘Seal’ your hands to the net, which means that the ball should not be able to deflect off of your hands to your side of the net. This is a common mistake for inexperienced players. Blocking too far away from the net will result in your team not being able to get to the ball when it hits the net.

You should also always try to seal the block to the inside of the court. If the ball is wiped off the block and your hands are aimed to the outside of the court it will deflect out of bounds and cost you a side out. Whenever possible, make sure your hands are directed toward the inside of the court.

Here are some key tips for blockers as they watch the opposing team’s hitters:

- When you see a hitter’s shoulders turn towards a target, get your hands in front of that direction. Very few, if any, hitters can direct their shoulders one-way, and hit it effectively another.

- Watch their angle of approach. You can often tell the most likely direction of the hit just by the approach.

Always try to point the palm of your hands towards the inside of the court.

Any deflected ball has a better chance of hitting in the court, rather than out of bounds.
• The hitter’s hand can also be a valuable telltale sign of where the ball is going to be hit. When you see the hand turn when it is cocked, get your hands over to that area.

• The eyes are probably one of the best ways to tell where a hitter is going to try and place their ball. They will be looking to see where there might be a hole in the defense, and this could be a giveaway for the blockers.

• Finally, to get a jump on where to set the block, watch the setter’s hands. It should give you a good indication of where the ball is going to end up on the attack.

You will likely set the block off of your middle player, as they should be able to identify where the attack is coming from because they should be fronting the opposition hitters, except when they are on defense.

Always remember that you can hit the ball again after the block. The block is not considered a contact on the part of either team.

**Here is a drill that is going to help your blockers try and read the play.**

Since they will likely be at the net, they will not be able to see anything that is going on behind them.

• Have three hitters lined up across from the blockers, playing what would be the three regular hitting positions.

• The blockers will be at the net in the ready blocking position (hands up and ready to jump) and the coach will be behind them. The coach will point at one of the hitters, at which time that hitter will begin their approach to the net.

• The blockers need to shuffle over to where the hitter is approaching the net to set the block.
• Have the blockers return to the center of the net before the coach points to another hitter, and then they must shuffle to that area to set the block.

This will help blockers react to the approach by the hitter as a clue to where the ball is going to be hit. To make this drill simulate more of a game-like scenario, add the setter in so the setter can make the decision who he or she is setting to, and the blockers can begin to learn reading the setter to get an indication of where the ball is going to go on the attack.

**Coaches –** You need to watch to make sure that your players aren’t trying to step up and make the block. This could carry them into the net and a violation could be called.

You have also got to reiterate to the players that their arms need to be as close to the net as possible. They are going to have to jump straight up at the net and create a seal with their arms and hands. Also watch to make sure a player’s hands are pointed toward the inside of the court.

**Other volleyball skills**

It’s not always about bumps, sets and spikes. There are many dynamic plays that happen in volleyball that are equally spectacular to big hit or a great block.

**The dig**

This play always makes the fans cheer and the players on the bench give you a slap on the back during a stoppage in play. And inside there is no better feeling for the player when they have sucked a ball up from the depths after the opposition’s best hitter just hammered one to the floor.
Is there any way to make a player better on digs? Sure there is, but a lot of it is mental. And by mental, I mean you have to be willing to risk getting the ball off the chin, the cheek or the chest in order to save the team a point. You have to convince yourself that you are not afraid of the ball coming at 30 or 40 miles per hour. Believe me, I have seen many higher level players turn their heads hoping not to get hit and missing the dig.

The mental aspect is the biggest aspect, but once you get over standing in front of the ball, you shouldn’t have much problem at all.

- First you will need to be able to read where the hitter is going to hit the ball. Any edge you can get in position is going to help you be a better digger.

- Get low. The ball is going to be coming in quick and probably at a trajectory that is going to make it tough to get under. Get as low as you can, but bend at the knees.

- Be prepared with your hands already locked and ready to pass the ball.

- When the ball comes, resist the urge to swing your arms to lift the ball in the air.

When the ball does come the force of the hit will be enough to send the ball in the air enough for your players to get to the second hit.

You can be a better digger with practice, too. Learning to read where the ball is going to go and getting under the ball are both things you can do during practice. But, try getting past standing in front of a speeding ball before anything else.

**Tipping the volleyball**

This play is borne of a little bit of misdirection, when the opposing team is ready for a big hit, they get a dink and dunk move instead.
The tip is a move that is used when a hitter sees that the block might be set and there is a spot just over the net where a defender may not be able to get to right away. It is a great change of pace when a team is expecting you to keep slamming away at their blockers.

Tips are also a last resort on offense when a set is too close to the net or a player’s approach timing is off. It is still a good offensive play at any point during a game.

How do you execute the tip, here’s a basic idea of what you should do:

- When you jump up during your approach and you decide to tip the ball rather than hit, keep your hand rigid. If you try and flip the ball rather than directing it with your fingers, you will be called for a held ball.

- Poke at the ball rather than trying to sweep at it. Again, if you sweep at the ball and it goes off the back of your fingers, you could be called for a held ball.

- When in doubt, tip the ball with a closed fist. This is a legal play at any time in volleyball, and once you learn to finesse the ball with your fist, you may never have to worry about using your fingertips, and therefore worrying about held balls.

Here is the key to placing a good tip:

- Disguise the tip as a hit. Cock your arm back if you have to and then poke at the ball with your fingertips.

- Try and direct it to a place where the tip coverage might not expect. Usually a tough place to cover is crosscourt and short.

- Try tipping the ball just over the block. The setter is usually going to cover the crosscourt tip where there are no other players on defense.
Here is a good drill to help your hitters with tipping the ball:

- The coach will stand in the middle, right in front of the net to toss the ball up for his hitters. On the other side there is two blockers and one person covering the tips.

- When the hitter approaches he or she has one of two options -- they can hit the ball into the block; or they can tip the ball. The hitters need to recognize where to place the ball and when it is a good idea to tip.

- They also need to be aware of where the tip coverage is. The hitter can tip the ball crosscourt, or just over the block. In order to be effective in this drill, the hitter needs to be able to look forward and tell where the blockers are, and where the tip coverage is.

Skills, skills and more skills

We’ve covered a lot of ground here in this chapter, and given you the basics of most of the fundamental actions in volleyball. There’s plenty more where this came from, and later on in the book we are going to get into more advanced skills for hitters and defenders.

Continue to remind yourself of one thing – practice. If there is a second thing to remind yourself, it is – learn the basics. You won’t be able to execute the more advanced moves and tactics if you haven’t mastered the basics.

The ultimate goal is to give you the skills you need to raise the level of your game to where you can be noticed by collegiate, national team or professional scouts. But, they won’t even take a second look at you if you can’t consistently pass, set or hit the ball. It helps to be able to dig the ball, and throw in the odd well-placed tip.

In the next chapter we are going to delve into the different types of hits, the different defensive and offensive formations and we’re going to take a look at some of the most current volleyball tactics.
Volleyball strategy

Any time you can cause confusion in your opponents, you are going to have a better chance scoring the side out. So different offenses can keep the opposition guessing. Coaches are always trying to come up with ways to outsmart the block and trick the tip cover.

We’ve got a few different ideas that coaches and players can use to find an edge over their opponents. Starting with a basic numbering system for hitting, we’ll get to offensive formations, misdirection plays, quick hits and back row hits and we will also tackle defensive formations and responsibilities.

Hitting

We’ve covered how to hit the ball, but we haven’t gotten into many of the game situations and some of the different offensive sets that a team can have, so we’ll dive right in and find out what they are all about.

Numbering system for hitting

Although this entirely depends on how intricate your offense is, there is a basic number system for planning your hits. It is based on a place at the net and the height of the ball. Teams will vary the way this system is employed on the floor, but there is a universal system
that many teams use. What this means is that once you learn this system, the one that is used on your team may not use the same numbers, but it will mean the same thing.

A five

Some teams will even go as high as a seven, but for our purposes we will stick with a five. The ‘five’ is a set that is high and to either of the outside positions. When a five is called out, the power hitter and the off side hitter should have been backed up to the attack line and waiting for the five.

The problem with the five is that it is easy for the opposing team’s blockers to get into position to stuff the hit. It takes a long time to get the ball to the hitter, and in that time your opponent is probably going to be able to get two and maybe three blockers to the hit.

When the five is set back, naturally it is called the ‘back five.’ This might be one way to get some misdirection, because most teams will try and play off the setter. Like we mentioned in the blocking section, and the setting section, the setter should be facing their target more often than not and you can watch their hands to see which way they are headed.

A three

As you can well expect, the three has a little lower arc and takes less time to get to the point of attack. Obviously this allows the hitter a better chance to beat the block because they may not be able to mobilize on time.

This is probably the most common type of set, because it works well with the natural timing of the hitter. Unlike the five, the hitter isn’t waiting for the ball to get to their spot and they can attack quicker.

This set has its obvious advantages, but because the timing is a lot quicker than a five, this places more importance on the set itself. For a five, the hitter has some time to adjust to where the ball is going, so there isn’t as much of an emphasis on getting the perfect set.
With a three, once the setter touches the ball, the hitter is starting into their approach. The hitter’s angle is selected and their motion has already begun. It is now even more important for the setter to get the ball to the right place. It takes practice and learning the timing of your players.

What makes this hit so common is its effectiveness against blocking and it is usually closer to the net. Blockers don’t have as much time to react as they do on a five, and also it still affords the hitter time to decide whether they want to hit the ball down the line or go crosscourt.

Just like the five, you can also call a ‘back three.’

The two

This one requires great timing on the part of the setter and the hitter. They have to be in sync for this hit to be effective. The two is placed about 18 inches to 2 feet above the net and is considered one of the two types of quick hits.

When the setter releases the ball, the hitter should already be jumping. The hitter and the ball are expected to reach their apex at the same time so the ball can be driven downward while both are at their maximum height.

The advantages to this hit are obvious. If executed properly, this hit allows the blockers very little time to react and therefore makes it a very successful attack. Of course, in the heat of the action, unless this hit has been rehearsed many times by the setter and the hitter, there can be communication and timing problems. The key to this hit is practice.

The number one or the true ‘quick hit’

This is one of the most exciting hits in all of volleyball, because when it is executed effectively, it is the epitome of teamwork and timing. It is an impressive hit to watch and to learn.
As we have mentioned, the key to the quick hit is timing and making sure the ball is placed in exactly the right spot. This is a hit that has to be planned between the players, but the motion of the quick hit is a great misdirection and can throw blockers off.

When the setter has released the ball, the hitter will already be in the air. The ball is set no more than 12 to 18 inches above the net. The ball should reach its apex when the player has just begun the descent. This allows the player to use their body, their arm and gravity to drive the ball toward the floor. It is usually the most direct hit to the floor, often coming down inside the attack line.

**The shooter**

This is another set that isn’t in the number system but is common for quick attacks. It is also used for quick crosses and with fakes. The shooter is exactly that – a quick shot across the court to a hitter who is already in the approach.

I would consider it like a long distance quick hit, because the ball doesn’t come too far above the net, and the attacker is usually airborne when the ball reaches the attack area.

Timing between the hitter and the setter are imperative for this hit. If practiced and perfected this can be an extremely effective attack, because the blockers have virtually no chance of setting up.

**The Back Row hit**

This hit has become increasingly popular, especially in situations where a team’s power is in the backcourt. To integrate it into the number system we have described, this hit is typically called the ten, because it happens at the attack line or the ‘ten foot line.’

This action on this is similar to that of a jump serve – except the setter is putting the ball in the air, the player isn’t tossing it.

This type of attack is advantageous against a team that may have a weak backcourt, or the players in their backcourt are weaker passers than those players in the frontcourt. When the ball is hit it usually
goes over blockers hands and into the backcourt. Having the ball in the backcourt also offers the hitter an opportunity to aim where he or she wants the hit to go.

**Signals**

Most team will develop a set of hand signals to use to communicate on the court without letting the other team know what they are up to. There is no set way to come up with hand signals except that they should be easy for all team members to understand.

On serve reception, the front row setter will likely be at the net, and with their back to the rest of the team they will flash the signal behind their back. Often times this signal will indicate either a set play, or it will be a number to tell hitters what set (see numbering system) they can expect.

Other teams will have plays set up verbally, but once a team catches on to the lingo, they can figure the plays out and have the block set up before the hitter is even ready to attack.

Here is a basic system for hand signals that you can use:

- Number the front row players and one back row player. Use this number ahead of the set number (numbering system) to indicate who is getting the ball. For example, if you number your middle player ‘five’ and you want a quick hit or a ‘one’ then the numbers you would flash behind your back would be a five and one.

- A simple one to remember is a cross. Simply cross the fingers. Then add the number system. For example: Cross 3-3. This means the three player (power, let’s say) will cross with the middle and hit a three in the middle of the court. If it were a Cross 5-3, then the middle would cross with the power and hit the ball from the outside.

- Because players can move about where they want in the front row, I would suggest keeping the same name or number for the positions. Some teams use letters, some use
numbers, but whatever the case, they should be kept the same.

- If you want your power hitter to hit a shoot set, then the setter should call a 3-2. This will tell the hitter where on the net the ball is going to be, and if the setter takes the ball at midcourt, then they will shoot the set out to the outside.

As you can see, there are ways of devising a signal calling system for your team. Some teams even go as far as having a series of set plays called. Other teams will have five or seven standard plays, and the setter uses the fingers behind the back to let the team know what play it is going to be.

Whatever the system, make sure it is consistent and ensure that all of the players know and understand it.

**Coaches** – It may be tempting just to spend time with your top players on learning the team’s offensive system, but this is a coaching mistake. At some point the players on your bench are going to play an integral part on your team. They may be freshman or sophomore players who haven’t seen the floor yet this season, but at some point they will. Neglecting them now may be troublesome down the road when you have to insert them into the game during the state or provincial tournament. Make sure everyone knows the system – except for the other teams.

**Volleyball formations**

Since the beginning of time, the game of volleyball was just simply made up of the bump, set and spike. In time the game has evolved to include a set of rules that allows certain players to do certain things on the court.

This has led to the design of formations for teams to use to almost ‘take advantage’ of the current rules and offer themselves the best opportunity to utilize the players they have. We are going to take a look at the basic formations teams use and the pros and cons of each.
The 4-2

The 4-2 is probably the most basic offense that has two setters and four hitters. The two setters are usually opposite from one another in the rotation, because the team needs to make sure they have a setter in the front row at all times.

This is basic because everyone just continues through the rotation, and you will end up with two hitters in the front row – the power and the off side hitter. Sometimes teams will move one player into the middle.

Pros
- Easy to teach
- Has two setters so someone is always in position
- Not a complicated hitting system
- Three blockers in front row / Three backcourt players

Cons
- Only two hitters
- Hitters have to get used to styles and timing of two setters
- Must have good setter communication
- Easy for blockers to read

The 6-2

This is becoming probably the most popular offense, but really it is nothing more than a variation of the 4-2. In this offense, you still have two setters, but the setting responsibility lies with the back row setter. This allows the front row setter to become a third hitter and also act as the third blocker. It is important to note that the back row setter cannot engage in any above the net action – i.e. they cannot hit or block, unless they are behind the attack line.

Pros
- Three hitters
- Three blockers
- Far more options on offense – crosses, quick hits, etc.
- Back row setter also covers tips
Cons

- Two people left in the backcourt to cover attacks
- Chance of back row setter blocking or hitting the ball
- Lots of players up front
- Could be miscommunication between setters

The key to the 6-2 is making sure that each player understands the responsibility in the front and backcourt.

The 5-1

This is a little bit of a hybrid of the 4-2 and the 6-2. You have probably already noticed the second number refers to the number of setters that are on the floor. That’s exactly what is happening in this offense – there is only one setter among the six players. This is usually an offense that a team takes on because they don’t have any other exceptional setters. Basically, in this offense, the setter is required to set for everything, anywhere, anytime.

Pros

- Only one setter – players can adjust to one way of setting
- You still have the advantage of three hitters when the setter is in the back row.
- No confusion over who is setting the ball

Cons

- Three hitters when the setter is in the back row, only two when he or she is in the front row.
- Leaves two people for serve reception. If setter is the passer, then they cannot be the setter.
- Setter must be quick and in great shape – it’s an awful lot of running.

Each of these systems has their advantages and disadvantages, but for the most part the situation will dictate which one you use. It is probably a good idea to use the 4-2 with a team that is young. It is not complicated, and it might help develop more than one setter.
The 6-2 is probably going to be more complicated, but it also offers teams the most options. The 5-1 is a decent offense that offers the best of both worlds, but puts the setting duties on the shoulders of one person.

These are the basic offenses that are used, right from junior high to international levels. There are variations and options with each of them, but most offensive systems are derived from the above mention offenses.

**Service reception**

You may think that it is simple enough to just move everybody back to wait for the ball to be served over the net. Well, that sounds like what you are supposed to do, but it might not always help your offensive situation. Plus, whether most teams or players believe it or not, there are some players that are better at passing the ball than others. So you need to try and maximize the opportunity for your best passers to get the ball.

**W plus 1**

With this reception system, you have everyone except the setter back in a ‘W’. The setter stays at the net, the front row players cover just behind the attack line, along the sidelines. The corner back row players will cover deep and the middle back row player will cover short serves. If you are playing with a back row setter, the front row player and the setter will have to meet in the middle until the serve and then the setter can move to the front. Even though the front row player is taking a back row position on the serve reception, they are allowed to hit.
Cup

This is a variation of the W plus 1, with the two outside front row players patrolling the attack line and the back row corners split the court in two. The middle hitter will be headed up toward the net, getting ready for a quick hit.

Three receivers

This is a pretty simple serve reception, with the back row players handling serve reception and the front row players preparing for attack.

Two receivers

If you can count on your two back row corners players to split the court alone, then this reception will work for you. What this allows is for your team to go straight to the attack with three hitters ready to go. The only problem is, there will be a lot of open court for the server to aim at. If they are a particularly good server, and can serve it consistently to the middle back of the court, it could, cause problems for your serve receivers.

Defensive formations

Defensive formations may be a little bit of a misnomer, really because it is more about defensive responsibilities than anything else. The responsibility ends up changing with where a player is in the rotation.

There are variations and adaptations of all of these formations, but these are the basic ones that teams use.

Flat back 3

This is about as simple as the 4-2 offense, because it simply relies on players covering the position they are already in. This means that the back three players are responsible for covering the back half of the court. Actually, it ends up being more than just the back half of the court, because often times the blockers aren’t able to recover if the
ball is tipped and that forces the back three to creep up to help cover short plays. When this happens, it leaves a team vulnerable in the backcourt. That is why coaches developed the other two defenses.

6-up

The player that is in the six position moves up to the attack line and covers tips and any short dinks that end up within this area. This leaves two players back to cover deep plays by the oppositions, but forces the six player to cover the entire front half of the court by themselves.

6-back

The 6-back is virtually the opposite of the 6-up. In this case, the six player covers the entire backcourt, usually staying near the service line. The back row corner players move up to the attack line to cover tips and any other short plays.

This allows for coverage in the back of the court, and it covers the tips well. One disadvantage is making sure the back row player is in position to retrieve whatever ball comes to the backcourt. It could be difficult for the 6-back player to get to all the balls in the back.

Advanced tactics

Every team likes to throw a monkey wrench into things once in a while, and we have a few more advanced plays that teams can use in their game play. They take a tremendous amount of practice, but if they are mastered, they will stump even the best blocking team.

Tandem hits

This is an attack that brings two players together to the same side of the setter and approaching the net at roughly the same time. For example: If the middle hitter and the power hitter are at the attack line and both approach the net when the setter sets the ball, the blockers on the other team aren’t going to know which person the ball
is going to. One time the setter could give a two to the middle, the next time a three to the power.

**Cross or Crossover**

This is a play where the players cross each other and take on the hitting position of the other. Very similar to the tandem hit, only the players cross. For example: the setter is facing the power side and a cross has been called. The power hitter will cross in front of the middle hitter and the middle crosses behind. Each player approaches the net at an angle and goes through the hitting motion.

The setter then has the option of going to either player for the hit, or even better yet, the setter goes away from the cross and goes to the off side.

**The Piston**

This is a play where two players attack the exact same spot on the net, with one just behind the other. For example: The power and the middle begin their approach one behind the other. The setter has the option of hitting the early man on the 2 or 3 hit, or the late hitter following in behind.

What this offers the hitting team is an opportunity to beat the blockers by having them try to guess which player is going to hit the ball. They may go up when the first player arrives at the net, and then the block goes down when the second player hits the ball. Or, conversely they could wait until the second hitter and not have the block set up at all when the first player hammers the ball at them.

**The Slide**

This is my personal favorite because it takes the most athleticism on the part of the hitter and the setter, and it is pretty to watch. On this one, the hitter takes an angle of approach where he strides directly back toward the setter, somewhat like a cross (you can add this element). Instead of jumping in front of the setter, the hitter takes one more stride behind the setter and hits the ball from behind.
Most blockers will expect the hitter to finish the cross, and instead they go behind the setter. The blockers have set up in the front, and there is nobody from behind.

Those are the most common advanced attacks that are used, but many coaches have devised variations or combinations. For example: the middle crosses in front of the power and the power looks like he is going to take the cross, but takes one more stride behind the setter for the slide. There are lots of opportunities to make brilliant plays.

**The Libero**

The libero is a unique new position that gives team the opportunity to beef up their backcourt defense. It is a player who can be substituted limitlessly into the lineup, usually at the number five spot in the rotation.

The libero is a defensive specialist – someone who is great at getting quality passes up to the setters. They are put in when a back row middle player is not the player you want in the line up for defense.

Here are times when you use the libero:

- For better service reception
- To rest top players
- Improve backcourt defense
- At a point in the game where hanging on to the lead is most important

With the libero being a new position, the actual tactical possibilities haven’t been explored. As with all of the different hitting tactics we have shown you, this position will probably have tremendous possibilities down the road.
The swing offense

This is supposed to be the latest and greatest new offense for collegiate and international play. It is intricate, but it can be indefensible if it is executed correctly.

What happens on the court is completely different with the swing offense than with any other offensive system. The swing offense has attacking players coming from the center of the court, rather than from their positions outside. With the setter near the net, the three front row hitters line up in the middle of the court. Immediately, this makes it difficult for the opposition to identify which players are going to certain positions on the floor.

Once the ball is served, the backcourt players put the ball up to the setter like any typical reception. From here the options are limitless. The two front players can cross in front of the back player for a variation of the cross, or the middle player can go one way, and the front and back player can do a piston hit in the other direction.

As with most other hitting tactics, the object of this is to create misdirection and confusion among the blockers. There is one down side to this that I can see. Unless you have a team of players that are right on the ball and into the game, you could end up with rotation calls coming down from the official.

Coaches – Using these advanced tactics will improve your game and probably result in more wins – only if you can execute them correctly. I think it is far more important to teach your team to attack correctly with the basic attacks, than trying to include some of these new more intricate attacks. Once the basics are achieved, then your team is ready to handle the advanced attacks.

Choosing the system – Coaches, you will have to take stock of the players you have and make a decision what offensive formation is going to be best for you.

With two good setters, you could go with the 4-2 or the 6-2. If the setters are shorter you would want to go with the 4-2. If your setters
are on the tall side, you would be smart to use their height as an extra attacker and go with the 6-2 offense.

If you don’t have the luxury of having two good setters, you could be relegated to a 5-1 – which isn’t bad. This still affords you three hitters when the setter is in the backcourt, and the hitters only have to get used to one player.

Whatever the system, make sure the players understand their responsibilities and they are able to carry out their roles. Putting players in a position to succeed is the best way to get the most out of them.
Advancing your volleyball skills

Let’s get this straight right off the bat. There is no substitute for hard work. I know it is a cliché, but it is the truth. I don’t know of any player in any sport that has had an easy ride to the top. If you want to be one of the best, you have to develop the best work habits.

That’s where you start. Where you go next is practice. You need to practice your skills, basic and advanced skills all of the time. Sitting around during practice waiting for your time to show off is not the way to get to the top of the sport. Try practicing your approach on an imaginary net. Bat the volleyball against the wall, or just shuffle along the net jumping at each position (power, middle and off side) practicing your blocking technique.

I am going to offer you a little bit more. Along with practice tips, and drills and some ways to improve your technique, I will include some of the top tips from coaches on how you can polish your game and get a chance at making a collegiate, national or professional team.

Improving your technique

For now we’ll bypass the drill sergeant aspect of this chapter and get straight to the good stuff. So, you want to know how to add a bit more power to your hit, or make your sets more accurate. I’m going to give you a few minor technical tips that are going to make a major difference.

These are by no means miracle improvements. They are simply improvements that would be made in your game had you reached the higher levels without them.
Hitting

The question asked most often in volleyball is, “How can I hit harder?” Well, we’ve already gone through the basics – and frankly once you master those, your natural power should take over. But there are a couple of things you can do to enhance the power and improve your overall hitting now.

- **Bend at the waist** – When you approach the net, you should jump with a slight arch in your back, cock your arm and then follow through on the ball. When you follow through, snap forward at the waist. This principle is similar to golf, where a player gets the most power from your hips and your abdomen. A snap at the waist increases the speed at which your hand contacts the ball.

- **Weight train** – We’ll get more into this in the next chapter, but there is no substitute for strength than working to get stronger.

**Here are some other tips:**

- **Learn to wipe** – Getting more comfortable with hitting will afford you the ability to slow things down and take a look around the court. One of the most important things to identify is where the block is. If you can learn to identify the blockers and then learn to ‘wipe’ the ball off the block, instead of hit it directly into the block, you are going to score a lot more side outs.
- Tip – Here’s a tip – learn to tip. If you can learn to temper some of your big hits with a few little dinks and dunks, you might draw one of the blockers away to cover tips. This could leave you with only two blockers to hit through.

- Pick a target – This goes with your ability to wipe the ball, but in identifying where the blockers are, you need to find out where the backcourt defenders are. You have to be able to choose whether you want to go crosscourt or down the line and you need to be able to do it on a moment’s notice.

- Hit the first one down the line – I picked up this tip on one website and it is a good one. You can increase your overall success hitting simply by placing the first hit of your match down the line. Most blockers are trained to take away the crosscourt attack first. If you hit it down the line it will make them realize you can and will hit it there when you can. This could pry them from the crosscourt block, so then you can go there. If they don’t respect you hitting the ball down the line, keep doing it.

Passing

Other than getting in front of everything, there aren’t too many other tips to give players. We’ve dug around to find some tidbits that we could give you when it comes to passing the ball.

- Move your feet – You will never be able to get into good position (the most important aspect of passing) if you have your feet in cement. Crack the blocks on your feet and stop being lazy. Move your feet in order to get into position and you won’t let anything past you without a fight.
• **Anticipate** – Don’t anticipate to the point of just guessing where a team is going to hit the ball. Read the play and the players. Find out whom their big hitter is and where he or she likes to hit. It may be anticipation, but it’s better to be educated anticipation, than just a guess.

• **Shrug for control** – When you contact the ball, shrug your shoulders, bringing them as close to your ears as possible. This will help you maintain a good tabletop by keeping your elbows locked as you rise through the ball. The flat top of your forearms ensures that your ball will be under control.

**Setting**

Just like passing, there are few tips you can give to make you a better setter. But, I’ve looked because we know you are looking for that edge when it comes to getting a leg up on the competition. I’ve come up with a few things that could help separate you from the pack.

• **High contact** – We described that setters need to contact the ball about 6 to 10 inches above their forehead, when we went through technique. This is crucial to get the best possible timing for your hitters – especially middle hitters.

• **Don’t bend the wrists** – Strong contact with the ball is important. If you bend the wrists to cushion the ball, and in the meantime drop your hands, you will get far more held ball violations than if you keep your wrists strong.

*It’s practice time*

OK, we’ve given you some time to rest and just read about a few of the ways you can improve your skills and techniques on the court. The only way to make those moves better is to practice. In
this section we are going to give you (and your coaches) some ideas to help you perfect your skills on the court.

**Hitting Drills**

**React in the air** – This is a good drill to teach players how to read the opposing defense and react to what is going on. The hitter tosses the ball to the setter and when the ball is in the air and the player has started their approach, the coach will call out where he or she wants the ball to go. This will help the player to react in the air when they see a blocker. They will be able to adapt to the block by hitting down the line, crosscourt, or tipping.

Add a blocker to this one to make it more game-like.

**Tactic teaching** – This drill will allow your attackers to develop their advanced attack skills without being in a game, or even a game simulated situation. It is a graduated process, where you start off slow and work your way to full speed.

Whichever tactic you want to teach (tandem, cross, slide) you walk through it. Do it at ¼ speed rather than half or ¾ speed. Walk through, get the footwork down and then increase the speed.

Once the attackers understand where they are going, increase to half speed and add the approach. Go to ¾ speed and add the setter, the set and a jump. Then go to full speed. By allowing the players to ‘get up to speed,’ you will be ensuring they understand not only the theory behind the attack, but the proper execution.

**Passing drills**

**Shuffle and dig** – Two players work together on this one to teach players to get into proper position when the ball isn’t coming straight at them. One player is in the ready position and the other player has the ball. The player tosses the ball three of four feet to the left or right of the receiving player.

The receiving player should be able to shuffle and get in front of the ball. They should be low to the ground with their feet shoulder width
apart and the knees bent. The behind should be dropped to knee level and the arms should be just above, or between the knees to receive the ball.

**Toss and pass**

This is a simple drill that should be done with any level just to get the technique of using your legs to lift through the ball rather than using your arms. The player receiving the ball should be in the ready position. The other player tosses the ball to the receiver and they should be prepared to lift their legs by straightening their knees.

Seems like a simple drill – and it is. But, arm swing is probably the most common killer of good passes. This will reinforce at all levels the importance of using your whole body to lift through the pass.

**Dig Drill**

This is a variation of the shuffle and dig drill, and can be initiated by the coach. Sometimes it is done as a warm up before a match. The coach hits the ball at a waiting player and gets them to pass to a player standing right beside the coach. Every once in a while the coach will dink or cut the ball short so the player has to dig the ball short.

Once again, coaches should be watching that players are prepared for the ball and that they have the proper technique.

**Setting drills**

**Sit and set**

This drill doesn’t allow players to use their legs for power on their sets, and it forces the setters to learn to hit a target. With your setters starting off at around 8 to 10 feet apart, they should sit cross-legged facing each other.

From here the player have to set to each other with the set having enough power to get above the net, but with the accuracy and touch so their partner does not have to move to get the ball.
This is a tough drill because many setters use their legs to help their direction on a set, which is fine, but can be a detriment if they need to kneel underneath a low pass. It builds strength and helps teach accuracy and touch on a set.

**Crosscourt sets**

Players need to learn to be able to set across the court just as they need to learn to set short balls. This drill will give them the feel they need for the long distance sets, so they can develop the touch for shorter sets.

Two setters stand on opposite sides of the attack line on their side of the court. They should set the ball high and across the court to the other setter and keep doing this back and forth until their arms tire. This teaches the setter the strength it takes to get the ball across to the other side on a ‘five’ set. It will also show them the touch they need to provide their hitters a nice number three as well.

**Blocking drills**

**The Joust**

This takes its name from a particular occurrence that happens in volleyball, where blockers on both teams go up to play a ball that is in no man’s land. Both sets of blockers are going to try and push the ball down to the floor.

Try this in a practice to help your players get used to fighting, or jousting for the ball. The coach can stand on the referee’s platform and tosses the ball to two players who are on opposite sides of the net. The players fight to get the ball to the floor.

This will teach players to get up to the ball, and if they have the opportunity, to put it to the floor.
High tens

Players should pair up and face each other on either side of the net. They need to raise their arms in the ready position and then jump up and touch hands. They have to do this without touching the net. They must jump in the same spot and not drift into the net.

This drill will not only help the players develop a bit of net perception, but it is a good conditioning drill that will help them develop their legs muscles to prepare them to possibly jump several times in a row to set up the block.

There are literally hundreds of drills that coaches can have their players do, and they can probably make up that many more. For any coaches who need more drills or exercises for their players, the Internet has a wealth of information that can help you get the most out of your team. To save you surfing around for the right sites, I have included some fantastic resources at the end of this book for you.
Training and Conditioning

We’re going to spend some time helping you to get in the proper shape for volleyball. Not only by running laps, but how to get your shoulders, legs and waist prepped for the season, some weight training ideas, and if I dig hard enough, I think I have some pointers on how you can improve your vertical.

Every athlete needs to spend some time conditioning in order to get through an entire grueling game. The best athletes are still able to summon the strength and speed in their bodies even after four straight 26-24 sets.

Weight training

Most volleyball players probably dread the word ‘weights.’ While there is no need to pump yourself up, you can build your strength and improve your vertical or the power on your hit. It isn’t necessarily about building up bulk on your body, but rather getting your muscles in the prime condition for performance.

There are three main areas that a volleyball player should be focused on for weight training – the legs, the abdomen, and the upper body (arms, shoulders and chest).

The legs

Again, there is really no need to be leg pressing three or four hundred pounds to build leg strength. The way to build strength in the legs is by increasing their stamina and the explosion in the muscles. The way to do this is by doing quick burst lifts with not much more than the weight of your body. Since you aren’t trying to lift anymore than
your own body weight, what’s the sense of lifting any more than that? The other key is to do as many quick burst lifts as you can. Put them into sets of 10 to 12 at a time. Start off with less weight, but the same amount of repetitions.

The reason behind doing quick burst exercises is to develop the quick twitch muscles in your body. When you train your muscles to explode when you need them, they are going to do exactly that – explode when you need them. It will help you with your jumping height and power.

Here is a list of exercises you can do to build your legs:

- Squats
- Leg curls and leg press
- Calf raises

**Abdomen**

To many trainers, the abdomen is the core of the human body. To build strength in the core of the body is to build stability and overall strength in the entire body. Core training is the type of training that many elite athletes use in many different sports, including swimming, cycling, basketball and others. It stabilizes your trunk and your spine, keeping your body in tiptop condition.

Work on the abdomen muscles helps ever aspect of your volleyball game. When you build the stomach, hip and lower back muscles you will improve the power on your hits, your sturdiness on blocks, and steadiness on the floor.

The muscles in the abdomen should be worked regularly and probably more than any other muscles in the body. When the core is strong it enhances and improve other elements of strength training. With core training, your leg workout is going to be more effective because it is drawing on power from the body’s midsection.
How do you work the abdomen? Anything exercise that you know that works the stomach muscles, to start. Sit-ups, crunches, side-ups, etc.

Here are some other ways to work the abdomen to increase the strength of your core.

**Body balancing**

Ever seen one of those exercise balls? Make it your training friend. Try stepping on top and balancing yourself for an extended period of time. Immediately your core muscles are put to work trying to stabilize your body on the ball. It’s tough, and even though you might not think you are getting a workout, you will feel the burn the next day.

When you get comfortable with your balance on the ball, take a set of light (5 lbs) weights on and do arm curls. This will immediately give a new dimension to your ab-workout because you have more weight, and you are adding an action.

**Improve your posture**

Once you make a concerted effort to improve your posture, your body will work to make those muscles stronger. In making those muscles stronger you will be improving your core. Improving your core is going to continue to make your posture better. Sounds like a win-win to me.

As you can see, improving your abdomen area has nothing but positive benefits. You will perform better and feel better if you spend time improving the middle of your body. It will improve every aspect of your volleyball game, from the hits to the serves to the blocks and jumps.

**Upper body**

Obviously an improvement in your arm strength is going to result in an improved power in your spikes. But, like the leg training you don’t
want bulk. It will restrict the movement in your arm and possibly hinder the action you put on the volleyball.

Extended workouts that create stamina and burst in the arm are the type of exercises you are looking for. Also, you want to increase the strength of your shoulders to help with your power.

You can start by working your chest with bench press. Remember, more repetition with less weight is much better than trying to press 200 pounds. Even start with 40 pounds and do it 20 times, rather than pushing big weight.

You also need to train the quick burst muscles, so any weight training should be done in quick bursts rather than long drawn out period of trying to lift as much weight as possible.

You should also do an involved shoulder workout, utilizing all of the muscles in the upper arm and shoulder. Deltoid workouts, tricep and bicep workouts, and trapezium workouts are important. They all help in the proper function of your arm and shoulder.

Here are some weight training exercises that you can do:

- Bench press
- Full shoulder workout
- Arm curls
- Tricep curls
- Shoulder shrugs with free weights

Note to players: We have provided some ideas on the muscles groups to train, and some of the exercises you can do to improve these areas. However, we are not physical fitness experts and you should consult a physical fitness trainer to help design the appropriate program for you.

You may also want to consult a physician to make sure you are able to take on a weight-training program.
Cardiovascular training

This can really be summed up in one word – running. Actually, it can also include biking and swimming and other aerobic exercises. The main idea is to improve the strength of your heart and its ability to transfer oxygenated blood to your body.

The best players in the world are in the best condition. And condition doesn’t always mean that you can keep playing at a quick pace for long periods of time, though it helps. It also means being able to recover quickly from periods of extended physical activity.

Your vertical

For some of you, this may be anti-climatic, but it is the truth. If you want to increase the height of your jump, then do more jumping. The more often I throw a ball naturally the further I am going to be able to throw it in time. Repetition is going to help you build the muscle memory to increase the height of your jump. If you think about it, it makes sense. The muscles you need to jump are worked when you jump. So jump. And jump some more.

Here is a basketball drill you can do to help you improve your jumping, and your vertical.

- First, warm up your calves and ankles. This will put some strain on them and if they aren’t warmed up properly, you could suffer an injury.
- Start on your toes and bounce slightly up and down. Do this about five or six times and then do a deep knee bend and explode straight up. When you come down, start bouncing again and then bounce five or six times, then explode. Repeat until you are tired.
- This is jumping. You will get better… and higher.

Most of your strength will come from your hips, legs and core, so any work that you do in these areas is going to help you increase your vertical.
Stretching

I would be remiss if I didn’t mention in here that you should stretch before and after any workout – weight training or cardio. When you work your muscles, they build muscles mass. When they build muscles mass it puts a strain on your joints. In order to minimize this strain you need to stretch the muscles properly.

Imagine a large rubber band, just pulled out of the package. It is tight and cannot be stretched. If you immediately try and stretch the rubber band to its maximum, the rubber band is going to break. If you take the time to lightly stretch the rubber band before you try to get the maximum out of it, it will not break. In addition, you will likely be able to stretch it further than you could in the beginning, without damaging the rubber band at all.

Your body works the same as this. Make sure you stretch before and after every workout.

The skinny on training

Professional athletes all over the world train year round just to be able to compete at the elite level. If you want to be one of the elite athletes you will do something else besides eat greasy burgers and watch the latest cheesy soap opera on the tube. That’s right. You will take a bike ride, you will go for a jog or you will swim a couple of laps at the pool. That will simply keep you in decent shape to play.

If you want to excel, you will have to have a dedicated weight training and conditioning program that is going to help you improve your overall physical condition.

I have included some great resources at the end of this book to help you.
For the coaches

We’re going to do a short section here for coaches that is going to provide a few tips on getting the most out of your team, and how to deal with some typical challenges with players.

You are going to run into all sorts of situations: conflicting personalities, problems with attitude and work ethic, and worst of all, problems with parents.

So how do you deal with all of this and try to coach a championship team? It takes a special breed of person to do it effectively. You need patience, understanding, intensity and you need to gain the respect of your players.

Respect

Gaining respect from the players might be the most important thing to get, right from day one. Once you get the respect, most of the other situations will be easier. If they don’t respect you it might be difficult to get them to see your point of view.

Here is what I would suggest to gain the respect of your players:

- Treat all players fairly and the same
- Don’t verbally berate a player in front of the rest of the team
- Encourage players even when they make mistakes
- Construct – don’t destruct. It is far more beneficial to try and build someone up to take your criticism than it is to simply start telling why they are no good.
- Be firm and have expectations for the player. Make them aware of the expectations and have them strive to meet them.
- Be honest

Respect from players makes it easier to motivate and mediate.
Mediating disputes between players

No matter how close a team is, a coach is going to have to put out fires in the dressing room and on the court. Not everyone is going to like each other. Just don’t let obvious situations get out of hand. Here’s how to handle spats between players.

- You need to take the situation away from the court to begin with. Players will look to drag teammates into their squabble and it could make things more divisive.
- Hear both players and don’t take sides. Ask them for a solution. Once they agree on a solution give your support to the solution.
- Ask the players to ensure that this discussion goes no further and that they will agree to work together for the betterment of the team.

Motivation

I find there are two types of motivation – one to get a team excited and ready to win, and another to get them to get off their butts and to work hard. I think they work hand in hand and one plays off the other. If a team works hard, they will win. If they want to win, they will work hard.

Here are some ideas to help you motivate your team members:

- Set team goals that the whole team agrees on and the whole team works towards. No personal goals. Let the team members set those for themselves.
- Encourage - don’t yell. Yelling makes people feel worse and does exactly the opposite of motivate. Each time you encourage a player, they become more willing to work hard for you.
- Make sure they are aware of your expectations. Hold them to those expectations. The expectations should be reasonable but have to make them stretch as people and as players in order to meet them.
Don’t be afraid to let the players confide in you. You don’t have to have all of the answers, all the time. Sometimes they merely want someone to listen to them. By showing your support they are far more likely to play their hearts out for you than if you brush them off.

Dealing with problem players

It’s too bad, but there is usually a bad apple in every bunch. Someone who wants to go against the grain, who feels they aren’t being treated fairly, or one who just plain has a bad attitude.

Here’s a few tips to handle these handfuls:

- Your first defense against this player is to identify them during tryouts. If you don’t want the bad seed, don’t pick the bad seed. It doesn’t matter if you are in junior high school or the pros – players who have attitude problems are cancers that will do more harm than good.
- If they develop an attitude during the season due to something that has happened since tryouts, find out what it is. Help them find a solution.
- If the problem is team or sport related, like: not enough playing time, not getting the ball enough, etc, discuss it with them. Try to figure out with the player how the problem can be addressed.
- If the player is a problem that cannot be cured by discussing it with them, then use whatever tools you have at your disposal – benching, cutting playing time, suspension from team or even from school (high school, college).

Problem players need to be dealt with because otherwise they can spoil other teammates, or even the desire of a team itself. Often times the problem people have strong personalities that can sway weaker people one way or another. Don’t let this happen on your team.
Dealing with problem parents

I have to laugh when this happens because I wonder who is more immature – the parent or the player. Oddly enough, parents will complain about precisely the same things their children will – not enough playing time, not getting the ball, too much practice not enough play… etc. The one that gets me is, they tell you that you don’t know what you are doing. Yeesh!

I really don’t have any time for parents who do this. I will listen to the parents, but then they will listen to me. I will tell them exactly why their son or daughter doesn’t play as much as Mrs. Smith’s son or daughter. I do this diplomatically and in support of the player learning or improving their skills so they can see the floor more often. I put the ball directly in their court, or the court of their kids.

Here are some tips for dealing with problem parents:

- Listen first, talk later. Sometimes they have had a bad day and then they come out to see Jimmy or Susie play and they don’t play.
- Tell them diplomatically why their son or daughter doesn’t play as much as someone else.
- Be polite and tell them that you are the coach and ultimately the decision on these things rests solely on what you think is best for the team.
- Ask them if they would like the coaching job. (Nine times out of ten they will tell you they would, but they just don’t have the time).
- Ignore them. (My favorite)

Coaching isn’t always the most enviable position – there are a lot of forces at work, and many of them are working against you. But, with the right skills, you should be able to get past the bad and get to the good parts of coaching – the players, the game and winning.
What else is there?

Not much. We’ve tried to cover everything we could in this book without trying to get too involved in different systems and more intricate schemes and terminology. More than anything, this book was intended to provide you with a sound measure of the fundamentals of volleyball and then hopefully a bit more.

We could have spent literally hundreds of pages covering technical stuff that could have bored you to death. Instead, we decided we would give you a book that provided hands-on material that you could put to work right away to make you a better player.

Hopefully we have succeeded.

Best of luck in your volleyball!

Hayley Merrett
A – Z Library of Volleyball Terms

3-meter line – also known as the attack line

4-2
An offense with four hitters and two setters. The setters are setters when they are in the front row, and defenders when they are in the back row.

5-1
An offense with five hitters and one setter.

6-2
An offense with four hitters and two setters. The setters are hitters and blockers when they are in the front row, and setters when they are in the back row.

ace
A serve that hits the floor inbounds without being returned

angle
Cross-court.

antenna
A flexible rod that rises above the net to show the sideline boundary. The antenna is considered part of the net and is out of bounds.

assist
Awarded when a player passes, sets, or digs the ball to a teammate who attacks the ball for a kill.

attack
The attempt by one team to end the play by hitting the ball to the floor on the opponent's side.

attack angle
The direction of a hitter’s approach to a set ball and the imaginary path of the hit across the net if hit in the same line as the approach angle.

attack approach
The accelerating running movement of a hitter, usually involving three or four steps, to the point where the attacker jumps to hit the ball.
attacker
A player who attempts to hit a ball offensively with the purpose of terminating the play in his team's favor.

attack line
The three-metre line.

back row
The three players whose court position, according to the official scorekeeper, is near the baseline.

back set
A set delivered behind the setter.

back slide
A quick slide behind the setter.

backspin
The resulting movement of the ball when spin is imparted in the vertical plane in a backward direction, usually due to striking underneath the ball.

block
The combination of one, two, or three players jumping in front of the opposing hitter and contacting the spiked ball with the hands.

blocker(s)
The player(s) responsible for blocking the opponent's attack.

break
An abrupt change of direction in the attacker's approach.

break point
The spot where the attacker changes direction.

broad jump
A forward jump in the attacker's approach.

bump
Forearm pass

center line
The line that lies in the plane of the net and extends from sideline to sideline, dividing the court.

combination
An offensive play that includes two or more players who attack at the same time.

cross
A combination in which the path of one attacker crosses the path of another.
cross-court
An individual attack directed at an angle from one end of the offensive team's side of the net to the opposite side of the defensive team's court.

defensive system
A tactical formation of deploying players to positions to defend against an opponent's attack. An effective system deploys players in the areas most likely to be attacked and takes the strengths and weaknesses of the individual defenders into account.

dig
The act of retrieving an attacked ball close to the floor

dink
A tip

disappear
To position oneself behind a teammate so as to be hidden from the blocker's view.

dive
A defensive technique in which a player extends for a ball near the floor, causing both feet to leave the ground. The player contacts the ball with one or both arms and slides on the abdomen and thighs.

double block
A block formed by two players.

double contact
Contacting the ball twice in succession, or the ball contacts various parts of the body successively. Also known as a double hit.

down ball
An attack, neither a hard spike nor a free ball, usually made by a player with his feet on the floor, which the defense tries to field with its back-court players only.

dump
A ball that has been attacked by the setter on the second contact
five
A high, deep set to either sideline

floater
A serve that moves in an unpredictable path due to lack of spin.

floor defense
Any retrieval of an attacked ball that gets by the block.

follow
To move with, and then block, an attacker, often changing positions with another blocker in the process.

forearm pass
One of the six basic volleyball skills. It is a ball-handling skill that a player uses to legally contact the ball at a level below the waist using the forearms as the contact surface.

four
A shoot set that is attacked near the left sideline.

front
To position oneself, in order to block, in front of the attacker’s arm.

front-row
The three players whose court position, according to the official scorekeeper, is near the net.

front slide
A quick slide in front of the setter.

inside
Toward the center of the net.

inside the block
A ball that has been attacked in the crosscourt angle so that it passes by the block nearest the center of the court.

jump serve
A serve in which the player jumps and attacks the ball like they are spiking it.

jump set
A set executed while the setter is in the air.

lift
An illegal contact, resulting when the ball is in contact with the player for too long.

line shot
A straight-ahead, sideline attack.
Line up
The players’ serving order, which reflects their starting locations on the court.

load
To arrange the blockers so that the team's most effective blocker confronts the opponents' most effective attacker.

middle
Either the middle-front or middle-back player.

midline
An imaginary line drawn equidistant from the sidelines, that is, lengthwise, on the court; an imaginary line drawn vertically on the player's body that divides it into comparable left and right parts.

multiple-attack
An offense consisting of plays in which two or more players attack at different places on the net at different times.

off-speed shot
Any ball spiked with less than maximum force but with spin. vice-versa.

one
A low, quick set that is attacked either directly in front of, or behind, the setter.

one-footed slide
An approach to attack that includes a one-footed jump long the net.

open up
To step away from, and face, the ball's path in receiving serve.

opposite
Three positions away in the line-up; the player opposite the setter.

outside
Toward the sideline.

outside-in
Defending, either at the net or in the backcourt, from the sideline to the interior of the court.

overlap
A foul in which one player is out of position in relation to another player (defined by player's foot placement) when the ball is served. This results in an out of rotation call.
overhead pass
A ball-handling skill using both hands simultaneously to contact the ball above the head and direct it to the intended target - usually an attacker.

pancake
A one-handed defensive technique in which the player flattens his hand against the floor in order to save the ball from hitting the floor.

pass
The first contact of a served ball; a forearm pass.

pepper
A (usually) warm-up drill in which two players pass, set, and hit the ball back and forth.

perimeter
A backcourt defense in which four players arrange themselves near the boundaries of the court.

play
An attack with a planned fake, usually including two or more hitters.

post
The standard that supports the net.

pre-contact position
The floor location arrived at and the body positioning assumed before the ball arrives. The ready position.

push
To lengthen a set; an attack where the player pistons their arm rather than swinging, "pushing" the ball across the net; an illegal lift.

quick
A low, fast, inside set.

quick/shoot
A play that includes both a quick set and a shoot set.

quick slide
A quick attack that includes a two-footed takeoff and a broad jump along the net.

rally
One series of play, from the service until the ball is dead.
read
Watching the opposing players to see what they are going to do during a play. Beneficial for setting blocks and getting into position to defend attacks.

ready position
The flexed, yet comfortable posture a player assumes before moving to the point of contact.

reverse bump
A desperation ball-handling technique sometimes necessary but seldom encouraged. It occurs when a player brings the hands together in front of the face, elbows bent. The ball is contacted in front of the face on the back of the forearms.

rotate
To advance on position in the line-up; a backcourt defense in which the line defender moves near the block and the middle-back moves behind the line defender.

rotation
The players' locations on the court, according to the scorer.

seam
The mid-point between two players.

serve
One of the six basic skills, used to put the ball in play. It is the only skill controlled exclusively by one player.

serve receive
The tactical skill of directing the opponent's serve to the setter so that he or she can set. Forearm passing is the most common technical skill used to serve receive.

service ace
A serve that hits the floor or causes the serve-receiver to misplay the ball in such a manner that another player cannot make a second contact.

service error
Charged when the serve touches the net, fails to clear the net, lands out of bounds, touches the antenna, or the server is called for a line violation, delay of service, or rotational fault.
service reception error
Charged when the serve strikes the floor untouched, no teammate is able to make a second hit, or the player is called for an illegal contact.

set
The skill in which a ball is directed to a point where a player can spike it into the opponent's court. Overhead passing is the most common technical skill used to set. Also one game in a match.

shag
To retrieve balls that have been played, missed, or terminated in a drill and returning them to the leader of the drill.

shot
Any directed individual attack attempt.

side-out
Occurs when the receiving team successfully puts the ball to the floor against the serving team, or when the serving team commits an unforced error, and the receiving team thus gains the right to serve.

spike
To hit the ball forcefully into the opponents' court.

shallow
Near the net.

shank
A severely misdirected forearm pass.

shoot
A low, fast set to an attacker who is away from the setter.

shuffle
A footwork pattern in which the feet do not cross each other, used to cover short distances.

sidespin
The resulting movement of the ball when spin is imparted in the horizontal plane, usually due to striking the ball off-center, causing the ball to follow a somewhat sideways path.

slide
An attack approach that includes a last moment move along the net.

soft block
A technique in which the blocker angles his hands backward in order to deflect the ball and slow its speed.
**step-around**  
A one-footed slide where the attacker moves around the setter.

**step-in**  
A one-footed slide where the attacker moves toward the setter.

**step-out**  
A one-footed slide where the attacker moves away from the setter.

**stuff**  
To block the ball to the floor.

**stuff block**  
A ball that has been blocked to the floor.

**swing**  
To move from one sideline to the other, usually in approaching to attack; a type of offense that uses the swing approach.

**switch**  
To change positions on the court.

**tandem**  
A combination in which one player attacks immediately behind another.

**tape**  
The top of the net.

**target**  
The player who is intended to receive the ball on any given play. The target can be the setter who is in the correct court position, an opponent who is designated to receive a serve, or an attacker who is waiting to receive a set.

**target area**  
The court position where the target players should be.

**telegraph**  
To show one's intention to the opponents.

**three**  
A set that is attacked between the setter and the left sideline.

**tip**  
A one-handed placement or redirection of the ball with the fingers.

**topspin**  
The resulting movement of the ball when spin is imparted in the vertical plane in a forward direction, usually due to striking the ball and following through by snapping the wrist. A ball with topspin will drop faster than a ball with little or no spin.
toss
A skill used to initiate the contact of service.

touch
A player contacting the ball. Players will call this out on a block if they have touched the ball, to alert their teammates to play the ball.

two
A medium-height set that is usually attacked near the center of the net.

underhand serve
A serving technique in which the ball is contacted at about waist height by the serving hand.

unforced error
An error committed by a player that is unrelated to the opponent’s play. Touching the net, stepping over the center line, and serving into the net are examples of unforced errors.

W
A serve-receive formation with three players in the front row, two in the back (in the shape of a "W").

X
A cross play in which the middle attacks a front one and the right attacks a two to the left of the middle.

zone block
When the blockers take away a significant portion of the defensive backcourt in which the opposing hitter can hit by being in good blocking position relative to the opposing hitter.
Volleyball Resources!

The Internet has been revolutionary in helping people find information at the touch of a finger. This sport is no different. There are so many resources, I feel a little remiss in not naming them all. But, there are a few that really stand out that I’d like to share with you. You will find everything you need – from drills to skills to techniques and tactics, performance training advice and even a free fitness analysis, most of these sites have a ton of information.

http://winningvolleyballskills.com/fit_analysis.htm

FREE FITNESS ANALYSIS: You just fill out a quick form and you’ll immediately receive easy-to-follow exercise, nutrition, and other health related recommendations -- all personalized for you. This site has a wealth of personal fitness information. It’s your link to 30 Highly Qualified Experts. HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

http://www.yesicansports.com/

The number one volleyball success training program. Offering camps, clinics, books, videos, audios, newsletters and much more.

http://winningvolleyballskills.com/peak.htm

PEAK-PERFORMANCE TRAINING

Peak Performance Sports is considered the most comprehensive mental game improvement site on the web. It’s packed with valuable tips and strategies as well as a variety of products and services, It’s the perfect site for serious athletes who want to achieve peak performance!
http://volleyball.lifetips.com

If you want a complete volleyball site, this is it. They have information on everything from conditioning to drills to scholarships, camps and coaching tips. If there is any site you check out for volleyball information, this one should be it.

http://winningvolleyballsskills.com/stretching.htm

The Stretching handbook is the book you keep with you wherever you go .... an easy to use, quick reference guide containing over 100 photographs of stretching exercises for every major muscle group in the body. It gives coaches, trainers, athletes and fitness enthusiasts a complete reference handbook to assist with the planning and implementation of their training and rehabilitation sessions.

http://winningvolleyballsskills.com/sports workout.htm

Sports workouts – Offers an excellent library of ‘sport specific’ skill and strength training books and videos for athletes, coaches and trainers

http://home.earthlink.net/~tfakehany/index2.html

This is another site that has a lot of information. It has a lot of peripheral information that coaches, parents and players will find interesting. A good site.

http://www.volleyball.org/

This is a worldwide website that has information on programs from all over the world. You can find a lot of information about programs in general on this site, and it will help you to find links to other sites on skills and tactics.

http://volleyball.about.com/

If you have any questions about volleyball they can probably be answered here. About.com has sites for pretty much anything and
everything and volleyball is no exception. The only thing about the articles on this site is they are only surface information. They don’t get too in-depth. Still though, a great all-round source for good information.

http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/h2g2/A510481

A funky looking website address, but trust me, it has great volleyball information. It provides an overview of many of the different systems and formations used in volleyball. This information is invaluable for any player who is looking for more insight into the different attacks and defensive positions.

http://www.tkohl.com/vbpage.htm

This site has a little bit of everything, including a lot of different things for players, coaches and parents.

http://winningvolleyballsskills.com/jump.htm

Now these are Cool…. JumpUSA manufactures and drop ships sports training equipment which help you jump higher and run faster. They claim you can gain between 5 - 10 inches in vertical Jump using their “Jumpsoles”

http://www.scorebookstore.com/vosc.html

Find all your volleyball stat sheets, scorecards, roster pages and binders at this site, all at reasonable prices.

http://usavolleyball.org/RulesOfficials/indoor.asp
http://usavolleyball.org/RulesOfficials/outdoor.asp

Here you can download a copy of the most up-to-date rules for both indoor and outdoor volleyball for free.
http://www.sportscamptshirts.com/

Home of the $4 Volleyball Camp T-Shirt!

I hope you enjoyed the book and have found it a useful resource to help improve your volleyball skills!

If you have any comments we'd be happy to hear from you, just send an email to: mailto:comments@winningvolleyballskills.com

If you would like your team members to benefit from the information in this book also, please let them know about our site at www.winningvolleyballskills.com