Chapter XV

BASIC TEAM SYSTEMS AND TACTICS

1. The nature of volleyball

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

a. Volleyball is a rebound sport

This implies there is no possession of the ball by the players with the exception of serving. The coach must constantly be concerned with training players to be in position to return the ball. The coach must be concerned with contact points on the players’ bodies and players’ positions to most efficiently return the ball. In most other games, athletes possess the ball and run while holding it. They compensate for poor body position by the act of possession. Strength overcomes poor movement skills. In volleyball we must work very hard to position our bodies correctly before returning the ball.

b. Most ball contact in volleyball is intermediate.

There is no final contact therefore ball control is essential. Cooperation and teamwork are vital. Once the ball is put into play only the final attack counts. Because success depends on the interrelationship and cooperation among players, these qualities dominate coaching strategy and tactical theory. And because of the overwhelming number of intermediate contacts, the term “ball control” dominates coaching thought.

c. Volleyball has a high concentration (ratio) of people to the size of the playing field.

We have a very congested, very dense playing area and, therefore, we need to consider the organization of players, the organization of movements, the flow of players and what we call “balancing the court”, or “covering the court.” The relationship of players who are next to each other in rotation becomes critical. The interrelationship of who plays next to whom becomes a prime coaching concern.
d. Volleyball offers relatively little positive feedback.

The fact that there is relatively little feedback, particularly instantaneous positive feedback, presents some difficulty in the learning process. One of the key elements of motor learning is immediate reward or positive feedback. In volleyball it is difficult for youngsters to understand where this positive feedback is except with service aces or attack kills. All other contact tends to be intermediate and not positive in reinforcing capabilities particularly in the area of defense. Blocking and back row recovery skills require great creativity by the coaches to achieve high performance. This is why players tend to learn serving before passing and offensive skills before defensive skills.

e. In volleyball the traditional roles of offense and defense are reversed.

In volleyball offense prevents points from being scored—you merely achieve possession of the ball when your offense is successful. With defense we are attempting to score points. Volleyball can handicap the traditionally aggressive offense as this produces many unforced errors and loses many points. Conversely, the conservation defense, which simply waits for the opponent to make mistakes, is not likely to produce success in volleyball. In volleyball defense, we want to be aggressive and create opportunities to score points. The coach must understand this reversal and integrate these concepts into training and tactical presentations early in the development of his players.

f. Volleyball is tremendously imbalanced between offense and defense.

In spite of changes made by the FIVB Rules of the Game Commission in an attempt to narrow the gap, this imbalance has increased in recent years. Perhaps more than any other team sport in the world, volleyball offense has a tremendous advantage, and, in some ways, this negates the reversal of normal offense and defense roles which are structurally presented by the rules. The offense scores or achieves success in the form of a side-out over 70 percent of the time at the top level in men’s volleyball. Thus the normal opportunity to score points is very rare.

g. Volleyball is a team sport with a physical barrier preventing most direct one-to-one physical contact.

The players are in control of their own game and, in many respects, they control their success or failure regardless of the opposition’s level or action. The coach must train his players to determine the level of skill which will allow them success regardless of how strong or weak their opponent is. This carries over to the type of athletes who gravitate to volleyball. They tend to deal with frustration and aggression differently from athletes in other team sports where body contact releases frustration and moderates the highs and lows of performance. The coach must train the volleyball athlete, in addition to competing with the opponent, to play within himself, to compete against himself, and to meet the standards he sets for himself.

h. Volleyball presents no time limit.

Therefore, the game is always won by the victorious team. The last point must be scored. A large lead can easily be lost, thus the coach must train his team to actively “win” the game as
opposed to waiting for the opponent to "lose" the game. Momentum is critical in volleyball and will quickly and easily shift from team to team. In volleyball it is difficult to win the game by depending on the opponent's lack-of-play versus your own strong performance. There is constant pressure to score points.

i. Volleyball is a player-dominated game more than any other team sport in the world.

This is opposed to coach-dominated games where the coach has a stronger, direct influence during the actual play of the game. The contact allowed the coach in volleyball is very restrictive. Therefore, the coach must do most of his work before the teams enter the playing area. He has less opportunity to adjust and interact than in other traditional sports. The players must be trained to react to situations and make tactical changes independently.

j. Ball contact on the forearms in the underhand pass is unique to volleyball.

This is unusual as the ball traditionally is contacted by the hands in most sports. It can be compared to sports that use racquets or sticks even though none is used in volleyball. Eye and hand coordination is very unusual in this particular skill just as it is for players in soccer and football who use their chests to control the ball.

k. Volleyball rules require player rotation.

This means volleyball is dominated by the idea that players must be equally adept in all phases of the game. The rules tend to direct coaching thought from "player specialization" towards the "universal player theory." Teams with six starting players being equal in all respects has been a goal for many years. This situation, unfortunately, has, in many respects, retarded the development of some top teams and of some of the thinking in volleyball. However, the coach must understand the rotation concept and the limitations on specialization. He must use the rules effectively to train his players to be familiar with all areas of the court, to be equally comfortable in the front row as well as the back. In the learning phase, the rotation concept is perhaps the most dominant rule with which young players must become familiar. Another element that rotation dictates to volleyball has to do with coaching adaptations in practice. We believe that since the universal player is "the ideal," we must spend time training players in all volleyball skills. This becomes virtually an impossibility in real-world situations. There simply are not enough hours in the day to train all players equally well in all volleyball skills. The coach's role, relative to rotation, is to work within the rules to build in specialization and overcome the idea of the universal player. This is consistent with all sports for achieving success. Greater specialization always equals greater success.

l. In volleyball, moving skills are somewhat unique.

We move in every direction by diving, rolling, running, shuffling, side-stepping, cross-stepping and other movement combinations. The coach works with his players until these skills are second nature to them.

m. Zone of Play

In volleyball there are two unique zones of play. Most sports are played in the mid-zone which
VOLLEYBALL FOLLOWS A CYCLIC AND SEQUENTIAL PATTERN SIMILAR TO THE ONE LISTED BELOW

SERVICE

↓

SERVICE RECEPTION

↓

INITIATION OF ATTACK
  (SET)

↓

TRANSITION TO ATTACK

ATTACK

DEFENSE

ATTACK COVERAGE

BLOCK

TRANSITION TO DEFENSE
is the area between the top of the head and the knees. Volleyball has two zones which are outside the mid-zone—the low-zone and the high-zone. The low-zone is between the knees and the floor. Players are trained to be comfortable on the floor using such skills as diving, rolling and flying recovery techniques which are standard in volleyball. The high zone is the topmost reach of the players (a point 3.50 or more meters above the floor). Much of volleyball is played in the high-zone, therefore, volleyball players are trained to jump more than athletes of any other sport.

2. Key Volleyball Coaching Concepts

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

a. Strong teams are based on six basic building blocks:

1. Physical characteristics (size, agility, speed, strength, power).
2. Team tactics supported by technical expertise and level of players.
3. Level of team experience.
4. Mental agility, shifting tactics and strategy (team sophistication).
5. Team work characteristics, team members complement and cooperate with each other.
6. Team’s coaching strength.

b. Each movement and contact in volleyball is part of an unbroken chain.

Players who perceive it this way contribute to a strong team more effectively than players who perceive their actions and movements as independent and separate from team patterns.

c. The player’s role in any contact is to “better the ball.” Regardless of previous contact, each player must strive to create a more advantageous situation for the next contact.

d. Volleyball combinations are infinite:

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

e. Volleyball is dominated by movement before contact and player movement between contacts.

We cannot make up for poor movement with strength or by holding the ball. Our ability to effectively control the ball and to “volley” the ball depends on movement.

f. Volleyball is really six distinct games within one game.

Each rotation presents a different team and a different set of criteria to the players. To be successful in the total game, we, as coaches, must see it from the rotation point of view.
g. We must consider the individual match-ups within each rotation and we must match our strength against opponent weaknesses.

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

i. Players must be trained to compete with themselves.

They must be coached and pushed to be the best players they can be. If they are content merely to be the best on their team or better than the opponent, they will fail eventually.

j. Players must be trained to consider each contact they make with the ball as the most important one they will make in the game. Once it is accomplished, they must forget about it and concern themselves only with the next contact. The ability to focus on the immediate play is the best guarantee of success, the best guarantee of attention to the task at hand, and creates the most beneficial environment for team cohesion and cooperation toward a common goal.

k. Each player on the team must have a specific and critical role in team strategy and tactical outline.

Players must understand their roles and the roles must fit their technical abilities. You can never expect a player to perform within a tactical construct outside his technical capabilities.

3. The Six “T’s” of Volleyball

Teaching
Techniques
Theory
Tactics
Team Work
Training

4. Definitions

Systems:

The various methods of deploying individuals on the playing surface.

Systems can involve serve-receive patterns, offensive maneuvers, setter movement, spiker coverage positions, blocking alignments, back court defensive positions, etc. Any alignment of players which we can codify and describe is a system of play in volleyball.

Tactics:

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

Strategy:

The application of tactics to the specific opponent you are playing.

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

Coaching:

The decision-making processes which are imposed upon the team to effectively select the strategies for a particular opponent, to effectively select the tactics that will be developed during the training period, and to integrate the available components into a cohesive unit. The effective coach will maximize the individuals, the individual skills and the individual tactics available so that he develops “the whole which is greater than the sum of its individual parts.” If the coach does this he is judged to be successful.

5. General Theory

Team competition and team tactics

In general, coaches can either develop players and find tactics which fit their abilities, or mold players to fit specific tactics. There is no question that the vast majority of coaches prefer to develop players’ abilities and then select those tactics which best take advantage of players’ skills. However, there is an element which must be considered in dealing with this common coaching dilemma.
Coaches must understand their own strengths and weaknesses long before they can effectively deal with those of the players. Coaches train players and transmit information to them in certain parts of the game more effectively than in other parts. All coaches feel more comfortable when their team uses tactics with which they have a strong fundamental knowledge, than when they use tactics with which the coach is less familiar.

The point here is that some modification must be made in the blanket statement that “tactics must always fit the players’ abilities.” We must modify this theory in order for the coach to effectively take advantage of his own skills and his own abilities to affect the result of the match or the set. You must coach in a comfortable environment. This implies a certain set of tactical considerations versus another set of tactical considerations.

One consideration must be that players should be selected who are more apt to fit into tactics the coach prefers to use with his team. We commonly talk about coaches who favor a certain kind of player over another. The coach’s style is most important for ultimate success. While we must never force a player to do something tactically that he is incapable of doing technically, we must also be careful not to force the coach to use a tactic simply because it is the best for his team. He may not make maximum use of the tactic or strategically select it at the most opportune time. So there is some balance to the general rule of the tactics fitting the ability of the players.

Team composition

It is important for the coach to understand that each player on the team must have a specific role. Communication between coach and player is critical relative to the player understanding his or her role on the team. The player must accept the role, feel comfortable with it, and feel confident that the coach will, in fact, use him or her consistently whenever that role is required regardless if the player is the best or the poorest on the team.

In selecting the team, the coach must keep in mind the systems most likely to be used and the players chosen with those specific systems in mind. The “twelve best players” are never chosen because the “twelve best players” will never make the best team. We select players who fit specific roles within the squad of twelve (players who can accept the role of substitute, players who can accept the role of specialist). Players, willing to subjugate their egos for the good of the team, are more valuable than those better players who may not be starting players and who will destroy the internal fabric of team cohesion.

Generally we look for nine potential starters—three who will not start, but who will replace, by position, the six starters. The balance of the squad is made up of specialists who have one or two outstanding skills which have the capability to directly score points, to change momentum or, to prevent the opponent from gaining momentum. For example, an outstanding back court substitute who is also an outstanding server, can be tremendously valuable. A particularly strong front court player can also be counted on for a string of successful side-outs. It is very important for the coach to consider systems and tactics to be used before he selects the final squad.
Developing a top class team

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

The first is to choose the best athletes available, and to train them to take advantage of their abilities.

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

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

The fourth key is to develop the newest tactical approach as possible. Sports always follow the lead of new developments—the novel idea. It takes at least three years to catch up to new ideas.

Flexibility of systems

To reach the very top level, teams must be adaptable. They must have a basic foundation of play with which they are familiar and, in general, will use against most opponents. The teams who reach the top can change their systems with subtle shifts to take advantage of specific weaknesses of their opponent. They also are able to change so the opponents cannot exactly expect the same tactical presentation match after match.

Your team might be able to change from a one-setter system to a two-setter system or it might change setters within a one-setter system. It might change attacks from combination plays in position “4” to combination plays in position “2” or change combination plays which move from right to left to combination plays which go from left to right. You may choose to change blocking tactics or defensive systems. It is important for your team to develop capabilities of adjusting to various opponents and match situations. The best teams are the most flexible.

Scouting your opponents

The importance of scouting increases as your team’s ability gets higher. At the lower levels, coaches are 95 percent concerned with how their own teams perform and only 5 percent with adjustments that might be made to defend against the opponent’s strength and performance. As your team gets better this ratio changes so by the time your team reaches the very top level, approximately 30 to 40 percent of your preparation is directed at the specific tactics you expect your opponent to show. This involves extensive scouting from both a statistical and a general empirical point of view.
Statistical evaluation

To gather complete information on your opponent, it is helpful to have statistical data regarding all performances on each skill by each of their players. This material should be combined with empirical observation and the rotational data given in the preceding section to form the scouting report and complete a game plan which will be used to make strategy decisions for your match.

Team preparation

The special preparation that must be given to a team takes many forms. In general, for your team to be prepared in the best way to win at the top level, it must train under conditions closely approximating competition. This may involve many factors and is called “Specificity of Training.”

a. General arena surroundings
b. Floor surface
c. Lighting conditions
d. Practice at the same time of day as important match
e. Make practices intensely competitive
f. Place positive and negative consequences as the result of all drills and competitions in practice
g. To give players the most confidence possible, emphasize those areas in practice which they will most likely perform during the game and, also, those areas they are most successful in performing technically.
h. Have the team practice the same tactics they will use in the match.
i. Use a real referee to simulate real game conditions.
j. You must physically prepare your team by tapering off their work load slightly so they will be fresh and recovered when they play the important competition. A very light activity load on the day of the match is recommended, but the day before should have no physical activity.

6. Game Coaching

a. Team meeting on the day of the game

It is important the coach establishes the game plan in the players’ minds. This can be done during a meeting early on the day of the match. The meeting should review the scouting report, match-ups, and tactics which will be used during the match. It is imperative that the coach not overload the players with too much data, but highlight two or three elements which will make the difference between winning and losing. It is also important that the coach focuses on and emphasizes only those game plan elements and aspects which will allow the team to win. The rest of the data is simply available for the total preparation of the player. It is recommended that this meeting take place early enough in the day so that the players may assimilate the data and use it during their individual preparations for the match.
b. The pre-match physical activity

It is recommended that the team should workout at least four hours before the match begins. The workout can last anywhere between thirty minutes and one-and-a-half hours. There are several reasons for this. The first is to physically attune the body for the intense activity which will come later in the day. The second reason is to allow the players to get as comfortable as possible with the specific surroundings where they will be competing during the match. The third is to gain confidence that they are “peaking” at the appropriate time and that they are performing at the height of their abilities. The fourth is to run through the specific strategies and tactics which will be used in the match. The workout should be relatively easy with the players simply breaking a sweat and not doing excessive jumping or strenuous exercise.

c. Warming up/pre-match warm-up

It is better for the players to spend a short amount of time in the sports hall just before warming up, probably having some very light food and doing any final dressing, massage, or athletic/medical taping or rehabilitation that needs to be done before the match. The warm-up should begin at least thirty minutes to one hour before the match, depending upon the ceremony and the specific pre-match protocol. There are several points regarding the warm-up that are important:

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

2. Drills which are conducted in warm-ups by trainers do not require the player to make volleyball decisions necessary for success.

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

4. The final part of warm-up should be spiking, blocking and serving, particularly that which simulates the actions to be performed in the game.

5. The team should ignore the opponent as much as possible.

d. Final coaching instructions

Immediately before the game begins, the coach should gather the players together so the last thing they hear before going to the court are the two most important elements of the team—strategy and tactics. They must have these elements firmly in mind so that they will execute the game plan correctly, particularly at the beginning of the match. Frequently the first several points will dictate the outcome of the match. If your team establishes its own tempo and rhythm, the success of its game plan, and the success of the specific match-ups, the possibilities of winning are greatly increased.
e. Coaching during the match

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

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

The coach must have 2 or 3 alternate rotational match-ups planned for the match.

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

The coach must be confident at all times there is a way to win any match.

During the course of the match, the coach must constantly remind the players about the strategies and tactics to be used. The key element is to constantly re-focus the players’ attention, which will naturally stray off the game plan, back to those tactics which will bring success to the team. Remind your players about blocking assignments, opponent attack tendencies, serving strategies and defensive positions. You must constantly focus and re-focus the players’ attention.

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

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

The coach must periodically discuss the progress of the match with the substitutes, particularly if they have not been used, so that they might be mentally prepared for the flow of the game.

The coach should keep a ‘flowchart’ of the game on the sidelines so he may understand the momentum shifts and better select opportunities for time-outs and substitutions (see Flow Chart).

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

The coach must never be afraid to substitute.

The coach must have confidence in all his players. If the coach does not have confidence in a player, he should change that player because he will be handicapping his team by not using all of his available resources.

f. The coach’s use of time-outs

A time-out is principally used to change momentum. Under no circumstances should a coach
TEAM PREPARATION

TACTICS AND STRATEGIES

System of the game

Attack Tactics
- Individual
  - Serving
  - Setting
  - Smashing
    - Attack from back court
    - Attack with high set
    - Quick attack

Composition of the Team
- Individual
  - Team
    - Attack setter at net
    - Penetration
    - Attack with first pass

Defense Tactics
- Individual
  - Team
    - Service receive
    - block and back court over
    - 5 players
    - No. 6 up
    - 4 players
    - No. 6 back
    - 3 players
    - No. 6 middle
    - 2 players
    - Cover by net player
    - Cover by back player

Overall Strategies
- Long term preparation for important competitions
- Physical and tech. preparation
- Mental Prep.
- Watching the opponents
- Special tactical and psychological prep. for the opponents
- Special prep. for the matches conditions
- Preparation matches

Coaching
- General tactical elements
- Teams' meeting before the match
- Tactical Plan
- Choice of ball or end
- Tactical Measures during the game
- Time outs
- Rhythm of the game
- Substitutions
- Switching back and front court
- Alteration of the tactical plan due to the game situation
- Psychological warfare
- Match Analysis
- Interpretation of the match

Actual variations and improvisations due to the game situations
ever call a time-out if his team is playing well and winning the match.

If a team loses two or more consecutive points a time-out can be called.

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

A time-out can be used to reorganize tactics which have become disorganized.

A time-out can be used to bolster the morale of the players by reinforcing the idea that their strategy and efforts are going to be successful in the long run.

A time-out can be used to adjust strategy or tactics based on data obtained by the coaching staff on the bench.

A time-out can be used to allow for a physical break in the match if the team has become fatigued due to long rallies or long playing time.

The time-out should, however, be principally a method of halting the opponent’s momentum or to alter strategy and tactics.

During the time-out, a coach must keep several key points in mind:

1. Communication is best in a one-to-one fashion with the person who is the most important to talk to.

2. At the very most, the coach will be able to relay two or three specific pieces of information.

3. The information that the coach wants to relay must be repeated as many times as possible in the allotted time. The players will be bombarded with sensory information and it will be very difficult for them to slow down their thought processes and their sensory input receptors to fixate on the information that the coach is attempting to impart.

4. The coach will be most successful dealing directly with the setter in altering offensive tactics.

5. The coach will be most successful dealing with the prime blocker in altering defensive tactics.

6. The most important characteristic of a time-out should be control and confidence. The coach must demonstrate that he is in control of the match and he must demonstrate confidence in the players, tactics and system being employed.

7. The coach must be prepared during the time-out. It can be a very effective tool for the coach to spend 5 or 6 seconds talking to his assistants before going to the time-out huddle so that he has specific information.
8. Train your medical assistant or trainer/manager to give water and towels immediately and then to retreat so as not to clutter the time-out.

9. It is important that the coach be the focal point of the time-out and that player-to-player discussion be done after the coach has relayed the information that he desires.

10. The last word should be a single specific action which the coach wants the team to perform immediately, either a blocking match up, a serving strategy or an offensive tactic.

11. Written or diagramed information is easiest to understand.

g. The Coach and How to Substitute

Substitution should principally be used to strengthen the team. The substitutes should be prepared for their role and should be keying their attention on the player or players that they are most likely to replace during the match. They must constantly be prepared to go in but cannot be expected to be most effective unless they are given adequate warning that they will be used. It is important for the substitutes and either the coach or assistant coach to interact frequently during the match. This is particularly important when they are not being used so that the coach is confident that the substitutes are mentally tuned to the flow of the game and to tactical changes. It is important for substitutes to be used early, especially in a match that the coach expects will be a long, close, difficult one. For a substitute to be effective, he cannot be put late into a match for the first time and be expected to perform at a high level. It is also best to use substitutes with specific tactical goals in mind. They must know their abilities and their strengths and they must be told the specific reason that they are going in and the specific goal that they are expected to accomplish. Substitutes are most effective at altering rotational match ups without altering the exact rotational order. Substitutes can bring increased emotion to the team. Substitutes should be used for physical fatigue or when the match has deadlocked or stalemates and they have the ability to break the team from that deadlock. Substitutes should be used to reinforce the tactical plan as the starters will frequently lose focus during the course of the play. Substitutes should also be used to bring in new tactical information which has been discerned from the staff on the bench without the need for a time out. Substitutes should be used to take advantage of weaknesses which are uncovered during the play and were not anticipated during the scouting procedure.

The coach should substitute players when he perceives a starting player is not mentally, emotionally, physically or psychologically prepared to play at his best. It is important for the team to ensure that every player makes his best effort at all times. If a player is allowed to perform when he is at less than his best, the structure and cohesiveness of the team are weakened. Substitutions should not be made simply to allow players to play. Players do not have the “right” to play, they have an obligation to do what is best for the team - that, by definition, is what the coach decides. Players should only be used if there is a reason that they can help the team. Players’ opportunity to play comes more from their performance during training and their general maturation and increased experience. The starting players should be prepared to play the entire match, and, in fact, should be expected to play the entire match. They
should realize that the substitutes will be used because of a failure on their part to perform physically, or within the tactics of the team. Players should normally be told why they are being removed from the game. If they are playing poorly, it may not be appropriate to talk to them immediately, but they should be informed very soon as to the reason for their replacement.

h. The Interval Between Sets

The coach must be prepared to advantageously use the three minutes between sets. It is critical that a winning team maintains the intensity and the concentration level that allowed them to be successful in the preceding set. The coach must reinforce those elements which cause the team to be successful. The coach must refocus the players' intensity, emotion, and concentration so they begin the next set at the same level as they concluded the prior set. The coach must reinforce rotational match ups and the game plan between sets. The coach must make sure that new players or substitutes, who will begin the set are informed as to specific adjustments that have been made in the game plan. The time between sets can also be used by the coach and his assistants to single out individuals for tactical adjustment or reinforcement. It is a particularly good time to spend several minutes with the setter or setters to reinforce what has been successful and what has been unsuccessful in the offensive game plan. The same can be done with the key blockers to make adjustments in blocking match ups or tactics so that the defense can maintain the success that they enjoyed in the prior set.

If the team has lost the prior set, the time must be used to adjust the game plan, the rotational order, or the tactics. If new players are involved, the new starting team must be immediately gathered so that the reasons for the loss can be explained quickly and the adjustments which will be made can be relayed effectively. The team must then immediately be focused by the coach so they can begin to mentally assimilate the adjustments that they will be making. It is important for the coach to briefly and succinctly point out the reasons for the loss and the adjustments that will occur to allow the team to be successful. The coach must make sure that the attention of the players is only on the elements which the players themselves can control. The coach must not allow frustration with the referee’s decisions or linesmen decisions to carry over into the next game. The players must forget about everything except their own performance and what they can do against the opponent. It is the coach’s job to focus this attention during the three minutes between games.

i. Coach's Control of The Game

The coach has the ability to dramatically influence the outcome of the game even though his opportunities for direct interaction are limited relative to other sports. He still can have a great impact on the flow and rhythm of the game and, of course, the outcome. The coach must make use of those opportunities intelligently. He must understand that the game will have a very specific rhythm as each member of the team gains and loses momentum. The coach must develop a feel, a sense, even an artistic awareness for the appropriate time to slow down or speed up the rhythm of the game so as to create an advantage for his team.

To slow down the game, the coach may make use of all of his substitutions and time-outs and
the full duration of each break in the action. A coach may also instruct his players to play a
more error free, risk free offense which keeps the ball in the air for a longer period and can
allow his team to reorganize more effectively. The coach can instruct his players to make
maximum use of the time allotted for serving and for retreating into their serve receive
positions. In general, it is very possible for the coach to dramatically slow the game down.

Of course, just the opposite can be true for a team that is winning and can score points very
quickly against a disorganized or inferior opponent. Here the coach will want to encourage
his team to speed up play and to put the ball into play as quickly as possible. He will likely
make no changes and call no time-outs. He will encourage his players to get into position as
quickly as possible, to have as little delay as possible between the dead ball and the initiation
of the next serve. The most important element of the rhythm of the game is the coach’s
sensitivity to how the rhythm matches up with his team’s success or failure. Some teams can
play very well under a slow rhythm, some need a fast rhythm. It is important for a coach to
know how his own team will react and about how specific players on that team react to tempo
changes.

7. Philosophical Coaching Theory

The nature of the sport of volleyball demands that coaches think of our sport in a very
structured and sequential manner. As a coach, you can never get ahead of the skill which is
occurring at that time. By this we mean that the coach must consider serve reception for the
act of receiving serve and not principally to establish his offensive play. Serve receive must
be an end unto itself, then at the conclusion of serve receive you can consider how the players’
positions affect the offense. By the same token, blocking and back court defense occur before
the team has an opportunity to be involved in transition to offense. You cannot set up back
court defensive positions with offensive concerns and expect to play effective defense. The
game very definitely moves from serving to serve receive to the act of the setter setting the ball
to the attack and the movement of the attacking players to attack coverage, from attack
coverage to retreat into defensive position or at the same time into regrouping to attack or
counter-attack; from this position we move to the block, from the block we have back court
defense and finally to a transition offense from a number of possibilities; deflected balls, balls
that are successfully recovered, and this is the way the game flows. It is important for coaches
to understand the sequential nature of volleyball when they are considering systems and
tactics.

8. Coaches Must Develop a Philosophy
With Which The Team Can Identify

Every team will take on the characteristics, the demeanor, the emotional nature of the head
coach. The coach must be aware of this and must strive to create a positive environment so
that his strong characteristics will be adopted by the team and the team will benefit by the very
natural association that they have with the head coach. The head coach’s personality is
normally so dominant that the team cannot help but reflect the coach’s general philosophy.
Therefore, it is critical that the coach exhibit some of the following traits:
a. The coach must be prepared at all times.

b. The coach must demonstrate to the team that he is extremely organized.

c. The coach must demonstrate confidence.

d. The coach must demonstrate technical and tactical competence.

e. The coach must demonstrate maturity.

f. The coach must be a behavioral role model for the players.

g. The coach must define leadership as seeking the answers when an unexpected situation or a conflict presents itself that must be resolved.

h. The coach must demonstrate flexibility and must demonstrate the ability to deal with players on a multitude of levels.

i. The coach must never forget that his own will to win, his own leadership, his own competitiveness, his own persona will be transmitted through the team and that the team’s success or failure will be his success or failure.

9. Developing an Offensive Philosophy

A team’s offensive philosophy will be the most dominant characteristic that it develops. It will most likely determine which players will play most often and the nature of their roles on the floor. The offense is so dominant in volleyball that it occupies a preponderance of time during the practice setting.

The offense of volleyball first must be structured around the skills of the setter or setters on the team. It is impossible to run a more complex or difficult offense than the setter is able to technically execute or mentally integrate.

The offense must take into account the level of the opponents. It is not necessary and it is very risky to run an offense which is more sophisticated than the level of the opponent’s defense. You should only develop the offensive capabilities needed to defeat the specific level of your opponent.

The offense must present a variety of options that the opponents must defend. Whether it be specific individuals or specific maneuvers or combination of the two.

The offense should strive to maximize the strength of the individuals and create opportunities so that each attacker is most often hitting the type of set and from the position where he will be most successful.

The offense should create a tempo or pace that the team is most comfortable playing at—from very slow to very fast.
The offense should be developmental and sequential. By this we mean that one portion of the offense should be used to set up another portion, or one combination play should be used to very logically move into another combination play.

The offense can depend on speed variables of the ball, speed variables of the players, movement characteristics of the players, the number of players involved, positional characteristics of the players and combinations of all of these elements.

The offense must be as effectively coordinated with the serve receive patterns as is possible, given the fact that serve receive must be structured to most accurately receive the serve before any offensive maneuvers can be considered. It is frequently very easy to take advantage of certain serve receive patterns when constructing the offense.

Another continuum of offense which must be decided by the coach is how much responsibility to place on the setter or setters to determine the success of the offense, and how much to place on the abilities of the various attackers. If the setters have a large responsibility then the training must be devoted to making the setters as deceptive as possible. If the burden of responsibility is on the attackers then most of the training time must be devoted to the individual technical and tactical abilities to be able to defeat a relatively well placed and well formed block. This generally coincides with a very fast offense versus a very slow offense.

The offense must develop a communication system which can have two components; one which can be used during time-outs and training, when more time is available and more explicit communication is possible. The second form of communication, or the second component must be available for player-to-player communication during the game. It may be called “short hand” communication and must involve as few verbal commands as possible.

The coach must also develop an offensive philosophy from transition. There are basically three different modes of transition offense: free ball, down block situation, and normal defense behind a block. The coach should establish transition offensive rules and a transition offensive philosophy. A philosophy may be to try to put the ball into play as quickly as possible or to try to put the ball into play with as little opportunity for error. There are several methods of developing counter attacks with penetrating setters or with a front court setter which must be considered.

In general, the transition offensive philosophy must be closely coordinated to the general side out offensive philosophy from serve reception and the transition offensive philosophy must take into account the defensive capabilities of the team and the defensive tactics which will allow certain offensive counter attacks and preclude others.

10. Developing A Defensive Philosophy

Because of the nature of volleyball and the fact that defense is the easiest and most likely way to score points, defense must be thought of as an aggressive, risk-taking component of the game. Your team must take chances to score points. Defense in volleyball must be thought
of in terms of the more ordinary sports where the flashy, high-risk component is generally thought of to be the offense. Too often coaches have not spent nearly the amount of time necessary to develop an effective defensive counter to the advantages of which are inherent in the offensive attacking components of the sport. Lately, we have begun to develop some options to our defensive theory which are beginning to deal with the movement characteristics of offensive volleyball; the multiple combination attacks, the time differential plays and the back row attack which have become common in volleyball. We still, however, are faced with the overwhelming imbalance of three blockers defending against three, four or five attackers plus many times the setter who has the ability to jump and tip the second pass over the net. The keys to developing a strong defense begin with the block and we must think in terms of matching our best blockers against the most likely point of attack. To do that, the block must have the opportunity to change the positions of its players. We must move away from the concept of a pure middle blocker who is always in the middle of the court or in position #3; to a more flexible system which has equal blockers in terms of their ability to block in position 2, 3, or 4. We must also do a much better job in setting up our defense by predicting the area of the net where the opponent is likely to concentrate its attack. Another element of defense that is important in the coach’s decision making, is how to structure a close coordination between the front row blockers and the back row defenders. The areas that the block leaves open must be principally covered by the back row defenders. They must not be playing in the “shadow” of the block. They must do their best to balance the court and cover as much territory as possible. The back court defenders must also adjust their position based on two key elements: the first being the particular offensive maneuver which the opponents are running, and the second, being the known blocking reaction to that specific offensive maneuver. Possibly the most important key for an effective defense is for all six players to perceive the same offensive threat by the opponents and to react in a similar manner. If this situation occurs, the chances for defensive success increase dramatically. The other key to the back court defense is to be able to adjust players’ positions so that the most agile and quickest defensive player is in the area left open by the block where the opponent is most likely to direct his offensive efforts.

11. Coaching Roles

The coach must be a multifaceted personality. He will play many different roles.

a. The coach must be a leader.
b. The coach must be a teacher.
c. The coach must be a psychological counselor for his players.
d. The coach must be the model for the team members as they reflect his image.
e. The coach is the principal decision maker of the group.
f. The coach must be an effective communicator and must have outstanding communication skills.
g. The coach must be a group dynamics coordinator.
h. The coach must be a logistical manager.
The coach must be able to interact with many different groups. The coach must deal with the athletes, the athletes’ relatives, the officials, the other coaches, the public, the professional media, the business related sponsors, the volleyball federation both within his country and at the international level.

Conclusion

Statistics can only measure certain aspects of the game and should be used accordingly. In making the final decision, a coach must use his intuition, experience and general knowledge of the game, along with the statistics. There are several intangibles such as hustle, competitiveness, making a smart play, and so forth that are too subjective for any specific category. Statistics play an important role in evaluating players’ performance, and when interpreted correctly can contribute significantly to the decision-making process.
Chapt. 15 • Basic Team Systems and Tactics

1984 Los Angeles Olympics USA-Bra Game

Defence Action: Karch Kiraly

Attack Action
Receiving Service System

Doug, Beal USA Coach giving Instructions to his Team
1984 Los Angeles Olympics USA-Bra Game