

# **Growing the Game Together Coaches & Club Directors Edition**



***USA Volleyball***®

***Insights and thoughts on the science, facts,  
and principles of sport and volleyball***

**By - John Kessel**





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## The Evolution of Pepper

February 29, 2012

This second in a series of sharing the evolution of popular drills – into grills or even games, takes on perhaps the most hallowed of traditions... “pepper.”

You may not even know why players call it this term, you just carry on this tradition of calling it and doing it its easiest form – digging and hitting the ball back and forth in a straight line. It comes from a pair baseball drill that is similar, with catching and throwing quickly back and forth, rather than the rebounding found in volleyball.

So rather than just keep doing something because everyone else does it, I ask you to again use the question a coach should ask of every drill they use and teach in practice – “What if they became the Olympic Gold Medalists at doing this?” What if your players became the world’s best a partner pepper, what does that mean they are good at?

In clinics around the world, coaches say, “Yeah, but John, this teaches ball control.” I believe and can see in decades of watching players that it really teaches you to be great at digging the ball straight back at the person who hit it at you, right up to that attacker’s hitting area. That is a habit, or form of “ball control,” I simply cannot fathom having the desire to have. Let me say it again, I do not want ANY of my players to be good at digging or passing the ball directly back to a person who hit it at you. As covered in the grassroots handout article “[From Positive to Perfection](#),” learning to dig the ball back to your partner is simply teaching your athletes to make the negative mistake as their base habit/reaction, rather than the positive, as the journey to perfection continues.

Let me ask you to reflect on a few questions:

*The better a player gets at pepper, the more or less a player moves? - in my experience, the great “pepper players” have such “ball control” that you could nail their shoes to the floor and they could still keep peppering – in no small part because the best pepper partners hit it right at their teammate. Yet the better a player gets on real defense, the more they can move. Do you want to teach players to move less or more as they improve as defenders? The great ones move in advance to where the hitter is sending a ball, and minimize the movement needed at contact.*



*When a player does not hit at a teammate, they say what? Why do they say “sorry” and not “DIG THAT?” How many of your opponents hit at the defender? As the distance is artificially short, and the ball is not coming over the net, with an attacker approaching, there is nothing to realistically read, nor is there really time to do so. So we mindlessly become better and better at digging back to the hitter.*

*Why do players hit virtually all swings at their partner, facing straight on? Why don't they hit wrist away/cut shots and across the body/line shots? It is not part of the tradition.*

If you remember from IMPACT or motor learning education, random training is superior for learning – promoting better retention, problem solving, and game play. Pair pepper is a hidden “blocked drill” with players standing at a distance that is fascinatingly never taught or mentioned, but simply “understood.” Pair up with a player and say “let’s pepper” and stand near them, and they will automatically back up to “pepper distance.” Do the same but stand “too far away” and immediately the duo will collapse the distance to “pepper distance.” I have never heard anyone teach this distance, or mention the distance in feet or meters. It is just a learned habit that the traditions of our sport “teaches.”

You see, full skill movement in defense, has players who wait nearer the net when their opponents pass (ready for an overpass) and then set (ready for a possible setter 2<sup>nd</sup> contact dump shot) the ball. Then once it is seen there is no dump shot, coaches expect their players to move some short distance deeper in the court. How far back is determined by your defensive system and the reading of the third contact attack, but invariably, every coach expects these defenders to move backwards, deeper in the court. *Does pepper teach this repeated backup reading move?* Yet you expect your defenders to do this every single time the ball is on the other side of the net... We teach them to be static in traditional pepper and since that is easier than moving, the players oblige...

So, now that you know how I feel about traditional pepper, what might I encourage to replace it? Let us begin with the evolution. The first ones are those you might use for pre-match warm up, or when you have no net that you can play over for whatever reason

### **DIG TO YOURSELF PEPPER**

This one change of tradition might be the biggest change to improve reactions and habits in defense that are learned from pepper. Simply stop digging the ball immediately back to your partner, and instead dig it first up to yourself. Then either hit that ball on two, or set it to yourself then hit it to your partner.

Part of the problem of learning to be positive first and always in your habits is that at the lowest level, it better allows for the worst team to win on the scoreboard. This is due to the fact that at this beginning to read/understand the game level, the team who simply hits it back on one hit, wins. You might be teaching three hits (three chances to err) and you lose at the start of learning this game, to those who pass and dig the ball directly back over the net. So you see overpasses falling (and as a much more experienced at physical activity you are baffled as to why it happens) untouched on the other side, and much celebration – for a habit that as you get better, simply will result in certain losing. Just not at the start, so we begin our thinking that pepper is a good thing.

### **ALTERNATING PEPPER**

This is the variation with the most movement, and thus a more advance form of positive pair peppering. The player with the ball starts at about traditional pepper distance, then sets the ball to their partner, and immediately backs up, as a defender does after no second contact setter dump – to further than traditional pepper distance. The partner getting the set ball, hits (using all the shots they know) near their defender partner. Now, rather than dig the ball back to the attacker, the defender digs the ball up half way between their digging spot and their attacking partner, and that attacking partner moves forward to set the ball, and then the cycle repeats. Thus two players play as if there are three. At the highest level, this is played over the net, explained more below.

## THREE PERSON PEPPERS

### *Static Version*

When you have three, you can more easily develop the positive habits and reactions desired to be ingrained. For younger players, you start by simply overhead passing the ball in the right pattern, which is A to C, C to B, B to C, C to A, A to B, B to A and repeat....

### A B C

As you progress, A and C dig to B and hit over B to each other, while B sets both A and C in the pattern. At the start, the players hit “over the net” by B even raising his or her hands to be the “net” and turning around to read the dig of player A or C. Once the skill of hitting over this “net” is understood, player B should start moving right and/or left, so the dig is on an angle, as it will be more in the game. Straight lines do not happen too often in volleyball. Say player C is normally a right side digger, then they would want player B to move to their left, for digging attacker A “down the line” from zone four and towards their teammates, or if they were to dig player A from zone two, the dig would move to their right, so B would move to their target. This is a concept for all three person pepper options, along with the front/back movement of a digger.

### *Movement Version*

Now you add in the overpass/setter dump nearer the net, and then back up move. So while B sets to A, C moves back, and once A hits, they move up as C digs, then B sets, then moves back as C hits over B. At the highest level, B moves “off the net” rather than standing still for each dig and set. These ties into making the positive error even more, no digging right up to the “net,” but digging off the net on each side.

### *Weaving Version*

This one is what I strongly suggest for warming up, before a match or practice, when you only are using one side of the court. I always start, for intrinsic learning’s sake, by seeing if the athletes can figure it out by saying “Each time the ball goes over the ‘net’ you need to change positions.” If they, or you, can’t figure that out, it means in the above ABC pattern, when A hits over the “net” (player B), that player switches with B to become C’s setter. Now the player pattern is B A C, and C digs to A, who, once the ball is set, C hits it to B over the “net”...then C switches to the net and A moves off the net, to receive the attack from B. In other words, the attacker becomes the digger’s setter on the other side of the “net.”

## OVER THE NET PEPPERS

It is important to understand that when the vast majority of players do pepper, they hit the ball down at an angle that is simply not gamelike for them. They are essentially learning how to be negative in their hitting – learning how to hit into or under the net, not OVER the net, which is not only the perfection being sought, but even if you hit it out, you are making the other side think (is it in, or out?), but when you hit into the net NOBODY LEARNS ANYTHING. So pepper without the net still needs to have players, jumping to hit or not as options, who learn arm swings that hit the ball OVER the net. When you add the net, reality dictates this. When the net is not there, you must ensure that your errors are positive, and over a net at an angle that is gamelike for you – jumping or not.

### *Dig to Yourself Version*

Same as the first changed in pepper noted above – you just have to hit over the net, as you would in the reality of the game. This way you can't get away with hitting low/waist high or other shots that would go into a net if the net were there. You see, the closer you get to your opponent in a REAL game, the more the net looms in your way and makes you hit up and over more. In pepper without the net, the closer you get to a pepper partner, the more you just hit down at them.

### *Alternating Version*

This requires a lot of hustle, and a somewhat not exactly gamelike running under the net, but I say go for it in the interest of lots of movement and to keep digging up and not over the net. After you hit over the net to your partner, you must run to the other side of the net to be your partner's setter. After you set to your partner, you back up under the net to be the digger, while your partner, once they hit the ball over the net, then runs to the other side of the net to be their partner's setter, before also backing up to the other side of the net. You learn to dig up even more, and yet never dig back over the net, since that would stop the pepper.



### *Three Person Version*

Weaving, movement, and lots of hustle, this is also known as the "Three on None Game." It could include starting with serving, just from near the three meter line unless you are pretty darn good. You have one player on one side to serve/attack, the other two waiting to pass/dig, and whoever does that, runs to the other side, as the server/attacker runs to their "other side." Lots of hustle, and, like all these variations, you keep track of how many in a row you and your group can do, attempting to beat the scores of the other groups who are also pair or triple peppering.

## **PLAYING DOUBLES PEPPER**

Once again we return back to the value of playing doubles. Short Court, Shared Court, Narrow Court, Cross Court. Put up that rope/2" ribbon/2-3-4 nets down the middle of your regulation court and have tourneys, try stuff, play non-dominate hand, figure out how to beat your opponent, and play, play, play....

Let's put an end to creating another generation of players whose fundamental habit/reaction to dig the ball back to the opposition/attacker, and at least have players who only know how to dig each and every shot UP where their other 5 teammates are....it won't happen overnight, but it will create players in time who get those valuable leads in rally scoring that come from being able to transition attack, by not knowing how to dig the ball back to their opponent, but instead to their own side....

So while I have already blogged about [STOP Teaching Passing](#) – this is related in the same way, and I welcome comments or complaints below, or email me at [john.kessel@usav.org](mailto:john.kessel@usav.org) - Hope you have time to read some of the other important blogs in this Growing the Game Together series... next up will be the Evolution of Blocking Drills and then Spiking Drills.

## Specialization is for Insects

February 15, 2012

A long talk last week with a writer from *Volleyball Magazine*, got me contemplating some principles that are important on the topic of “specialization” The first thought that came to mind, is the title of this blog – taken from this quote:

*A human being should be able to change a diaper, plan an invasion, butcher a hog, conn a ship, design a building, write a sonnet, balance accounts, build a wall, set a bone, comfort the dying, take orders, give orders, cooperate, act alone, solve equations, analyze a new problem, pitch manure, program a computer, cook a tasty meal, fight efficiently, die gallantly. Specialization is for insects.” -- Lazarus Long (Robert Heinlein)*

This is not to say that specificity, a cornerstone in motor learning is not important, for specificity is perhaps the most important thing to learning the sport you are practicing. It means that “People are Awesome” (see my Christmas present blog <http://usavolleyball.org/blogs/growing-the-game-together-blog/posts/3393-videos-and-principles-worth-many-thousands-of-words> which links with those titles if you missed seeing those compilations of amazing things the human species can do athletically) and can and should experience a wide variety of activities – in life and in sport. The key thing is specificity does not require specialization – especially in our sport where we rotate, have front and back row rule limitations, and where our playing space, once the ball is contacted on the serve, potentially is half of the planet.

### Initial Ability and Final Ability are not Highly Correlated

I have been one of the lucky ones to have time to share ideas and be mentored by the great Carl McGown, as have names you might recognize, Doug Beal, Marv Dunphy, Fred Sturm and Hugh McCutcheon – each Olympic medal winning volleyball coaches. Carl keeps reminding us all that the research is very clear – early success/specialization does not necessarily result in later talent. Carl and our two time Olympic men’s coach Fred Sturm cover this in detail in their paper “*Basic Concepts in Long Term Talent Development.*” If you want a copy, email me at [john.kessel@usav.org](mailto:john.kessel@usav.org) This fact is perhaps best exemplified in the recent “overnight” success of Harvard graduate and the NBA’s newest basketball star Jeremy Lin. A great article, “Just Lin Baby!” is found on Forbes at this link - <http://www.forbes.com/sites/ericjackson/2012/02/11/9-lessons-jeremy-lin-can-teach-us-before-we-go-to-work-monday-morning/> I have also put together a “test” you can take – [Match Quiz on Talent Development](#) that you can take in a past blog that references some examples of late developing athletes.

### Find a Sport to Love – There are over 100 options!

I was going through pictures of my kids recently, and was struck by how many sports they had experienced. Sure they love volleyball, but they had also competed, in leagues and formal training, in football, basketball, baseball, lacrosse, skiing, tennis, judo, gymnastics, team handball, swimming and skating. Last week a staff member of American Sports Data came to town at the Olympic Training Center to share facts gathered in about sports with USA Volleyball and a dozen other NGBs (National Governing Bodies).

NOTE: I am often accused of saying initials rather than names, in an interest to condense what I might be speaking about. So know that each Olympic sport has a National Governing Body, or “NGB,” which are the groups which guide each Olympic, and often Paralympic, sport in partnership with the US Olympic Committee.

Thus we share joint logos and the term “Olympic Journeys Begin Here” and if you have not gotten the cool free bumper sticker that looks like this:



Well then, send a stamped self-addressed long (8in, no 6 inch) envelop to USAV Region Services and we will send you one!

This gentleman said his company has data on 119 sports that he can analyze in many different ways. Interestingly, this did not have several Olympic sports – like fencing or martial arts of Taekwondo, Judo or Karate – nor was any form of video game included. So let your kids discover a sport they love – and if it is chess – the thinking man’s sport to reference the Saturday Night Live Classic skit on the unsung hero of chess, the high school chess coach featuring Jim Belushi – enjoy it – and make sure to rent/watch the movie “*Searching for Bobby Fisher*” in the process.

### **We Need Generalized Specialists**

Hugh McCutcheon, who be our first coach to lead both a men and women’s Olympic team when he coaches this summer in London – shares the importance of this in our USAV High Performance Clinics, but it really is for ALL levels. Hugh seeks players who are good at ALL six skills, and great at one or two... So does every Junior and high school volleyball coach in America. One of the ways this can be developed is by playing doubles whenever the situation allows – for there you get to work on your weaknesses in the six major skillsets. For instance, if you are your duo’s best hitter, you will likely get to set a lot, as your partner will be served or if you are a weaker passer, you will get a lot of serves – and become better skilled at all techniques, not just one or two. As a later developing sport – what Hugh also notes in [this great clip on “The Journey” to London 2012](#) – is that at this final level, he needs volleyball players, not just volleyball athletes.

### [It’s not How Tall you are – It’s How GOOD you are..](#)

That principle is highlighted in the link...blue...because it is a stand-alone article I wrote many years ago. It remains true to this day, and thus we must not tell the short kids, you are a libero, or a setter, or the tall ones, you are a hitter, actually you are so tall you are a middle hitter... Especially when they are under 15. Brazil knows this, and their national rule at these younger age groups is that ALL teams must play a 6-6. My best outside hitter on the one high school team I coached was Claudia Garay, all of 5’1” - we set her off the net, she learned all the shots from hard to tip, and all the angles from cross body to wrist away and...she was the best hitter! Last year you may remember I ran a 6-3, and in part of every practice we would have every player hit, then set.



## Why Do they Love Monarch of the Court and Speedball?

They stop specializing and become volleyball PLAYERS...

They get to hustle and grovel all over the court –not just in some specialized floor area

They stop doing drills and get to PLAY the GAME

They learn the lesson of Winners Stay On – just like every school or junior championship comes down to – losers don't run lines, they have to wait and watch for their turn and winners get to KEEP PLAYING...

They get to touch the ball just about every rally, rather than watch someone else touch it half the time (3 players/3 contacts vs. 6 player/3 contacts)

They get to start things with the SERVE, just like they will have to in a game, unlike the vast majority of most coaches "drills"

Oh, and did I mention that they get to stop specializing and become all around better volleyball players?

## Team Roles and Specialization

At some point along the long term development continuum of volleyball players, at about 16 and over, training to win becomes important – and specialization does also. Here, team systems have more specializing, but are best based on players who are well rounded in their skills. I believe you will be a better hitter if you have spent time setting, and suggest more teams follow in the Cuba women's team three time Gold Medal path of running variations of a 6-2 over a 5-1 for programs at the high school level, again for player development focus towards higher levels. Still, there is a need to have players who can play multiple positions, when injury or family/academic situations happen. This just happened to my son Cody this past weekend when both situations took place and he went from opposite to middle, and to the winning college team I watched while up doing the Alberta Volleyball Association clinic in Edmonton, Canada the weekend before, when they lost their starting setter. Specialization happens, but it is the player who can do all six skills well, even if they are only great at one or two of those skills, who is valuable at all levels of volleyball.

## The Importance of the Coach....

I will close with a must read, the material in the blog "*The Expert Advantage*" about the *Path to Excellence*. – a USOC study of Olympian development from 1984 to 1998...

<http://expertadvantage.wordpress.com/2012/02/13/usocpathtoexcellence/>

The author writes that "The [Path to Excellence](#) was a study undertaken by the United States Olympic Committee (USOC) in an attempt to describe and understand the factors that contributed to the development of U.S. Olympians (1). This study presents a number of practical findings relevant to athlete development and talent identification that are along similar lines to those being investigated in the Pathways to the Podium Research Project."

**Thanks for your support of USA Volleyball by leadership, membership and partnership.** We know our USA teams – indoor, beach and sitting -- will do their best and represent us marvelously, and hopefully all reach the Olympic and Paralympic podium again, thanks to people like you who care enough to be better teachers of this sport for a lifetime. Check out the other LTAD blogs and more here over the last 3 years of blogging and leave a comment if you have something you would like to add!

## Coaching the Human Animal

January 02, 2012

An advance heads up to start this blog, it is going to cost you the price of buying a movie, which you likely have not seen and which has become one of my favorite movies ever – documentary really – as it teaches huge lessons to all those wanting to be a better coach, teacher, or parent...so you have been forewarned.

With grandparents and a father who spent their lives in medicine – my grandfather John Kessel even being awarded the French Legion of Honor for his work in removing the elephantiasis disease from the South Pacific – I found myself taking many science classes in college. Somewhere along the way, my path to being another doctor in the family met with the sport of volleyball, both coaching and playing from the start. I still study biology, as it is the study of life – and I would like to say I still am a doctor of sorts – giving out prescriptions to solve unhealthy individual and team problems. More importantly though, as a teacher, I continue to look at ways to teach more efficiently and joyfully.

It is with this background in mind that I took Psych 101, and trained my rat in a Skinner box to roll a marble, run through a hoop, and pull a rod into the box. That I also trained it to “set” that same marble, and almost got an “F” for being too far out of the box, so to speak, taught me several lessons – the biggest one being the power of positive and intermittent reinforcement. I will never forget the joy my rat had in seeing me, and repetitively performing the routine, without getting a reward every time. I will also never forget the “hiss” of a classmate’s rat which was taught by punishment, and the way his rat only performed with the threat, or application, of punishment. I also can say I did not need thick gloves to handle my rat, as someone else needed...

You see, as much as I know the science shows teaching a motor skill to a human is best done by showing, and not telling, or if you are telling, to keep it simple, as words have little meaning to beginners in learning a new motor skill – I always marvel at what great animal trainers do without those tools in their teaching options. I mean, when you train a dolphin, or seal, or any of the large predators of the world – starting with lions and tigers and bears – OH MY! - to do those amazing tricks, do they show the animals what they want to have happen? Nope. Do they explain or tell the animal what they want to have happen? Nope. Yet, through shaping and positive reinforcement, they teach these athletes of the animal world to perform remarkable and quite complex motor programs.

One of the big take aways from studying all these trainers, is that not one used punishment. Perhaps guidance at times with firmness, but never punishment. No wind sprints, no pushups, no conditioning, No yelling at, but certainly yelling for, in the process of learning every increasingly complex skills, and in the case of the at least the aquatic animals, yelling pretty much is a joke anyways. Let me note here a favorite Mythbuster show “lesson” – that bullets fired from guns of any size, even the huge 50 caliber monsters, can only penetrate the water to a depth of about a yard...so those shots of escaping people swimming with bullets zinging by, are just not real...so good luck with yelling at someone from above the water’s surface.... Then again, if it is an animal, not sure how specific your words can be to get your teaching across – tone of voice perhaps, but words? Nope.

Working in the Wounded Warrior program has brought me into contact with some other amazing people, and in some cases, their animals. The service dogs of the blind and wheelchair bound veterans are simply remarkable examples of the power of praise and intermittent reward, and not of punishment in any way. Kevin Stone, 2004 and 08 Paralympian , Army Vet, and one of my teaching partners in Germany this fall for a large Warrior Transition Unit Europe, has a service dog “Mambo.” In a recent email Kevin writes *“Okay, I never expected this to happen, I wrote to SMA Chandler III after my clinics at the Valor Games and ask for an official*



enlistment. it could be that SMA Tilley (Ret) after the Chicago trip remembered an idea I had for Mambo, stemming from a ceremonially bestowed rank of Corporal at Ft. Huachuca. Not only did Sergeant Major of the Army John F Chandler III enlist Mambo via-absente, but the Commanding General of the Army also retired Mambo via-absentee as a Corporal/E4, gave him his coin (I guess we know who the top dog is with the top NCO coin) and presented us both with a letter and a Coin of Excellence from the Adjutant General of the Army's Commanding General Disabilities Agency. SMA Chandler's 1st Sgt Stafford did the all the research, and now the rest is history.

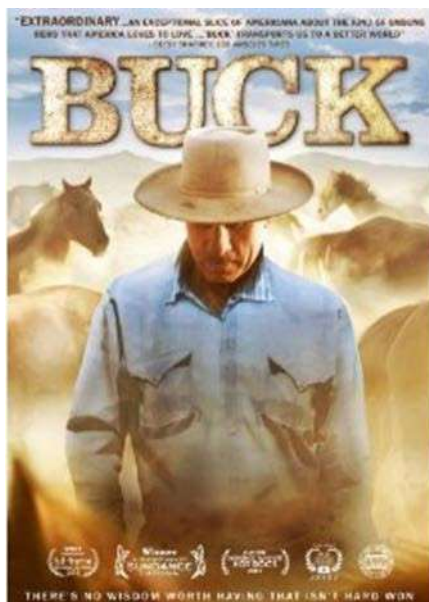
Now THAT is a humbling reality check, to have your dog be pulling rank on you after years of training.... Again, when you talk to all these K-9 specialist and others, you find that the training of these dogs who serve, sniffing out bombs or getting things for their masters, is always done positively, not through punishment...

So en route to working with the kids and coaches on the Navajo Reservation in Tuba City this year, I spent the night on a beautiful 400 acre ranch in Las Vegas, NM, owned by my college roommate Brad Turk and his wife Leslie. They train horses, and that nite, from arrival to the wee hours of the morning, Leslie and I, with Brad, a Physics major throwing in his two cents of the cosmos, exchanged ideas on teaching animals, including human ones. I marveled at the parallel worlds of how she had gone from a trainer using force and punishment, to one using praise, shaping and gentle ways. On my return, I studied more about training such big animals which you partner in such an intimate way as you ride on their back and literally become one team of two.

This led me to a book by Tom Dorrance –*Talks to Horses - True Unity – willing communication between horses and humans*... which led me to the documentary Buck, winner of the audience award at the Sundance Film Festival, and many other awards. It is simply a MUST own, to share with parents of your club in a team bonding/learning evening at a qualifier or other overnight trip with your team, or somehow else share and talk about the lessons of great teaching and parenting found throughout the movie. It has a hard ending too, which you may not want to show younger players in a program, but again, I would chose to do so as there are powerful life lessons even in that one segment.

Here is the trailer: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IShjmWYuHZ0>

And the DVD cover ....and FYI, 137 of 151 have reviewed it on Amazon with 5 stars...



Buck Brannaman was raised by a very abusive father, and then joined a foster home with over 20 other boys, resulting in a wide variety of forms of competition both in and outside the house. (Note – I watched Howdy Doody, Gene Autry, Sky King and other “western/cowboy” shows and have a fine appreciation of a true cowboy’s talents including the use of his rope) His father had taught him to trick rope – and several points along the way you see him show this closed motor program talent (remember, we can always get to be better at serving, our one and only closed motor program, so I will use trick roping as another example of why/how we can serve even better...), while his foster father taught him to shoe a horse and mend a fence. Then a fellow named Ray Hunt, who learned from Tom Dorrance, taught Buck how to change the way he was teaching horses, and the rest is history of a wonderful example of becoming a better coach... He is a “horse-whisperer” who uses leadership and sensitivity, not punishment to teach.

You likely do not know that I collect one liners to remind me in just a sentence or so, of key points learned on my journey to being a better teacher, coach and parent. This document is over six pages of single spaced sentences summarizing most of the things I have discovered in over 40 years of coaching. Below, I will share a short list of those I took from “Buck”... one which the DVD cover notes “*There’s no wisdom worth having that isn’t hard won...*” Make sure to also go to the Bonus tracks, as there are some other great stories there worth seeing and hearing, like Betty’s story – let’s do it for the kids....

*The biggest challenge of a horseman is to control their own emotions.*

*You allow a horse to make mistakes, the horse will learn from those ++mistakes no different than a human, but you can’t get them to dread to make mistakes for fear of what is going to happen when he does.*

*Fine horsemanship – you can discipline and discourage, or discipline and encourage.*

*Blessed are the flexible, for they will not break.*

*You gotta quit on a good note, just like the last 2 minutes of a date...the dealbreaker...*

*Do it with a greater joy, not specializing, by letting dressage horses do cow roping...*

*Solutur en modo, Firmitur en rey - Gentle in what you do, firm in how you do it.*

So to all the coaches, parents, players and club directors who are helping USA Volleyball grow the game, thank you. Somehow we must stop the tradition of using punishment as a viable way to get our players and others to learn to love the game. It does not match up to the principles of good teaching, nor the laws of learning, as any effective animal trainer, like Buck, can attest to. If you have any examples of great, positive teaching, please feel free to email me at [john.kessel@usav.org](mailto:john.kessel@usav.org). Best wishes on and off the court as this season progresses.



## Quantum Hoops II

February 24, 2011

You may have already read that one of the more fascinating documentaries I own and sometimes share with players and coaches is about Cal Tech Basketball, titled Quantum Hoops. It is a fascinating long look back at the history of the sport of basketball played at the California Institute of Technology, where “nature’s engineer” the beaver is the mascot. Well worth the watch, and lessons in teaching and leadership are threaded throughout. Narrated by David Duchovny, of “X” Files fame, the subtitle of the movie is *“Before they change the world, they need to win just one game...”* You can learn lots more from their official website – legends, players, view the trailer at <http://www.quantumhoops.com/>.

My favorite part of the movie, of so many wonderful moments, is about one of the Cal Tech coaches who thrived there for a decade. He came to Cal Tech from the Jr College ranks, with something like an 800-200 record, and having sent about a dozen players on to the NBA level. Pictures of him with John Wooden and other hoop greats were in his office. What was his record when he retired from Cal Tech? Something like 0-200. Not one win on the scoreboard. He developed some great leaders in life, yet did not win a single game. At one level he wins hundreds upon hundreds of matches, but when this great teacher moves over to CIT, victory on the scoresheet eludes him and the team.

What they lacked, versus their opponents, was simply basketball talent. In the movie the team of 2005 loses by an average of 60 points a match. You see, CalTech pretty much expects all applicants to have a perfect ACT/SAT score. They did not allow the coach to influence the selection process of the thousands of applicants. The coach simply has to wait to see who shows up at tryouts and often then begins to teach those students how to play basketball. Great learning lab for both skill and leadership, but starting so far behind other opponents in their conference who do get to ask for a smart basketball player or two each year out of the applicant pool, simply is hard to catch up to. What a great teacher, coach Gene Victor was, developing amazing leaders, while not winning a game all along the way. Imagine having a college team roster with more high school valedictorians than with players with basketball experience. For example, of the seniors on the 2006 team in the documentary, all making large team contributions over the season, none had any high school basketball experience.

So this short blog was brought to life due to reading recently that Caltech won. Won their first conference game since 1985. A basketball scoreboard losing streak of 310 games in a row, finally broken. Can you imagine the angst of your typical volleyball parent scoreboard police monitoring that scorekeeper over nearly three decades? That is 26 years of excellence in education – remember, we are talking CalTech here, school of astronauts and over 30 Nobel Prize winning students and professors – and just one NBA player ever – without a basketball team conference win in the school and local papers. To read more, I suggest both visiting the [Cal Tech Basketball website](#) and for all the Dartfish and Datavolley experts, [this reflection on stat keeping and winning](#) by Dean Oliver, Director of Production Analytics at ESPN.

In this day and age of clubs who base their success level on winning, I want to give a big high five to those clubs who don’t win as much on the scoreboard, but who focus on player empowerment and leadership development. Those coaches who can tell you that every player they had on their team last year, is playing the game this year also, even if another club recruited their son or daughter away from their team, as they give their players a love of the game. Those clubs who see many of their players return after, or even during college, to give back to the sport by coaching juniors like they once were. To give full effort to win is important, but winning in our wonderful, truest of team sports is out of one player’s control. It is more important that we create

players who are leaders, problem solvers on their own, empowered to create and learn without the eyes of a coach upon them.

I will close with one of my favorite quotes from Anson Dorrance, written about the women's soccer great, Mia Hamm. He coached her all four years at University of North Carolina, and one evening leaving his office, saw her working out very hard on a field, all by herself. He then wrote his senior year captain Mia a note (take heed new coaches, a handwritten note to each of your players during the season is POWERFUL stuff, trust me...), which became the Vision of a Champion title to one of the best books for a volleyball player to read.

*The vision of a champion is someone who is bent over, drenched in sweat, at the point of exhaustion when no one else is watching.*

For a list of other books I suggest players read, found under the Player button option of our Grassroots section at USA Volleyball's website, go four articles from the bottom at <http://usavolleyball.org/grassroots/player-information>. Yeah, I am asking you to scroll through this button, as I believe you will find a lot of additional help for your players (and you) right now in the dozens of other things I have written for players.

So as we enter the "dog days" of the junior volleyball season, take heart from the teams at California Institute of Technology. It is so much more about the process over the outcome, when you are focused on the right thing, giving players the skills to change their world first, and our world second. It is not just about keeping the ball off the floor, but about the integrity and life lessons learned as you teach. Thanks for helping grow our sport and holler at me at [john.kessel@usav.org](mailto:john.kessel@usav.org) if you have other thoughts to share.

## Top Ten Serving Secrets

January 17, 2011

So I spent the last four nights in Hartford, Connecticut. Snowfall of a greater amount in the storm than any other time in recorded history. Temperatures lower than any time in the last six years. So the aptly named Winterfest Tournament took place on over 20 courts in the Convention Center, and Tom Tait, Joel Dearing, Steve Colpus and I ran wave format CAP 1 and 2 courses for over 50 coaches who wanted to learn to be better teachers – including over 15 from John Raza's Maine Juniors. Great tourney to see, Boys playing on several courts each day, and thousands of girls and their parents competing and watching each other on courts all under one roof.

My last morning a coach from CAP said his girls were serving at about a 33 percent success rate and what could he do to help them. My thoughts shared with him seemed to be of value to share here with all reading this blog, so here are what we talked about...

1. **The most important skill in serving is giving yourself a consistent ball to strike.** The vast majority of errors made by all levels of servers are due to the server given themselves a toss that is not the same – resulting in having to change the swing, contact and ball flight. Indeed, just the word "toss" makes players too often put the ball too high – so I often say "place the ball" to get the desired ball arc – which is to put the ball to the height where when it starts to fall back down, it is struck. So placement should go up and down at a VERY low height, so consistently it would fall back into your tossing hand should you not contact it.
2. **Get your contact hand back behind your head before starting to serve.** A core principle in being a great player is to simplify the movement you make in each skill. For serving, this means you should simply TOSS-STRIKE, with the toss being low and consistent, and the arm swinging to strike the ball with a fast arm. There is no step – would you teach free throw shooting with a step? I doubt it, and many volleyball coaches

are surprised when I note in the gyms of the world how there is a nail or large dot in the middle of the free throw line, placed to allow the hoopsters to shoot from the same spot that is the lined up to the center of the basket.

3. **Show the skill with your program's best and meanest server.** Your players will learn faster when they see a peer or near their age player who can do the serve (or any skill) you want all to emulate. For my team, we watch Erin, state volleyball champion whose serve is one that nobody likes to receive. She is simple in motion and strikes a ball that floats every time. This float, by the way is NOT due to "punching" or stopping your arm when you swing. It is learned by each individual determining where on the sphere he or she need to hit the ball on the true center of the sphere including the intended ball flight. If you see it spin at all left to right, for example, you need to strike it a few millimeters more to the right, still in line with your ball flight. This deliberate practice reading of the ball spin should be done on every serve, as the player also moves into the court to play, or simulate getting to base. Too often coaches have the players just serve and watch, not serve and run to base, thus they are not teaching the whole skill.



4. **Strike the ball with a RIGID, CONSISTENT contact point.** When your players pre-strike the ball in their hand, most players cup their hand, wrapping it around the ball. Get your players to strike/tap the ball in this preparation habit with the same open palm and rigid contact you want them to actually serve the ball with. This very rigid hand/palm contact needs to be learned and done every time you strike a served ball. The wrist angle can change slightly to make for a short serve, or serving to the right or left, but it must be a rigid wrist/palm/contact every time.

5. **Serve the ball from corner to corner. 1 to 1 or 5 to 5.** We want to get the ball to go as fast as possible, yet stay in, so the best way to first do it, and get great at it, is to give yourself as much court to serve into as possible. This comes from serving from one corner to the opposite catty-corner area. Since setters dislike the ball coming in from zones 1 and 2 the most, we focus on this serve primarily. When kids are nervous before their first match or anytime, getting them to aim corner to corner also gives them more room for their adrenaline charged body to strike the serve, and keep it in, until things calm down a bit.

6. **Relax with a Big Breath – using a simple 1 – 2 - 3 count.** So the people who should be nervous are the passers, not the server. The first part of the count, done after your arm is already back and ready to swing fast forward, is a deep breath. Watch free throw shooters do the same thing. Then the next count 2 is the placement/low toss of the ball, followed by last count 3 of the fast arm/torque swing. While this 1.Exhale 2. Place 3. Swing can also be cue worded to 1. Relax 2. You're 3. Toast, as that is the attitude a great server has with every ball sent over the net, burning the passers on the other side of the net with each tough serve.
7. **Serve the ball hard and flat.** Too often players loop their serve or aim quite high to get the ball in. I spend a bit of money buying string/twine, and tie two strands from antenna to antenna (get up on the ref stand to tie it up). One is tied about 6 inches above the top of the net, and the other below the top of the antenna. You'll get less frustrated if you carry up a piece of duct tape or two so you can tape it to hold it to the antenna. The players when they serve want to send their serves through this gap, unless they are serving a short, inside the 3 meter line serve.

8. **Stand Back and Blast.** When you have players who “serve it too hard” or serve it “always long” you are close to having a great server. Take advantage of the space behind the service endline and then step to the end of the court surface – two or three meters behind the endline for many gyms, and up to nine meters back when playing in international or one court stadium matches. Then aim more into the center of the court and hit the ball even faster, still with float, and watch the ball dance. If there is no space to step back, you will need to guide these players to “swing a tiny bit slower,” while still hitting it over the net. I have seen international servers rack up 10 or more aces in a row by serving from 8-9 meters behind the endline, and blasting floaters which are very challenging to read and adapt to, with all the extra float that occurs. A key reason players jump float serve is that you can send the ball into the court at a higher speed, and thus get more float effect on the ball.
9. **Serve into heaven first and always, never hell.** There is the 7' 4 ¼" of “hell” where the ball is struck into the net (or even under it) and there is usually two to three times that space of “heaven” – from above the net to the ceiling. So players need to ensure every ball goes into heaven, never into hell. This is in no small part because when you hit into the net (serving or spiking) nothing is really learned at practice by your teammates, but when you hit over and out, still an error, your teammates are learning a key read – that ball is out. Remember, passers determine 80 percent or more of the pass BEFORE the ball crosses the net. The out serve is determined not as it goes by, but about at the net as it is flying in. So out serves are ok in practice as each time they teach your teammates what an OUT serve looks like. One gimmick I use is to stand with a player at the endline and show them where a ball needs to be hit into “heaven” by showing them how to always strike the ball while it is above the top of the net. Hold the ball so they see it above the net, and then below the net, and then back to above the net, a sort of constructive error sandwich of see... “hit it here/not here/hit it here”...see?
10. **Buy a Radar Gun.** The only tool I spent a bit of money on (but not THAT much!) which I use nearly every practice, is a speed radar gun. While there are apps for it on Smartphone, the radar gun itself is so accurate and easy to use; it is worth the purchase for a program to have. The main reason is you can specifically and objectively give feedforward information to each server as you get them to max out their serve to the fastest they can swing and still keep the ball in. For each player keep track of their highest speed of served ball in, challenging them to be the fastest server while still keeping it in. You'll use this gun for spiking too, and determining who dug up the fastest spike as well. These guns, like the Bushnell II, are right around 100 dollars, battery operated and an important tool in your coaching toolbox.

So there is what we spoke about and maybe a bit more. I really believe we can teach every player to be a great, never miss server, even while serving very tough. Look at what other closed motor program based athletes can do in gymnastics on a balance beam, or in shooting free throws for example. [CLICK HERE](#) to see one fun and very visual example of a "closed motor program loop..I often tell two other stories to get my point across about never-miss-yet-tough serving. My first is about comparing free throw shooters to servers. Great free throw shooters are not only simple in motion, but from a distance of 15 feet can put in 90% or more shots into a target that is about two square feet, using a larger ball. Volleyball servers stand TWICE as far away...but...how big is our target? Yep, about 450 times larger. You could land a helicopter over there. And we miss?

Which brings me to my final tale from the 1984 Olympics, where Craig Buck and Karch Kiraly combined for 14 of the 24 USA men's Gold medal winning team service aces. They each served about 130 serves total. How many did they miss, in this Olympic charged stressful situation? One serve. Each. You can be a really tough server, and yet never miss. All it takes is deliberate practice, focus, and repeatability. So go put up a line on your garage

door at home at 7'4 1/4" and stand back nine meters and practice away...you will get better at this closed motor programmed, completely-in-my-control skill, and make opponents really hate to see you step up to the serving endl ine....and give your team points that will make a difference.

## The Player Who Knows WHY Beats the Player Who Knows How

June 21, 2010

Last week I found myself with my kids, headed over Wolf Creek Pass, the ski area still patchworked with deep snow, as my son drives over the Continental Divide - and I get to work on the laptop. We are returning from several days working the Native American Volleyball Academy, run by the great Nana Allison Brewer, might be the first Navajo head coach at the DI level. I first had the pleasure to teach her back in the 1990s when she joined a YMCA Coaching clinic at the Olympic Training Center when she was a player at New Mexico. She is now head coach at SDSU, and a mom of four kids - including a one month old son who was in attendance at camp, getting an early start to coaching. My kids joined me at the academy again, as this is a pretty special camp to be a part of on lots of levels. Navajo Prep was the site again, and has a new student center and dining hall. We even had a visit from the legendary Nancy Mike, who won several NM State VB championships at Santa Fe High School and who now lives in the Four Corners area. She was playing last month in the US Open in the over 50s or so, another lifetime leader in our sport.

As I worked with these young athletes and their coaches, a dinner with Olympian Jackie Joyner Kersee a few summers ago kept coming to mind. She was a multi sport player, including volleyball when she was in middle school. She gravitated to track and field, as she enjoyed tracking her small improvements - I need to jump 1/4



inch more in long jump, win or lose....I need to go .1 second faster in this next race, win or lose. A classic case of Citius, Altius, Fortius understanding and focus on mastery/performance over outcome at a young age. She said the most important thing she learned from her husband/coach was that the track athlete that knew why, beat the track athlete who just knew how. What a true and powerful statement that is for all in sport.

Thus the title of this blog really says it all....we need to be better at teaching the WHY, not just the how. During the camp here, just about every one on one talk with players and coaches, I ask...Why? I

will be gone in couple of days, and these kids need to be better able to problem solve/understand without the help of a coach. It is equally true that the coach who knows why, beats the coach who knows how.

While questioning and guiding players to understand the why, not just the how, can take longer at the start, once the player knows why, they can problem solve related situations without your being there. In the end you have created a team of players who are also your assistant coaches, able to teach themselves so that the team gets better far faster than if you are the only source of wisdom. As the late John Wooden wrote – “You haven’t taught them if they haven’t learned...” It is not about what you know, it’s about what they know.

Working with these Navajo athletes is always one of the highlights of my year. Chon, the head coach at Neah Bay, WA, drove the 22 hours to New Mexico to coach the camp. I have also been lucky enough to have coached in Chon’s gym, part of the Makah nation that is also the most Northwest land in the continental US. Chon explains a lot more of the challenges of coaching on the reservation in his article that I have posted to the History section of the Grassroots. “Coaching on the reservation” notes that 50 percent of those living there are unemployed. So as part of USA Volleyball’s diversity work, we come here to help hands on. The Navajo Times carried two good stories on this year’s camp at <http://www.navajotimes.com/sports/index.php>

## Culture of Play

We wanted to help promote beyond this camp, a culture of play (now there is a virus I wish would spread worldwide, a culture of play virus...), so we went to the Wal-Mart next to the Navajo Prep campus, and bought over 20 market play balls so the players could take one home to play with their family back on the reservation. Nana spoke to the athletes about when she was a 7<sup>th</sup> grader and would play volleyball with her older sister, on their knees at their home, so they would not hit the ceiling as much. We strung my yellow rope up down the center of the court (just like seen in the minivolleyball book being done all over the world) and let each player pick out a ball in their desired color. Then we played one vs. one and one vs. one plus one. Three hits a side. Using their non-dominant hand for part of the time so they learned that important skill set. Then every player at the end of camp today took their ball with them, so they can play inside at home too. We also spoke about the value of being early into the gym to play, even if the nets are not up, getting more deliberate practice and never waiting for a coach to blow the whistle to start learning.

## I Need a Wood Court....

Here is a guesstimate I am making after coaching in over 40 nations around the world – *over 90 percent of the world’s volleyball players, compete and train on dirt or concrete courts.* So many of the small nations would have one or two indoor courts IN THE ENTIRE NATION, everything else is outside, and the lucky players get the asphalt or concrete level courts. In Italy and the Dominican Republic, entire minivolley tournaments are held on closed down streets – just like the great North American Chinese 9-man tournaments are run. Recently doing the CAVB (African Volleyball Confederation) clinic, again you saw dozens of outdoor courts, and only rare indoor court options. I remember talking with Lang Ping decades ago about one of the times she was too excited to sleep. It was before her first national championships, when she was around 14. It was not the nationals that was keeping her awake, it was because she was going to play on a wood court





for the first time in her life. One of the great advantages of our sport is that it can be played on so many surfaces – including sand, grass, snow, mud, water and dirt. Most the world play on dirt, which hard packs down, and if they are lucky, they get to move up to a concrete or asphalt court. Karch Kiraly’s East High School in Santa Barbara, like so many playgrounds in California, has only an asphalt court were boys and girls by the dozens play daily during school breaks. Sure a wood court is nice, but when we play on Sport Court with padding, we are still getting an elite playing surfaces. If you do not have a court, get a rope up and play on whatever flat surface you can find. The key thing is...to play.

### Aim for Heaven, not Hell

One other concept came back today, that of when you are lost, hitting the ball into heaven, not hell. The idea is to help young kids understand that when they are lost on the court, and having to hit the third ball over, they should never hit it into the net as an error, but should hit it way over the net, even if it goes out. “Hell” starts at the top of the net at 7’4 1/4” for the women, and ends at the floor. Heaven starts at the top of the net and goes the remaining 15-40 feet above the net, to the ceiling. I even have put up a red sheet on the net to the floor – to better show on of the hells of volleyball – or have used a black sheet (Hell then becomes a black hole) to help them see how they are to hit into the space above the net, never into the net. This concept has a cousin, that being “there is no such thing as too high a dig.” Now, watching the USA women’s team online winning the silver medal this last week over in Switzerland, there were some digs that hit the ceiling and were declared dead. In the US, the ceiling is in play, and I have given \$5 gift certificates to Wendys anytime a player digging a ball below their waist, had a ball hit the ceiling. Most players make an effort and touch a ball, but the ball goes horizontal in flight, and not up. These are ways to help players learn that they may even have to add power and “UP!” to a saving dig, making it go “too high,” rather than the normal lighter contact which goes “too low.”

### There is a Reason the Ball Cart Has Wheels

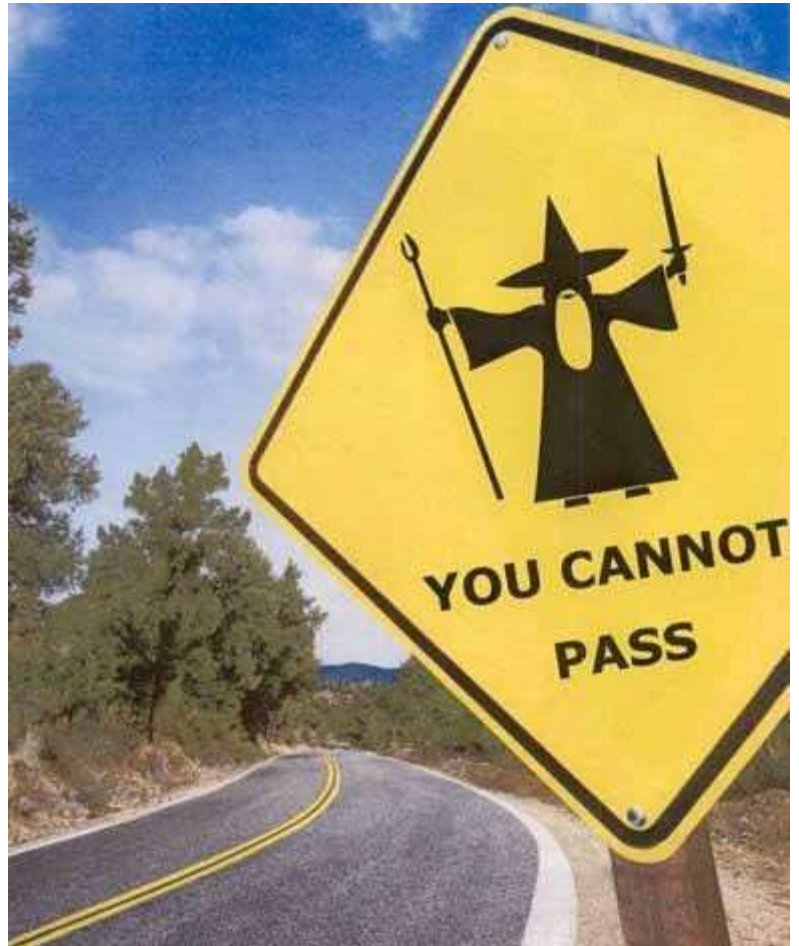
One of the things the NAVA coaches did really well was moving the ball cart around the court. Far more often than not, the coach parks the ball cart either off the court by zone four, or on the court at the zone 5-6 seam line. These coaches did an excellent job of moving around to introduce and play balls from zones 1, 2 and 3, and from behind the endline of the court too, and thus were developing much more well rounded players in the camp. Just make sure to free your ball cart from the tyranny of the perpetual ball cart tossing spot traditionally done by coaches that park the cart at the zone 5-6 seam area, and randomize the angles and play to ALL the game like angles.

### Bring Back Your Favorite Kids Games as Scoring

This last idea to share has been part of IMPACT training as well recently. One of the reasons to have a whiteboard in the gym, it not only to make your practice objectives no longer a secret, but to have a great place to score some of the children’s games you can use for a scoring option. Put up a tic-tac-toe grid, or two nooses and 4-6 blank spots for Hangman. You can bring out Connect Four game as your scoreboard, or a deck of cards, with each point won giving that team a chance to play their dot drop, or a hand in the card game of choice. The chance to play favorite kids games AND volleyball at the same time, and actually have a chance to win it in the case of tic-tac-toe with enough points scored in a row, is a great trip back down memory lane for all players. Thanks to all the coaches and players at NAVA for the chance to again share the new ideas we have come up with at USA Volleyball. Let us know how else you are growing the game in diverse populations around our nation, and make sure to share the best ideas that are working, so we all benefit. [John.kessel@usav.org](mailto:John.kessel@usav.org)

No matter where I go in the world to teach, the traditional coaches mantra of “Can’t pass, can’t hit” is one of the first statements I hear in any language. Then, when we introduce our sport to new players of any age, the first skill taught is almost always “the pass” – followed by incantations by the priest of the court on how important passing is, and then demonstrations of the form of the holy passer. While the [Black Knight](#) of Monty Python and the Holy Grail might be my hero for his perseverance, those who have been following this blog know the importance of humor and critical thinking in being the best coach you can be.

So I ask you today, to stop teaching passing. Before I get more international and national “what #&!@” type statements from coaches whose long standing traditions are being assaulted, I must explain that I am not asking you to stop teaching the skill found in most first ball reception – the forearm pass. What I am asking you very powerfully to change, is that you must teach from the start, and every practice, the skill of serve reception. You see, being the world’s gold medalist at “passing” (both overhead and forearm forms) as taught in pair passing, wall passing and all sorts of other forms of partner and straight line training, actually gets in the way of being able to do the MOST important skill of receiving serve. This is NOT a play on words. This is getting to the heart of the matter that too much time is spent skill developing the pass, when what matters when you get onto the court and attempt to win a game, is your serve reception skill.



So many coaches are saying they are “training gamelike” while the things they are doing on the court are far, far from “training in reality.” *Case in point...how many points in a GAME start with a serve – and have either an error/ace/serve reception? OK, how many of your drills do? The answer simply is...not enough.* Think of why the kids love to play queen of the court or speedball so much. What starts each of those games, and if you err on your serve or serve reception – you’re gone! The winners stay on training in these games are simply giving great experience in winning state or the USAV Jr. Nationals....where winners advance and losers prepare for the next season.

The technique of passing is pretty easy to grasp. Below the waist, the forearm pass has the arms contact the ball ideally above the wrists (meaning players need good eye to forearm skills, one not done in any other skill or sport, so a bit of a challenge to start). That contact spot is formed at an angle which will deliver the ball to the target. Not a lot of motion, start hands on knees, move your arms in the most efficient way to the correct served ball contact point, and send it on its way to the setter. Stance is a bit upright, as we want to "err" up, not low/parallel to the floor laser ball flights. Simple.

Here is how the current USAV High Performance Manual puts the "ready position:" *Feet pointed straight*

*forward, knees in front of toes and butt underneath; back more straight than forward; arms in line with knees and out from body with palms up; feet are flat on the floor but the weight is forward and over the big toe (not knock-kneed); square to the ball; wide feet, but not so wide that you can't take a good first step."*

When you get balls coming in higher, well above the waist, you do the overhead pass skill – but again you need to know how to handle a flat hard serve, not a looping friendship partner rainbow set done back and forth. This is an overhead serve reception, not a set. So the ball is contacted in such a way above the head in a setter type ball shaped hand pocket, and you direct it to the setter. This skill starts off a bit more successfully, as we have usually established eye to hand coordination.

The skill of serve reception starts by watching the habits of the server you are seeking to pass - watching THROUGH the net, not when the ball rises above it. Watching their ball bouncing habits, mannerisms, body position, and the toss. All these lead you to be a better serve receiver over the long haul of experience, as you learn to anticipate and what will happen even before contact. The servers whole skill up to, at and right after contact gives the receivers important hints as to what serve is likely to come. This is why even Misty May at the USAV Beach Coaches Accreditation Program training agreed that over three quarters of the success in serve reception for a beach player happens BEFORE the ball comes over the net. We learn these tips over time by receiving serves, not passing in front of a net with a partner or against a wall. Watch how less experienced players have to learn how to adjust their overhead pass technique for a the skill of receiving hard, flat floater or spin serves - no matter if it is a jump or a standing version.

How many times in the game do your players get “throated” misjudging a serve and being stuck with the ball in the no-man's land too high to forearm pass and too low for an overhead pass? Here is where the “alligator” pass, hands pressed duckbill-like together to pop the ball UP (not back to a partner), with one hand below to put the ball up. Your hands are almost in ... Or you can reverse pass, the national team calls these a “tomahawk” to pass the ball off the “bottom” of your forearms and wrists together, to still put the ball up high on your side of the net. We need to give our serve receivers skill sets which help them at least send the ball up, if not to the setter, when they misread a serve and can't perform the overhead or forearm pass. Go for it.

The other thing about the technique of “passing” is that the best serve receivers, while always seeking to be as simple in motion as possible, more often than not are found in less than ideal “technique” positions. Nonetheless, they still send the ball to the setter very well, if not perfectly. They know that the ball in serve reception does not know how old or experienced you are, or which foot is forward or if you are a disabled player or not. The ball only knows the contact angle that the .05 second contact duration is on a player's body. As Carl McGown puts it, “the ball knows angles.” So even if your body is not in any good “passing form,” it can serve receive wonderfully well, as long as that contact point sends the ball to the setter target.

One other thought that you might consider adding to your program is to pass as many of the serves that likely up to now have simply been flying over the net and hitting the floor. For many years, as serving is so important, I taught serving as a high priority. We served a lot. Tens of thousands of balls a season in doing “serving drills,” or simply focusing on serving. Except I also was wasting tens of thousands of chances to practice...serve reception. Letting ball after ball, hundreds per practice, simply fall to the floor in or out of bounds. Remember how important it is for your players to know the most important skill of READING, including the concept of “out.” Serving into the net does not teach what “out” might be when there are serve receivers, but neither does serving in or out when nobody is there to read and serve receive the balls that do fly over the net. Now we no longer let the serves fly over the net to land unread and undesired on the floor. Instead we start with at least one person reading the other side's servers, and that player serve receives the ball up to herself then goes back to serve.

So, given that the #1 and #2 things that are shared between medal winning teams at the highest international level and at the 12 and under level in juniors is who serves the best and serve receives the best – we need to teach those

two skills more. Luckily we know that since we learn best from things that are gamelike - the ideal serve reception training is – serve receive-set-hit, the ideal setting trainings are serve reception-set-hit, and the ideal hitting training is serve receive-set-hit, so we simply need to train that way more.

Hopefully I am not pressing my luck too much to remind you to also stop doing drills, and start calling and doing your training in games...but then, I already asked for that in my blog here: <http://www.teamusa.org/USA-Volleyball/Features/2009/December/18/No-More-Drills-Feedback-or-Technical-Training.aspx>. Thanks for your help in growing the game. Let us know how we can help you or share ideas by emailing me at [john.kessel@usav.org](mailto:john.kessel@usav.org) - Citius, Altius Fortius to all as we hit the dog days of our junior season...

## STOP Teaching Setting

October 21, 2011

After the dialogue from my blog called “Stop Teaching Passing” - I felt as this junior season starts up that it is important to give all you teachers of the game a few more titles to chew on. What in gosh sakes am I saying here, when I spent last season teaching my kids a 6-3 system, so half of my 14ers were learning how to set? That a previous season “middle blocker” not only was one of those setters but also made the varsity team is part of the reason for this title, but there is lots more than that of course.

This time I am challenging you all to think on two large fronts – the first is to not allow your younger players to believe or even call themselves “a setter.” We must remain true to the concept of teaching players to be all around players as juniors, good at all the skills – not just “setting.” Decrease the pass- set-hit drills where just the “setters” on your team

set the ball, and make EVERY player set for a part of practice. Have every player hit...THEN SET...then go get the ball. It is humorous how many repetitions it takes for a “hitter” to stop chasing the ball like some Pavlovian dog and instead hit, then set, THEN go get the ball. Equally important however in this concept is that we want

“setters” to also think of themselves as hard working, hustling diggers, and hitters, and if their height allows, blockers. Not all hitters can block, but all setters CAN and MUST hit. It is sad, and senseless to cross paths at training camps with kids who say they are only a setter, and have never hit. Of course all setters must also be effective, aggressive, intimidating servers, regardless of their height. Other volleyball nations get this well, with Canada implementing a LTAD – Long Term Athlete Development – model for many sports. This info has been shared by free webinar last season and will be woven more into our own IMPACT teaching this year.

*The biggest part of the concept we must understand and teach is this – stop teaching setting and start teaching HOW TO RUN AN OFFENSE.*



This is again NOT a play on words; it is a very important and not well understood part of teaching the GAME of volleyball, not the techniques of the game. With young players, you must start at the very beginning to teach them not just how to set, but what, where, when, what and why to set the other five teammates.

Even in the doubles games, these principles apply, as you set the only attacker you have, determining the best option of the five “Ws” that guide your teaching of setting an offense. Why five when there is only one teammate? As the “who” (or maybe mom would tell me to say “whom” here, but that does not fit the poem...) really in setting an offense might be the setter – dumping, shooting, or attacking on the second ball.

I have a sign in my office that I give to every new intern working for me over the last 25 years. It is a quote that fits into today’s blog, by none other than Ralph Waldo Emerson again.

*I have six friends  
That serve me true  
Their names are What, Where, Why,  
How, When and Who.*

I ask each intern to make sure these six friends have been checked with, before they turn a document or a request into me. We both save time and reduce errors when these friends are covered.

The same thing happens for learning HOW to set an offense – these five “W”s should to be checked at the start of each rally.

Where are the opponent’s best blockers and my best hitters in this rotation?

What are my front row hitters favorite or likely most successful set options.

Who is my safety valve hitter if passes go awry? Are they front row or is the best option back row for this rotation?

When should I most likely set them in this rally, first ball side out attempt or in transition?

Who has the best match up, blocker vs my front/back row teammates? Why

did they succeed in the last rotation(s), game, tourney, practices?

These decisions evolve from having to think about it, to being able to do it, and make the best choices, without as much thought, but with more art and game sense. It is no different from the evolution of a quarterback, who at younger levels runs a simpler offense, which gets more complex at high school, college and then the pro level. The main difference in volleyball and football is the speed and size of the players as you move up in age and level. Cody I just dropped off at Princeton for his frosh year – but this summer I got to spend some time with a classmate of his, Ryan, who will be the school’s varsity hockey goalie. I asked Ryan one time, what is the biggest difference for him as he has moved up the ranks to being a top level netminder. His answer was the same – speed and size. The principles do not change and the sooner you teach them to the kids seeking to run



your offense as the setters, the better. As teammates develop in their attacking skills over the season, the choices evolve, the playsets become more complex, the options more varied.

I will say again, we MUST start teaching our player at a far earlier age than we do now, to play on the right side of the court. We develop kids so long just hitting the left side, that when I do grills (aka gamelike drills) where players are choosing to attack zones four, three and two – only 10 percent of the kids will give zone two any time for spiking. That also means our setters have a vastly more limited offense to run – and we have athletes who cannot either set to zone two, or attack from that side of the court. PLEASE start with more “front/back” grills so the players learn to attack BACK row first, from both the left side AND the right side.

Other guiding principles for running your offense need to be shared, especially that of “bettering the ball.” This is a cornerstone concept for ALL who put up the second ball in the offense, whether they be the intended setter, or a teammate who answers the call of “HELP!” and then steps in to set. Who, where, even how concepts need to be guide and taught – for it is better to set a hittable ball with a bump set, then to “set” a ball with one’s hands, only to see it not make it high and/or far enough in the air for a teammate to jump and crank on the ball. The person running the offense must first put up a hittable ball. Nothing is more important. Secondly, it should go to the best hitter for the options available – considering factors such as where the ball is passed to and the positions of the opponent’s best blockers in that specific rotation, etc. If a hittable ball can be set to more than one option – then the setter can become “tricky,” but not without the first two concepts being achievable.

The person(s) running the offense are key to any team’s success, as they touch every second ball. They should be good athletes, able to pursue and improve any pass. They must be creative, not patterned by some blocked drill to look good in warm up but unable to set anything that is out of system. Remember, for the majority of teams, your offensive system is likely to be more “out of system” than “in system” – as your players grow in their serve reception and defensive system skill sets. While covered before, the ability of every player to set, and to jump and attack from any part on or off the court, is vital, and best learned in random training, not blocked. I find most players in the world are able to run their offense to zone four must more successfully than to zone two – not because it is harder to set behind, but simply due to the fact that about 85% of the training is done towards zone four, only infrequently backset/trained behind.

So ask your team this question at the next practice...who delivered the gold medal point set in Beijing for the USA men? I doubt they, and even maybe you reading this, know that it was Ryan Millar, the middle blocker for the team and the setter on the cover of our free USAV Minivolley book. Lloy Ball ran the team offense, wonderfully well in his fourth Olympics, but in the end, the final set choice was properly made by a person who also knew both the skill of setting, and more importantly, how to run the offense at that moment. So learning to be on the offensive, even after a bad reception where the “setter” must call for help, your players all should know the right setting options within varying levels of play.

Lately there has been more attention to Brazil’s training. I suggest some of you take advantage of the information shared half a decade ago, in the 2007 Volleyball in the Schools Symposium.

<http://kinesiology.usask.ca/fivbschoolvolleyball/presentedMaterial.php> There, three experts came in – Toyoda from Japan, Ivstan on LTAD from Canada, and yours truly. Then many federations, led off by Brazil’s presentation followed... Brazil understands well the importance of all around players, and they put their words into action by requiring ALL teams playing 6 vs 6 nationally and below, to run a 6-6, from the ages of under 15. Each player sets from either zones 1,2 or 3. Imagine what a gift we would give our own junior’s player development to have our own national championships to be played with mandatory 6-6 offense. I think it is worth implementing at your club level, even if you feel you can’t at the scholastic level for various reasons.

I would like to thank Laurel Brassey Iverson, who remains a dear friend, for her help over our years together in getting me understand how to run an offense. As a member of both the 1980 boycott Olympic team, and the

1988 Olympic women's team, she put up ball after hittable ball, no matter how challenging the pass came in, and lead the team with her spirit and saavy. welcome your comments and thoughts below, or directly at [john.kessel@usav.org](mailto:john.kessel@usav.org) on this edition of “STOP Teaching \_\_\_\_\_” Next up ? I will look at serving...

## **STOP teaching FREE Balls**

August 23, 2012

Yes we are back with perhaps one of the most important “STOP” lessons of all – the need for coaches to stop teaching “Free” balls, especially the way the vast majority of coaches around the world teach it, and start teaching “Mean” balls.

First we have the traditional ball slapping coach, who I see in coaching control mode, all over the world. They line up 3 blockers at the net, then slap the ball to trigger the pavlovian response of salivating players who move off the net as the ball comes over to them to play out. This response of retreating off the net for the free ball is so well trained that when I do clinics, I set up three players at the net, tell them we are doing a “free ball drill” and then I slap a ball. Immediately all three players back off the net. I never stop finding the ironic humor in this – and oft offer to start selling volleyballs on late night TV for people to carry as a self-protection device; yes ladies and gentlemen, you simply slap this ball you carry around and people bothering you will run away. The key thing to understand, as a coach who knows why, not just the how, is that when you train this way, you are actually training your players to be late...moving off the net as the ball is thrown over by the coach. Why late? Experienced players recognize this situation after the flight of ball contact number two, not after contact number three. If the second ball contact is going to not be able to be spiked, but will need to be forearm or overhead passed over the net, at the moment, long before the impending third ball contact is sent over the net, is when the front row player start their retreat, and the back row players also make their adjustments, often including a setter running to the net.

The second and even more important tradition to change is to teach your players to not send over “free” balls, but to still attack the ball. At any level, I find this to be a top 10 skill set to develop in your players – tied into increasing volleyball IQ, teach your players how to score points even on the worst of free ball situations, the forearm pass send over.

Why are we not fully on the offensive and doing a better job of sending over an aggressive, slimy, court smart “free” ball? Because our traditions right now have the COACH becoming the best skilled in the gym at sending over the third ball, not the players. Thus we need to STOP teaching free balls as we have and change.

You see, over the decades I have watched almost all coaches stand off the court, outside the antennas and hit at teams on both sides, often in 6 v 6 drills and even wash games. “Train in Reality” I so often say, thanks to Marv Dunphy who taught me that phrase. Coaches, including hopefully older former players giving back to the sport by coaching, are not just off the court, they are most often near zone four, with a bucket of volleyballs by their side, and hitting balls to their side of the court for the players to dig/set/hit, or turning to hit the ball over the net to the other side, for the same dig/set/hit response.

My questions to my readers are these:

Who is thus becoming the best at sending the third ball over the net?

Can the coach send the ball over the net to areas 1 and 2 when they are standing off the court near zone four?

How many “free” or “down” balls come at you from between the antenna vs. outside the antenna?

How many opponents spike a ball from off the court to you on the same side of the net?

How many opponents still two handed tip or even forearm pass the ball over the net, vs. standing spike the ball, at your level?

Point 1 – The sad answer is, the coach...yet last time I checked, the coach does not hit a single ball over the net in a match to their opponent. In this evolution we seek to empower the players more, both in volleyball IQ / reading and in skills, it is the PLAYERS who need to be skilled at sending aggressive, point scoring, crafty third balls to their opponents every single time. Again, NOT the coach. The coach should thus become the SECOND contact person in the gym, and do any of these variations

Throw the ball low, and teach your players how to be great at sending a forearm passed ball aggressively and wisely over the net to the holes in an opponent’s court.

Throw the ball a bit higher and teach the same aggression and skill in sending over an overhead pass

Throw it even higher and teach them powerful, confident standing spikes over the net.

Throw it even higher and allow them to develop the skill to maneuver, jump and in the air spike the ball over the net.

Point 2 – ALL teams, from Olympic level to youngest kids, should send the vast majority of their “mean” balls to zones 1 and 2. When the coach stands outside the court at zone four, they cannot hit balls over the net to these two zones. Ask any setter where they LIKE the ball coming from most of all, and they of course will tell you from the “ball cart coach tossing the ball to me” zone at the 5 and 6 seam. They have seen thousands of balls from this spot. Ask them what they dislike/are not as skilled at and they point to zone 1 or 2. This is due to the steeper angle they must set to any hitter, and as it is something they simply have not done at much of – any all levels of the game. So we need to then pour most the “mean” balls we send over on imperfect play volleyball to the very zones the setters dislike the most. Simple.

Point 3 – When the coach stands off the court in zone four – every ball they send to either side comes from outside the antenna. In game reality, some balls are that wide, certainly, but they still come from BETWEEN the antennas, not 100 percent from outside the antenna as the standing coach is training into their players. When the coach becomes contact #2, not #3, they can send balls into the court in far more gamelike ways and the ball will come from between the antennas, as it most often does in the match.

Point 4 – Like all forms of standing on the ground pepper, when the coach stands and hits, the players learn an angle to dig that is not gamelike. This certainly is also the case for the players on the same side as the coach who then dig the ball – they are digging not just a standing on the ground attacker but one who is actually outside the antenna. When coach sends the ball over the net to the other group, that coach will never hit it outside the antenna to those players. Yet standing there, ball bucket at the ready, coaches have no problem hitting totally unrealistic hits to be dug/set/hit. Again, when you finally break this tradition, the ball, if outside the antenna, will still pass between the antennas for either side. Another little thing that adds up over time...

Point 5 – Invariably the coach hits nearly 100 percent of the balls, swinging with “ball control” and hitting it top-spinned right to the player. Who hits that well on the teams you play? Most of us know not many opponents. At the lower levels the shots we must handle are two handed tip shots, fist shots saved over the net, forearm passes and



even reverse forearm hits. If they do hit it, it goes up then over more often due to opponent height/lack of jump. At the higher levels the reverse is true, but the failure to train in reality when a coach hits remains the same. Would any of you reading this hit a ball at the USA men at the level they see coming even on down/free balls from the 2012 Russian Gold medal team? Sorry, but for 99 percent of us the answer is no, I would not hit a ball as the USA men have to handle from their opponents they play. So it is far better to have Clay Stanley or David McKenzie hitting a ball over the net, than me as a mere mortal coach. Since reading skills are vital at all levels, again having the players send the 3<sup>rd</sup> ball over is vastly superior for training that essential read.

So now what you get to be doing is moving all around both sides of the court, not frozen at zone 4 married to your ball cart. Remember, there is a reason the ball cart has wheels...so move it, deeper, and endline as well and to zone 1 and 2 side, circling the court. Randomly toss balls of various heights and teach your PLAYERS how to send mean balls to the other side with forearm passes, overhead passes, roll shots, standing spikes – all not being hit the way you face – to Zone 1 and 2 from no matter where they are on the court. When you throw from behind the endline, turn and look like a teammate chasing and errant serve reception down and even back forearm pass the ball into the court. Low, medium or high, they then have to learn to be aggressive and skilled at sending the ball over, with your guidance on how to be slimy and mean, not giving the opponent a free ball, but a mean one that is still hard to handle. In the beginning, they will err, and often, but we are teachers and they will improve.

In the end, you get to players who earn awards for getting the opposing coach to slam their clip board and scream at their players “You guys that was a FREE ball for gosh sake, how did you let it drop!!!!” The how comes from you – who have taught your players to be great at hitting “better the ball” third contacts at all levels. Hitting it to the spot that the back row setter is vacating., and it falls...hitting it to the setter, who has to then handle the first ball and get someone to back them up, not nearly the offense that would have been run if the setter was able to set the second contact. Since we are teaching our players leadership and to be empowered as players, this way of play to pressure zones 1 and 2 happens not just in 6 v. 6, but in speedball, monarch of the court and other smaller number per side games. Stop being happy that they just got it over, and give your players the time and contacts to be mean ball players, not free ballers...

So I have covered a related idea in my blog “Tennis Anyone?,” but I need to bring that game/warm up favorite of both genders of our national teams. When you play one hit over the net tennis warm up variations, you get 1. Players who are GREAT at still scoring points on a third contact forearm or overhead pass. 2. Players who can READ those one hit over the net contacts by the low skilled players they face, or even high skilled ones who simply err and overpass. Those balls just no longer drop after a great serve; they get received and converted into a transition kill that is so valuable.

At the other side of the court, the team RECEIVING this ball should be thinking “OPPORTUNIYISNOWHERE” That some reading this older blog title see it as “nowhere,” is a topic for your sports psychology staff visit – and I hope you read it as “now here”...for it is! It is too bad in English that opportunity is a FIVE syllable shout, and not a single one as it is in other languages, and perhaps we should not call “Free” but call “Chance!” as another tradition to change. Nonetheless that is often what is occurring with teams not trained as we have noted above, and it is a chance to score the ever important transition kill that gives you a lead in rally scoring. With the ball coming from more zones 1 and 2 now, you get batter at converting these opportunities no matter where your team gets the ball from, as you help all 12 players, both the starters and non-starters, to be mean ball players who then can convert even off of a mean ball. Remember, this skill should be developed not just in 6 vs. 6 play, but in speedball and monarch of the court games and the like. Now you get to run the quick set front row player attacks with the bic player coming from back row. You get spikers/attackers (not hitters...lol) who look at the other teams block and swing hit from one side to the other side of the court to attack against the opponent’s weakest blocker....You get the

setter to stay back, not run to the net to set, so that teammates can forearm pass/overhead pass a ball to the net that they can hit on two, or twist in the air and set the trailing attacker who hits a meter ball while the opposing team lands from trying to block the setter hitting on two.... Players who know where the gaps are and can attack them better. In other words, players who can play and score off even the meanest “free” ball, as their own teammates have helped

them be able to convert those toughest and meanest balls by giving them to themselves....It may not always be rainbows and ponies out there, as Hugh McCutcheon notes and we all found out in the gold medal women’s match, but these little things add up, and this one, to teach MEAN balls by the players, not free balls or no third contact over the net skills by the players, is in my top ten changes we all need to make...

Off to London to jury the sitting volleyball venue for the Paralympics. Knock on wood I will not have a situation like badminton’s or fencing’s juries did in London 2012, or the #1 volleyball jury change of taking the USA win over Japan away, due to a missed red card, and triggering the men’s team shaving of their heads in support of Bob Samuelson...That is a history lesson for a jury that I hope I do not have to enforce. Like my journeys to Sydney 2000 and Athens 2004, I will be blogging daily from London with a “Growing the Game Together” focus, so look for those soon and Go Team USA!

## STOP Teaching Hitting

July 20, 2012

From: Chuck Rey

Sent: Friday, April 27, 2012 4:26 PM

To: Peter Vint, John Kessel

Subject: Re: Smash ball

Awesome. I do understand and that makes sense. I should have followed your ways years ago...Thanks again for the thought provoking Friday afternoon. We need to start Fridays with Vint and Kessel (kind of like a Mike and Mike in the morning ;) Have a great weekend guys.

USOC/USAV Response:

Not quite... There are several ways to describe how the velocity (which includes both speed and direction) of a golf ball is created. The easiest to describe is by the impulse-momentum relationship. In this expression, the velocity of the ball is completely dictated by the force imparted to the ball by the club, the mass of the ball, and the time over which the force this contact force is applied. Specifically, the relationship is  $V(\text{release}) = \text{Impulse}/\text{Mass}$  (where Impulse is the sum of all forces applied by the club to the ball multiplied by the duration the forces are applied).



There is a bit of a "fudge factor" in this equation which accounts for the imperfect elastic response of the ball. In the case of the golf ball, the deformation of the ball creates a loss of energy (which is much less than the loss of energy the deformed volleyball had). It's incorrect to state that deformation creates energy. It always loses it – but the elastic properties of the ball dictate just how much energy is lost.

The loft of a club head serves two purposes. First, when struck correctly (unlike most times I make contact), the loft will change the orientation of the action/reaction force to in turn changes the direction of the initial ball flight. Second, the loft of the club can influence the general point of contact of the club head on the ball (getting beneath the ball to induce back spin). The depth and geometry of the grooves can also influence "spin" by changing the extent to which reaction and friction forces are applied to/by the ball.



To your question, the orientation of the hand or clubface will absolutely influence the flight direction. To what extent depends on the alignment of the hands velocity with the orientation of the hand (e.g., think of an armswing that is entirely directed down the line but with only a hand that is angled back into the court. This would be like a club head which is driving perfectly forward, but the club head does not close at impact – the result is that the ball still goes MOSTLY forward with some lateral deviation.). The SPIN, however, is always dictated by the size of the force, the duration of contact, and exactly where the force is applied, relative to the object's center of mass. Spin is not dictated by club loft per se but how the club is designed to accommodate contact below the ball center.

From: Chuck Rey

Further thoughts... The head of a golf club does not flex like

a wrist, yet a golfer is able to make the ball spin based on the principles discussed on hitting under the center of the ball. (Power is given to the ball by the initial contact of the club, the compression of the golf ball plus the angle of the club is the "second" contact that creates the spin). A golf club is the "myth buster" to wrist snap on a volleyball.

But, a golfer can put more spin on the ball, based on the loft of the club. Applying that principle to hitting a volleyball, a player should have their hand at an angle (like a golf club) above the ball upon contact? I understand the science behind the creation of topspin based on a contact point above the center of the ball and not the hand "snapping" on top of the ball. But as you both viewed video on ball contact, there must be some compression on the ball. Logic tells me that the harder one hits the ball, the more the ball compresses and the absolute center of the ball is pushed forward, thus a player would have to hit more on top of the ball (higher above center), in order to force the ball down. In other words, the harder one hits the ball, the more on top of the ball they must hit. Of course there is a point when hitting too high on the ball would be counterproductive. I could also see the height the player is above the net and the angle of arm-swing on the ball would be a factor. I assume there is a "sweet spot" for every contact that is different for each set, each jump, each arm-swing, each player, inflation of the ball, etc...the randomness that is volleyball. It's those that find the sweet spot most consistently are the ones that will execute best (theoretically). Thanks for the Friday thoughts outside the box (or inside the ball).

## USOC Response

First – Hi Chuck! Great to hear from you!...Second, the REAL issue about the myth of the wrist snap is that, based on research using high speed video and film, the wrist does not actively flex (snap or bend forward) during ball contact. The photo you shared is static and therefore doesn't allow us to see the movement that is (or, more likely, NOT) taking place during the very brief time in which the hand is actually in contact with the ball. But, based on this perspective, I'd even speculate that the wrist is in a NEUTRAL position. It does NOT seem to be flexed (bent forward) and this is my primary point. The wrist is usually neutral and is NOT actively flexing forward...

Related to this myth of wrist snap are the spiking cousins of throwing tennis balls and pepper. Specificity in training simply means you are getting better at throwing tennis balls over the net, not hitting a volleyball. This often then builds to hitting off of coach's throws and then the setter sets off of a throw from the hitter, thus not learning the micro seconds of timing needed and reading cues to both start and adjust your spike approach at the fastest possible speed, and the best time and place to jump. This time and place to jump at the "sweet spot in time" takes many thousands of spikes to acquire –and of course as we know from specificity, it is NOT learned by standing on a box above the net learning "to spike." However, coaches choose to train this blocked/ungamelike way due to both tradition, and the desire to have practice look good, even if the science shows the best way to become a versatile spiker is to spike set volleyballs.

Another world wide tradition we must replace is "the circle of hitting..." Around the world, when I shout "OK, Let's Hit!" in their language, the hitters do the following:

- *Stand about 1 meter outside the court sideline, in Zone Four.*
- *Toss the ball to the setter*
- *Approach and hit.*
- *Land and fly at supersonic speeds after the ball (if they did not hit it into the net) under the net.*
- *Get the ball, and wait in a line on the other side of the net to hit the ball from zone four again...and again, and again....*

Hitters do that, failing to learn to transition outside – as they are standing outside the court throwing the ball to the setter – thus they are actually "contacting" the first ball out of bounds. I would prefer that my players read and let that ball go out. These hitters then are getting to be great at landing and moving fast under the net, a skill that looks somewhat like a chicken pecking for food, and one that is NEVER done in a match. Thanks to tradition, we have players who know how to fly under the net after hitting, but not back off the net to transition fast again, or land safely to then block or move down the net. Spikers on the other hand, like all beach doubles players, know they need to pass/dig a ball on the court for first contact (either from over the net or from their setter), then transition to hit. Once they hit, spikers then land and do a new skill. They land so they can block, or transition away from the net to ready to hit again or celebrate. They land and move down the net to block at a different zone tactically, and might even move along the net to complain at the referee about a touched ball. For the beginning part of spiking training, every player spikes the EVEN SET next the next ball, then go retrieve a ball. Everyone on the team needs to deliver a spikeable ball when called on in game play, so spikers will attack, then set, not just the setters ALL the time... It is a hard habit to break, and one of the funniest moments in clinics where the hitter, knowing they are supposed to then set, first hit, land, and fly to about the other 3 meter line, before realizing...oops, I am supposed to set. Talk about pavlovian responses...

Hitters hit zone four, and four and four.... This is a KEY place we need coaches to change their traditions. Spikers on the other hand, first take swings at the back row, swinging on the three choices of “A”, “pipe/bic,” and “D” first and after a certain amount of time, then spike sets delivered to zones 4 AND 2 and even 3. We must increase our spiking time from zone 2, which has the advantages of making the opposing team’s setter often handle the dig, and thus not able to run the offense. As most diggers send the spike back to the attacker, the ball, if not dug by the setter, returns back towards the other team’s zone 4, as you hear the opposition’s setter screaming “Help!” The reason Clay Stanley is so great at spiking from zone 2 is simple, he has practiced at it. Same goes for 12 year olds....

Hitters hit on good sets and tip on the bad ones. That is backwards from what great spikers do, who learn to spike on bad sets and tip at times on perfect sets. Hitters are developed by coaches who spend the majority of their time hitting against no blockers. That is fine for younger players, who in game play, are not blocked. However, if you are coaching older athletes who might have a block against them 90 percent of the time or more, well, they need to be getting blocked about the same percentage of time in practice, so they become spikers.

I will close this blog with two quotes from our Olympic Gold Medal volleyball coach Marv Dunphy....First, “Since we learn best from things that are gamelike, the ideal spiking drill is a pass-set-spike drill; the ideal setting drill is a pass, set, spike drill, and the ideal passing drill is a pass, set, spike drill – while likewise the ideal digging drill is a dig-set-spike drill.” Finally – he simply and accurately says – “Train in reality....” I couldn’t agree more, it is how you develop great spikers....

## STOP Teaching Running

October 8, 2012

This blog in the STOP series is a plea for coaches to please understand one of the most important principles in the science of motor learning – that of specificity – as it particularly applies to conditioning/running. Sadly, there are coaches who, either because of old, no longer true traditions or their beliefs and opinions, think that running the mile or more in less than some amount of determined minutes, is a valid way to 1. Train for volleyball, 2. Warm up for volleyball or even worse, 3. Eliminate a player from even trying out for a volleyball team. If you are one of those coaches, please stop doing such running. You are not training according to the science and research known, and you are being a less effective coach in your training. Your players need be taught how to play volleyball, not taught how to run long distances.

Let me share an email discussion with Dr. Carl McGown, professor emeritus of Motor Learning at BYU about this, important principle of specificity as it regards conditioning.

*“Training is specific. The maximum benefits of a training stimulus can only be obtained when it replicates the movements and energy systems involved in the activities of a sport. **This principle may suggest that there is no better training than actually performing in the sport.** This text maintains that the principle of specificity is the single most pervading factor that influences the improvement of performance from a physiological perspective. Training effects are, in the main, so specific that even minor departures from movement forms, velocities, and intensities result in undesirable training effects. This means that incorrectly designed training activities will have no carry-over value for a particular movement form, and may even have the potential to negatively influence activities.”*

Like we all have learned how to bike ride by riding a bike, playing the game of volleyball teaches players how to play the game of volleyball. There is a program in another team sport, women's soccer, where at the collegiate level one coach and school has won about two-thirds of all championships in history. The head coach, Anson Dorrance, has some great books out, including the classic, Training Soccer Champions. In two chapters, Anson's core statements are: *"In the Entire Off-Season, All we do is Play..."* and *"Conditioning is Homework."* A reference back to motor learning science that relates to the importance of both specificity and developing fundamental abilities is found in the IMPACT manual over the last two decades with the following quote by Dr. Richard Schmidt. *"Drills and lead-up activities take considerable practice time and do not produce much transfer, so use them sparingly in later practice stages."* AND *"It is fruitless to try to train fundamental abilities (e.g. quickness, balance) so concentrate on the fundamental skills instead."*



Getting in shape to play is important, but the non-game specific options should be done when you do not have time to play on the court. Marv Dunphy understood that when, in a season that he felt his Pepperdine team to be behind his opponents in skill and team play, he cancelled all scheduled conditioning/weightlifting, and moved that time into gym training and play. At the highest levels, conditioning is a core part of training. At the medium to lower levels, it is skill and team play, not conditioning, that wins the match. You can see this clearly in adult play where the Masters teams, in nowhere near the shape of their younger opponents, can easily defeat these youthful teams. The far better conditioned younger teams will win the warm up, but lose the match.

The most important "skill" in our game is reading, which is not conditioning dependent. Being a good runner does not help you be a better reader of the game. The flow of the game and actions done by a player long before the actual ball contact of the player, are essential to development of this skill, and only occur in game play, not in any drill. Indeed, as a lefty myself, we are, again based in specificity in training, harder to read and play against, as almost all reading done by players is against right handed players. In an important paper by Drs. McGown and Bain, they note that regarding specificity in training in blocked (as in most drills) vs. random training (as in game play) that:

*The random versus blocked practice methods represent a fundamental paradox regarding athletic performance during training and subsequent performance during competition [29, 30]. Based on performance measurements during practice, blocked activities, in which athletes repeatedly rehearse the same task, result in superior performance during the training session [2, 31]. In comparison, performing tasks and skills in random order decreases skill acquisition during training. Consequently, based on measurement of performance effects during practice, many coaches and players believe that blocked practice is superior to random practice [25]. Such a conclusion however, mistakenly assumes a positive correlation between performance in practice and long-term skill retention [32]. The paradox arises from the fact that blocked practice is in fact very ineffective for transfer of learning to competition as performance improvements measured during practice degrade rapidly, and inefficient because retraining on the same skills will be necessary [29, 31, 33]. Conversely, random practice is both effective, transfer to competition is high, and efficient, skill acquisition is relatively permanent. Indeed, the superiority of*

*random practice has been substantiated for a large number of sports skills including volleyball [34, 35], badminton [36, 37], baseball [38, 39], basketball [40], tennis [41], and soccer [42], and its utility and training applications thoroughly reviewed by Schmidt and Lee [2]. Finally, scientific research into the neurological reasons for this superiority have revealed that variable activities increase and strengthen the brain connections that are responsible for learning motor skills whereas simply repeating the same activities exerts no measurable effect on these brain connections [43-45] The neuronal explanation for these effects are perhaps best exemplified by our own observations (Bain and McGown), of inexperienced coaches training novice players where the instructor(s) become frustrated by the performance variability and lack of successful repetitions of new learners. As a consequence, these inexperienced coaches limit or abandon whole teaching methods for part, and random practice for blocked. Unfortunately, this course of action deprives the learner of the environmental variability and sensory inputs that are essential for the formation of motor maps and implicit behaviors, which are ultimately reflected in the acquisition of functional skills and expert performance [13, 18, 19, 29, 65]. In total, the evidence on this topic is clear; drawing distinctions between training methods based on age or ability is a coaching practice that has no foundation in either motor learning science or in the application of motor learning principles.*

If you are interested in the research noted above on reading and the random vs. blocked training topic (which includes the footnote numbers referenced, please send me an email at [john.kessel@usav.org](mailto:john.kessel@usav.org) and I will be happy to send it to you, no charge.

## **Evolution of Volleyball Nets**

June 21, 2012

This spring I was fortunate to be a speaker at the 25<sup>th</sup> annual Midwest Volleyball Instructors (MVI) Clinic. I got to follow in the footsteps of presenters such as Arie Selinger, Hugh McCutcheon, Bill Neville, Mike Hebert and dozens more, and joined over two days, over 200 coaches learning from their fellow Minnesota coaches, who just happen to also have won championships, and the talented Bond Shymansky from Marquette University. Walt and Tracey Weaver put on a class event, and I was given six sessions over two days to share ideas.

One of those ideas that stood out the most was my regular use of the ribbon/rope down the middle of the training court – allowing the 16 Northern Lights athletes helping us show what we were also saying – get more contacts per hour and better reading over the net. Same thing happened at Tracey’s Weaver’s 3<sup>rd</sup> grade class when I was there, and in Raleigh two weeks before, where Jenna and the superb Triangle Volleyball Club, helped me train 4<sup>th</sup> graders in volleyball and sitting volleyball, as well as getting kids of all ages to enjoy the sitting game at MPL.

A core concept that many fail to practice enough is to help players learn to hit every third ball over that 7 foot 4 ¼ in barrier for girls/women and the higher 7 foot 11 5/8 inch obstacle for boys/men. Players also need to serve every ball over that same wall on EVERY serve they do, that first and oh so important contact, while those receiving these serves and attacks, need to READ the ball as early as possible from the other side of the net. Our sport is played over a net – like tennis, badminton and table tennis. Those other sports are never played 6 vs. 6, but 1 on 1 or 2 vs. 2, so the athletes get plenty of contacts on each net crossing – as in 50-100 percent per team. So what we need to do is get either more nets up or more net length up. The end of my blog will share an option we have created to help clubs, youth sports programs and PE teachers around the world to get those needed repetitions, but for now, back to the evolution...

## Tables, Boxes or String



The first net for many might be just a table or a string, and just using a balloon. Basement boxes worked too, any barrier that can be volleyed across.... One of the most intense table matches I have seen was between Steve Timmons and Karch Kiraly, with a balloon. Epic. One rally I will never forget was with my roomie Abel Wolman, in the living room when his errant dig flew up, struck the overhead lamp which came crashing down on the table/net which had Laurie Glassgold's 6 month geology map project on it, and shredded it. So I strongly recommend a balloon or balloon ball (see the back of the MiniVolley book on how to make that), or the 70 gram Molten First Touch ball for such indoor play....

## Fences, Ribbon and Rope

A Chain link fence, the top bar of a soccer goal, and just rope or ribbon is the next level of net options to play over. This picture of boys playing 4 vs 4 over a chain link fence is from East High, Karch Kiraly's high school.







A higher than usual fence has also been an option. This clip shows some over the Mexico USA Border wall... <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uM3SkHolLdU> The ribbon shot of 16 sitting volleyball courts set up using chairs with weight room plates to anchor the system is from the 19<sup>th</sup> annual Leadership and Character Symposium at the US Air Force Academy. The next evolution is of rope courts set up using long linked into an “X” wood slats or PVC pipe even bamboo. You can also span the gap between two courts, or from a standard near a wall to the wall, with ribbon or rope to great a single small training court space. The most common way to add an “extra court” is to span between courts – and the end of this document shows two courts being turned into six courts using either a ribbon or a 4 nets on a rope system.



A Net

Then we get to nets that do not have just the barrier at the top but the net itself. You don’t need a LOT of net to pull it off, especially as it can be a challenge and cost to create, but that is what the regulations require. As an American, you might need to check your net to see if it is made by feet – thus 30 feet long by 3 feet wide, or to the standards that every other nation makes their nets to – metric, thus 10 meters long by a meter wide. Recently at a camp, the coach had bought nets made in feet, only to find the antennas they owned were too long to fit and tape was needed to attach things properly at the top. So check your net and make sure to get antennas that can be made to fit without tape!

Now you can mix net options, as I strongly suggest putting a ribbon or rope up between the regular standards you might have, over to the side wall, and especially between the small or large gap found between two courts. Also note that with so many nets and volleyballs around, a divider net can help with safety, and the video and upcoming USAV Toolkit shows how you can create a 50’ long by 14’ high divider made from deer netting by zip tying a roll cut in half – or if needed you use the netting uncut, to have a 100’ x 7’ high option. The cost of the string to weave thru the top and the netting is under \$20, and you attach it to a single eyebolt set at the appropriate height on each side of the wall at the center of the wall.

## Four Nets on a Rope Variations

Finally, we get to having more and smaller nets set up in the same space, so more players can train and learn. A video showing how to do this is being finished by this fall, but these images show how “rope wall standards” and rope topped nets can be tightened using a “trucker’s pulley knot.” You see, in this blog about nets, someone still unknown usually installs a minimum of 6 “volleyball training device nets” up in school gyms from the elementary to the collegiate level. The nets are small and short, and are attached to an orange colored setting accuracy circle. While it is nice to use them to set, and even forearm pass directly into (no misses off the backboard and in, accuracy-wise), six of them is a lot and allows for a lot of activity training. So the idea is to get as many or more more actual volleyball nets up in the gym.

The secret of a sort is the wall rope anchor system for an indoor gym or tennis court, or the crossed wood X’s for outdoor and beach court play. You should not drill individual attachment points at various, possible volleyball net heights. You instead set an attachment point very high, 10-11 feet from the floor, and another one just off the floor. Then you tie a rope and tighten it, again using a slip knotted trucker pulley knot, against the wall. You can attach to a basketball cranking device, or drill an eyebolt/anchor into the wall, one you can screw in and out if needed for when you put the eyebolt into the wall at the low floor level.



Then you simply attach from one rope to the other far wall rope, your ribbon, rope or volleyball net, again with the pulley knot to tension the top of the net across the distance being spanned.





The best part of this inexpensive system is how easy it is to adjust the net height – you simply slide it up and down the rope. When you combine it with the USA Volleyball “Four Nets on a Rope” option, you can get EIGHT nets up in a gym where one or two might have previously been used to train players. Even better, you can then lower it down a bit, and have 8 badminton training nets, and lower it further to have 8 youth tennis, pickleball or sitting volleyball nets! This is all part of USA Volleyball’s dedicated work to grow the game for all in our sport, not just one group, and to even support other Olympic and Paralympic sports from Sitting Volleyball, to tennis, wheelchair tennis and badminton. When the video clip on this final evolution of net options is produced, you will be able to download it right here, so if the link is not blue/hyperlinked yet, it is not finished. Plan is to have it done in August.



## The Evolution of the Butterfly Drill

February 06, 2012

Been thinking about one of the drills that most volleyball coaches and players, with a little bit of experience, known around the world – “Butterfly” More to the point I guess I have been reflecting on how the motor learning principles of increasing contacts per hour and gamelike training – not to mention extrinsic and intrinsic feedback/feedforward.

### Caterpillar Stage

1970s -- No ball in motion for learning --- Sat in circles, static stretching. Run in circles, around the court and doing “footwork” for the caterpillar has so many legs, you need to train how to get them all to work in unison I guess...

## Cocoon Stage

1980s -- A BALL started to get used! - 1 ball in a big circle drill COACH controlled. The players as planets circle around the sun of the coach – and the coach gets 10-12 times the number of contacts as a single player. Whenever the coach needs to actually teach/instruct, the drill comes to a stop – or they just use words, no modeling or one on one direct attention. The “better” coaches have learned to keep their eyes on the passer, while beginners actually look away for each ball being handed to them, or even reload themselves out of the ball basket. It is progress though, as the ball is coming OVER the net, like the game, FINALLY. Remember in pair passing, no over the net ball reading/learning that is essential to being able to receive a ball, is happening...so changes are occurring in the cocoon at least...scoring finally started with “how many in a row” can we reach.

## Butterfly Stage

1990s -- OMG TWO BALLS in the air! ... I love how you can now go just about to any clinic site in the USA and say “Butterfly drill now!” and while groups might have to teach some of the members of the flow of movement for both the balls and the players, they do it without a coach having to explain it. So now twice as much learning, 100 percent more, is being seen as two balls/groups are in action...and the players became empowered by their overhead passing/serving, not the coaches. Mind you, this was not done as a option to warm up however, it was done mid practice as a passing drill. This really is not a good mid-practice drill, but it IS a great WARM UP to start practices, as you can run, even ask for footwork movements, and by getting the players to first toss, then actually roll shot/serve a ball, depending on how far back they are, you get arm warm up too and reading balls coming OVER the net...

Remember that your feedback is a vital part of player development – and since you are out of the grill now, you can better observe both groups pre-contact actions – that make the difference to the contact moment that most coaches judge “good/bad” technique. You might event still be involved in teaching the players how to be better “assistant” coaches in randomizing and helping you give better feedback, and even being part of the grill at times for focused feedback and role modeling. There are two player flow options – one large group moving thru- such that scoring options would include whole team in a row maximums, or two groups of 5-6 – where the in a row scoring can be competitive between the two groups.

## Avatar - Evolution Options Beyond

What always intrigues me is that when I ask a clinic coaches to now get even more balls moving/smaller groups, they cannot figure that out. It is the main grill in the Minivolley book, as it really is how to drill down to the essence of serve reception learning. One server, one passer covering half the court by reading, and one player as target at the setter slot (off the net 5 feet, NOT stuck at/on the net). You do it for minivolley teams of three and when you have 12 players, you do the same, four groups of three, all using the net. Now you have most your scoring options open, timed, in-a-row, server vs. passers, etc.

Also it is important to note that your feedback/teaching skills are even more used, with a much less likelihood of overloading an individual player with feedback, Remember you want to give players about 5 trials before giving them more feedback, so as to not overload them with information. While “cue” words/shortened phrases can help a coach not overload, small group training allows the coach to be quite busy giving feedback, going from group to group, without the too oft seen problem of staying stuck on a single player and giving him/her too much information. You watch, perhaps (not always) give feedforward, and move on, knowing that the most important feedback is intrinsic, so your goal is to give them information to teach themselves while you are over working with other players.

Remember, as reading is so important, you want to limit or eliminate players sending balls over the net in non gamelike ways, but to have the players sending them over with overhead passes, rolls shots, standing spikes, even forearm passes, so the receivers get to READ REALITY, not coach throws, bounced balls, or things on the other side of the net that do not teach the reading they so importantly need. Remember the great warm up game of “Tennis” that the national teams of both genders enjoy – as they attempt to beat fellow Olympians with a below the net passing skills (both overhead and forearm), a big challenge for those who can read well. At the same time, “Tennis” is very gamelike for lower level play where the ball so often comes over on the first or second hit, and while you, with your experience can read it in plenty of time, the less experienced/younger players have no read of what is about to happen, and get beaten.

*Three balls – Concentration Passing* -- Three groups of four players. You get three players to become distractors, so each group has a server, passer, setter target and “distractor.” The distractor can do anything to the server receiver they are paired with they want, in preferably gamelike ways but silly works too – the only rules are, they cannot touch the ball, nor the serve receiver. When I first started doing this I called the game “Distraction Passing” but you don’t want to make the mistake I did – you want to focus on what you want out the of the drill – concentration – as the player serve receiving knows they can’t be touched or the ball flight can’t change.

*Four Balls* – see the MiniVolley book, page 20 for how to get four groups of three on the court training over the net, no problem. Each group is comprised of a server (serving from endline for older/better players or nearer the net/on the sideline for low experienced/young players), serve receiver (covering ½ the court – front and back, but not the other half court which is the serving target/reception training area of the other group on that side of the court), and setter/target (near the net, but not ON the net and either middle, or right side of the court – and one or both of the setter/targets can set balls off the serve received ball to a parent/coach and even “cover” if you want). Two servers on each side, serving to their half the court/serve receiver on the other side, and the two others on the opposite side serving the other court/direction.

*Six and even Eight Balls!* – using the above three or four ball grills, with the setter targets – or coach/parent target at the spiking target area if you are also including setting - having a ball to then throw to the server before catching/setting the serve received ball.

*Two other important thoughts methinks...*

If you see my blog on "STOP Teaching Passing" you see that we also want ALL specific serving practice to include at least ONE serve receiving player on each side of the court. This receiver can pass up to themselves (making the positive error first) or to an imaginary setter/target at the net. You as coach or putting assistants there, can optionally (if you are not on the endlines helping the servers) be that target and then send the balls back to the servers. I spent about half my coaching career, over 20 years, serving, but not having a single person learning to read and serve receive these priceless served balls coming over the net. What an idiot I was. It does not have to be the libero, but can be that player alot of the time. You just GOTTA get at least one player on each side reading and serve receiving these hundreds, even thousands of serves coming over the net, as you must win the serve/serve receive battle to win most matches.

Just looking at the “how do you learn to ride a bike” story insights -- no coach needed, no drills done, no summer camp attended, no progressions done – and you will understand my final point in this blog... Ask yourself how fast would kids learn to ride a bike if there were 12 kids, and one bike? You learned to ride by having your own bike and riding it all the time, not by watching someone ride. You learn to drive a car by driving it all the time, not by watching your parents drive for 16 years from birth to license age (though you likely do learn “when” to slam the steering wheel and yell and even curse when driving...). You gotta get more

balls in the air and more over the net or otherwise gamelike contacts per hour in your gym. We learn by doing, not watching.

So what other "grills" do you do to get more learning accomplished in the same amount of time - ones that use the net as a net, not a wall - and change the angle of the ball, not send it right back to where it came from? You know, gamelike drills....grills! Post a comment or you can always email me at [john.kessel@usav.org](mailto:john.kessel@usav.org)

## Videos, McCutcheon and Lessons, Oh My!

July 31, 2012

A chance to make history is ahead on several levels in this summer's Olympic Games in London. A young high school player named Hugh McCutcheon came up to me in New Zealand back in the late 1980s when I was there teaching an FIVB Coaching course, and asked for help in coming to play in the USA. "You can't teach tall, Hugh." I told him and in the end, the best fit for him was to learn from Carl McGown, professor of Motor Learning Science at Brigham Young University and head coach of their new NCAA men's varsity team. The rest of his journey story are quite well told by Hugh by your international federation, the FIVB, and by his soon to be new hometown newspaper, the Star Tribune:

<http://www.fivb.org/en/olympics/london2012/FeatureVB.asp?No=36012>

<http://www.startribune.com/sports/gophers/162480866.html>

<http://www.latimes.com/sports/olympics/la-sp-oly-womens-volleyball-20120728,0,1467264.story>

<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2012/07/28/hugh-mccutcheon-u-s-women-s-volleyball-team-s-silent-savior.html>

The women have won the last THREE Grand Prix annual world competitions, are ranked #1 in the world, and are on a very long win streak at the international level. When you have over 10,000 scholarship athletes in the USA (versus just over 100 for the men), one might wonder why it has taken so long to be ranked at the top going into an Olympics. Clearly Hugh is core to this climb, but he understands both the randomness of the game, and the work they have done.

Here is what he said on the eve of the Olympics opening *"I like that our team is aspiring to be the best*



it can be with the hopes of the gold medal," McCutcheon said. "I think that is why you should be here. Why come if you want to come in fifth. That doesn't make any sense to us. But that doesn't mean that we will do it. And we are certainly not under any illusion that just because we have this ranking that all of sudden it will come pretty easy. We know it will be a battle. We know there are a lot of good teams here, but we are not going to back down. I don't know who is going to win it, I certainly hope we do. But if we don't, I know we have done everything we could over the last four years to be ready for this moment. Ultimately, it will come down to one or two plays, maybe some luck, maybe someone being healthy or unhealthy."

The University of Washington has the most number of female volleyball players in this year's Olympics. Courtney Thompson's story, a walk on a UW (fellow Olympian Laura Davis was also a walk on at the Univ. of Southern California, for those who follow LTAD in this blog), is one I hope to find time to share, for she has true grit. Here is just a quick look - <http://seattle.sbnation.com/2012/7/25/3186733/team-usa-volleyball-olympics-courtney-thompson> and a chance to "listen in" daily with Courtney is found here [http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/olympics/2018783102\\_olympicsdiary27.html](http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/olympics/2018783102_olympicsdiary27.html)

Jim McLaughlin, UW women's head coach who has both won NCAA Division I titles in women's AND men's volleyball, knows the science of motor learning better than most, but my Univ of Washington interests actually go back to my grandfather, Oliver Lamson. His last name is my middle name, and he rowed varsity crew for UW in the early 1900s. In crew you see the best of tradition in sport, and amazing teamwork, when you row an 8 person scull. Trust me, you will find it more than worth your time to read this wonderful and little known Olympic story, to your family and your players...

[http://www.slate.com/articles/sports/fivering\\_circus/2012/07/\\_1936\\_olympics\\_rowing\\_the\\_greatest\\_underdog\\_nazi\\_defeating\\_american\\_olympic\\_victory\\_you\\_ve\\_never\\_heard\\_of\\_.single.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/sports/fivering_circus/2012/07/_1936_olympics_rowing_the_greatest_underdog_nazi_defeating_american_olympic_victory_you_ve_never_heard_of_.single.html)



The FIVB also just published their newest edition of their magazine *VolleyWorld* – featuring none other than Clay Stanley on the cover. You see, USA Volleyball is the National Federation member of the FIVB, which is one of the three core areas USAV must support, assist and adhere to regulations (the other two are the US Olympic Committee and the USAV Regional Volleyball Associations). Indeed, current CEO of USAV Doug Beal, is in the running for the FIVB presidency, a vote which will happen in the USA during the World Congress late this September. So flip through the most recent

magazine that is part of what you, as a USAV member, also assist.

<http://www.fivb.org/EN/ePublications/Volleyworld/FIVB-VolleyWorld03-2012/>

For the record, here also are the indoor pool schedules for the Olympic men's and women's events.

<http://www.fivb.org/en/olympics/london2012/scheduleVB-M.asp>

<http://www.fivb.org/en/olympics/london2012/scheduleVB-W.asp>

Whether history is made or not, Hugh, and his staff which includes none other than Karch Kiraly, Paula Weishoff and Jamie Morrison, have already made a wonderful impact on the training of our highest level of women's volleyball athletes. They have followed the principles of motor learning science, including the importance of game play and reading. Al Scates once said something to the effect that UCLA played a 5-1 defense with Karch, as five guys went to their positions and Karch read where the ball was being hit. Karch has been guiding every member of the program on how to read the game better, both with his insights and technical tools previously mentioned in this Growing the Game Together blog.

As the science of motor learning, as many should have learned from USAV's IMPACT course, notes that words have little meaning to beginners, and feedback is best if it is immediate and specific, and positive – based on guiding players to discover what they should do, not delivered by a “commentator coach” speaking as to what happened – there are tools we all can use to assist in this process. I did several High Performance camps this summer, and shared those tools with the staffs. We can all teach better using the Ipad apps below.

The Coach's Eye – <http://www.coachseye.com/> - Record, save, press analyze and in a few seconds you can slow motion replay, both forward and backward by the touch of a finger, the video you just captured. You can also draw lines, circles and other highlights on the image, and even email it. A GREAT tool to catch your players doing it right and let them watch and rewatch themselves doing just that. Of course you can also let the player discover their errors and guide them to determine what they should do in the future in the same situation. Ubersense – <http://www.ubersense.com/>(formerly known as Excelade) is another app which does the same thing that others like a lot.

Bam Delay Mirror - <http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/bam-delay-mirror/id517673842?mt=8> Displays from the front, as if a mirror, and the coach can set the delay of what is shown to be between 2 seconds to 2 minutes.  
Kinovea – [www.kinovea.org](http://www.kinovea.org) An open source sports video editing program.

I was told at Puget Sound by Peter on our coaching staff that the Android version for video replay is in beta by the name of “Cyclops.”

In 1995 the USOC study summary of the 10 Characteristics of Highly Successful Coaches noted that they were:

1. Profound thinkers who see themselves as educators and
2. Willing to experiment with new ideas.

This by the way is another factoid I put into the IMPACT manual in 1996 for all new USAV coaches and it remains there in the upcoming 2013 edition of the program. So I will close this chance to make history with a chance for you all to further your knowledge by taking advantage of the Open Yale Courses initiative. It fits with the vast material I have tried to share in this blog, following a philosophy of teaching and learning that



begins with the aim of training a broadly based, highly disciplined intellect without specifying in advance how that intellect will be used. Complementary syllabi, transcripts, and other resources may also be accessed from the Open Yale Courses website at <http://oyc.yale.edu/>. Now, with Cody studying and playing volleyball at Princeton, of course I also must let you all know where you can get a list of the free courses they offer online – just head over to <http://hulk03.princeton.edu:8080/WebMedia/lectures/> MIT has some great courses too – 2,100 free and counting! Go to <http://ocw.mit.edu/index.htm> Specific to this blog principle of the randomness of the game, I invite you to take 26 hours of your life, and learn from Yale professor Ben Polak, on “Intro to Game Theory.” *This course is an introduction to game theory and strategic thinking. Ideas such as dominance, backward induction, Nash equilibrium, evolutionary stability, commitment, credibility, asymmetric information, adverse selection, and signaling are discussed and applied to games played in class and to examples drawn from economics, politics, the movies, and elsewhere.*

[http://www.youtube.com/course?list=PL6EF60E1027E1A10B&category\\_name=University%2FEngineering&feature=edu](http://www.youtube.com/course?list=PL6EF60E1027E1A10B&category_name=University%2FEngineering&feature=edu)

Of course there is also Harvard, and as we watch these teams battle other teams, often you find battles within the team – so make sure to also peruse the Harvard Business Review area for gems like this one - <http://blogs.hbr.org/video/2012/07/get-comfortable-with-team-conf.html>

In closing, what with all the tweets, blogs and stories pouring out of London already, I can say that I have only missed two Olympic/Paralympics since 1980, and am looking forward to my work in London, serving on the Control Committee for the Paralympics. I love that London is hosting these again, having marveled for years at their taking on the 1948 Olympics, despite all the post-WWII austerity still going on, and made a dang profit of £29,000 in the process. Our connection to Great Britain is powerful, as are the Olympic connections. Billy Fiske is a name you should know, whether you are in London or not, as he epitomizes those connections [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Billy\\_Fiske](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Billy_Fiske)

Yes, I will be blogging almost daily from there, as so many know about the Olympics, but so few about the wonderful stories and athletes who are coming just 10 days after the close of the Olympic Games. We stay in the same village, compete in the same venues, and the USA Sitting Women’s volleyball team has been working the last four years to make their own history. Having won bronze in 2004, silver in 2008, you know what they want in 2012, and, ranked at #2 in the world, they, like all our USA Volleyball teams in London, are prepared to show their mastery of the sport on the world stage. So here are two motivational videos I think ALL coaches can use to grow the game – finishing with one of the best ones for a nation, our great neighbors to the north, Canada. Enjoy these and every day of both the Olympics and the Paralympics, as we in the family of volleyball have so much to be thankful for worldwide, regardless of the final champions.

No second chances... [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=twrvl\\_C5Bfk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=twrvl_C5Bfk)

Becoming a hero... [http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=8s4f\\_AiA624](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=8s4f_AiA624)

## Videos and Principles Worth Many Thousands of Words

December 14, 2011

If a picture is worth a thousand words, those who have heard me speak know that I love to use video and images to say far more, during the always too short time I find I have to present. Since it is the holiday season, it seems fitting to give away some of my favorite videos to help us all grow the game together...

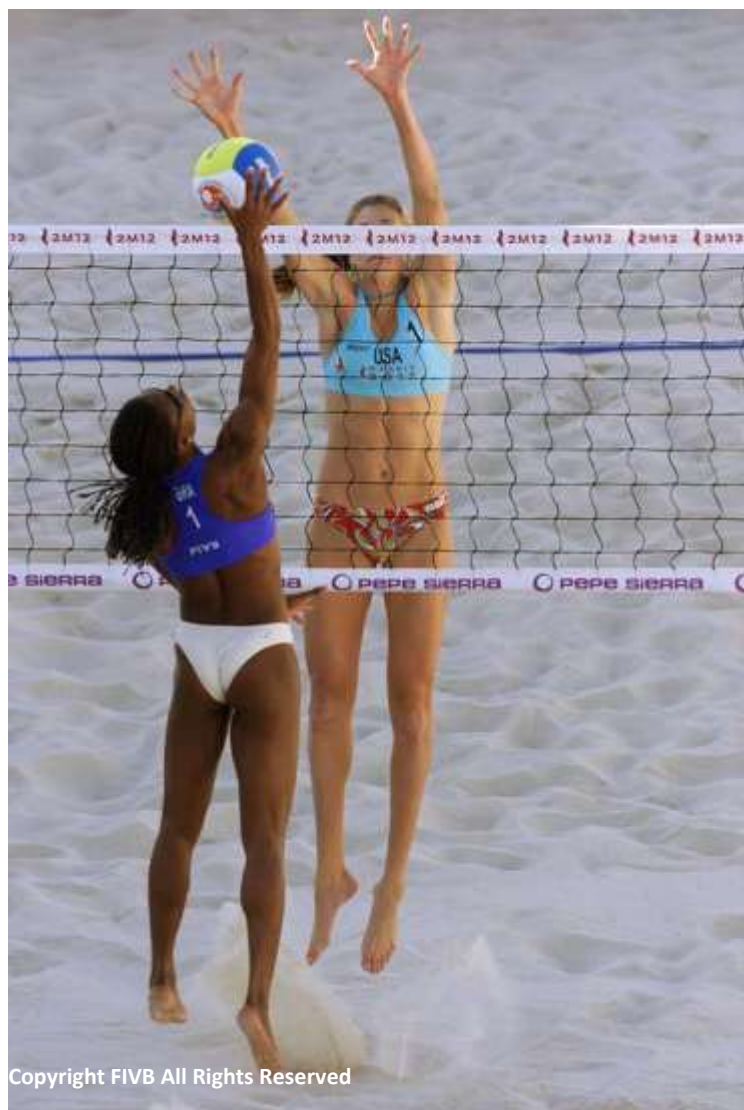
In sharing these ideas, last week I spoke in town at the Olympic Training Center for about an hour at the USA Shooting National Coaching Conference, and wove both shooting and volleyball images into a powerpoint on coaching principles. Their CEO sent a note to my CEO, Doug Beal which said *“Thanks for making John available to make a presentation at our coaches conference. John’s outstanding presentation was the best and most relevant of the conference.”* So nice to see that principles fit even in the different methods of shooting...

Then later that week I was lucky enough to return to Arizona, clearly a “pleasure trip,” as Phoenix had rain and highs of 40, while Colorado Springs was basking in single digits and below. It was an adventure though, as not only did I bring along McKenzie, who spoke to the Level II coaches about leadership in an impromptu roundtable, but our car completely broke down in an blizzard at dawn that morning, about 10 miles from Denver International Airport. A fun long cold wait in an ever getting colder car, tow truck ride – and a kind tow truck driver that then drove us to the airport, made for a later than planned arrival at the CAP course. Luckily there are people like Harold Cranswick, Becky Hudson, Eric Hodgson, Audie and Lisa do an exemplary job of running and leading that region, and the CAP cadre of Bill Hamiter, Todd Dagenais and Diana Cole. Fast forward to the departure when Eric gave me a thank you gift which contained a single quote by Thomas Jefferson, that I must share here, as we all work to grow the game together:

*“He who receives an idea from me, receives instruction himself without lessening mine, as he who lights his taper at mine, receives light without darkening mine”* - Thomas Jefferson

When I finally arrived in the CAP course after noon, my first question to the group was to ask how many of the coaches knew or could point themselves to easily find their program’s Mission Statement? A lot of pens started scratching on paper and you could see the wheels churning – for if you run your own one team club, or are a part of a larger program, you MUST know the expressed purpose of the reason the club exists, on order to make the right decisions along your season’s journey. That and you must have a copy of the club evaluation form which will be given to your team’s parents and players, NOW, so you can combine that with the mission statement to guide your coaching philosophy.

So in the spirit of the Jefferson quote, I think it important to share my favorite videos I use in most the clinics I present. During a lunch break in Arizona, I showed some of these favorites to get coaches, parents and players to ponder and extend themselves beyond their current limits – and, for those who know me well, of course to laugh heartily... My laptop has a terabyte hard drive, and I still seem to be running out of room, as videos, pictures and music are so woven into how I live and



work. So without further adeiu, here is my top ten list in no particular order, some previously mentioned and most new, and I am certain all will help you be a better coach, parent, or teacher of life and this wonderful lifetime sport.

Topic: The Most important Skill is Reading

Brazil Doubles - This clip of doubles play from Brazil speaks volumes on the value of anticipation and reading in volleyball... [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tCjP1r\\_C7D8&](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tCjP1r_C7D8&)

Ronaldo vs Ronald... Go to about 4 minutes in and watch the differences in levels of reading the game. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lx6VU7mIKvQ&>

Topic: The Value of Play and Creativity in Every Sport

JP AuClair – My dad was college roomies with the amazing ski filmmaker Warren Miller, who is still making ski movies to this day, and skiing mighty fine in his late 80s. While this is not a Miller film, it captures the joy of play/creativity and more. All the other links he has showing his skiing talent are also quite inspiring. Street Creativity <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G5dOB3VSYC8> and his All I Can movie trailer [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_L1T0EG\\_YQs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_L1T0EG_YQs)

Park Skimming – Used to do this after heavy rains at Colorado College - [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mJAu2V\\_K6jA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mJAu2V_K6jA)

Kris Holm – Unicyclist –So who is his coach? [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sV\\_w3CodBcw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sV_w3CodBcw)

Parkour and Free Running Who are these people coaches? <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WEeqHj3Nj2c>

People Are Awesome 1 - [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vo0Cazxj\\_yc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vo0Cazxj_yc)

People Are Awesome 2 - [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P\\_rgE7nDcHw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P_rgE7nDcHw)

People Are Awesome 2011 - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yKWOPIL2B8I>

Topic: The Importance of Coaches in Kid's Lives

Taylor Mali – On What Teachers “Make...” perhaps one of the most powerful poems I have ever heard. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RxsOVK4syxU>

Coaching Fail - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Drq9pXKWm0Q>

Coach McGuirk - "Role Model" All of the Cartoon Network series on Coach McC can be considered based on the topics, from psychology, fighting, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hT6Qe046Vuw>

Topic: The Value of Real Ball Control:

Lessons from My Dog Peppering - [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_kI9xhIJTFk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_kI9xhIJTFk)

Water Volleyball - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?NR=1&v=o4zmTkyTu8g>

Rhythmic Gymnastics Ball Control [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dK9TPs\\_yUz8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dK9TPs_yUz8) and [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jsxrxqWa\\_Qc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jsxrxqWa_Qc)

Throwball Nationals – There are dozens of example of this version of ball control <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nOTj7B6YcyI>

Topic: Philosophy of Coaching

Germany vs. Greece...  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=92vV3QGagck>

Topic: The Realities of Elite Level Serving.

Anne Matthes European Championships Serve - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s8neQ7bBWrl>

Jump Serving Wide but not over the net <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V6VeKhzO5L0>

USA National Team Calm Coaching and Player - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jccz2VxzUdg>

Samoloooooooooooooooooooooot - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GleJ9AiMhAc>

Clay Stanley Serving – Look at the identical routine he uses for both the positive error <http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=endscreen&NR=1&v=IrE35nht8dk> and the amazing ace...  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zx6f2KBpzp4>

Skyball Option – Remember, Beach/Doubles is great for becoming a better indoor player...  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fwrFp8LMbIA>

Serving Option <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YpsT9kczRIA>

If it makes you feel any better – check out this Brazilian National team level spike  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2pI367Azbqo>

Or you can be inspired by blocking at the Men's World League level - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rz2-4h8Ay5w>

Topic: Motor Learning Theory

Lessons in Giving Feedback <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=osD2U-s8i6E>

Lessons from Jay Kletecka in Serving Simplicity, Routine and Closed Motor Programs-  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z72Q4FBfLuM> and from a 4 year old...  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HS6NGtx9Hks>

Topic: Sports Psychology

Jessica's Affirmations – The power of positive affirmations – I can do anything good...

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qR3rK0kZFkg>

Dove Evolution – To teach your athletes that things are not always what they seem to be

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hibyAJOSW8U>

Awareness Testing – To help coaches and players realize the serial nature of the processes of the brain, not the parallel or multitasking myths... <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ahg6qcgoay4>

Coach McGuirk on Psychology - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ar0uj2JQKbE> and on Goals

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q3Jyl\\_sTmE0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q3Jyl_sTmE0)

Topic: The Randomness of Sport

Eric Shoji Kick Assist - [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r0gZQq\\_tyLE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r0gZQq_tyLE)

La Chance Compilation – Note the motorcyclists especially...

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nD19Os5oUTg>

Luckiest People Compilation –Life's randomness clearly seen...

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MhI4nB4u77M>

Topic: Three Things to Share with the Coaches who Show Up 15 Minutes Early

Murmurations – Canon D and Starlings in Flight - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eakKfY5aHmY>

World League in Slo Motion - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iZCQ1oD7ZZk>

133 Digs in 3 Minutes - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v6eEefbwYvA>

Note, if you thought I would actually limit this to my top ten, you clearly have not taken a clinic from me yet... as setting limits on great information or players does not fit with the Olympic motto of Citius, Altius, Fortius. This does not include my list of full feature movies or E60 and TED videos, previously discussed, so if this has piqued your interest in using video to teach, go read those blogs done in the past years, for they are pretty timeless... So now, head over to the USA Volleyball website and look at some of the other videos there, starting with the Wounded Warrior Games clip that lasts less than two minutes, of the double match points, with the noise and excitement, so you can share in the spirit of healing through sport...

Then there are the IMPACT Clinic videos – These are also found on the MVP GRO USAV Resource CD, along with dozens of other articles, posters, animated drills, and much more...

Golf for parents <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ReKw6J5tK2c>

Pin the Tail on Donkey for parents <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NFJeUOuqZTW>

Referee Calls for parents <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KhjbQGjP0cQ>

Hide and Seek for parents <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M9-MSGtxp80>

Age Requirements for parents <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pQAnv2iDTrU>

Hope you enjoy this year's holiday gift of videos from USA Volleyball and if you have any of your own must views - for this list is not comprehensive, just my top ones, please share in the comment section below. Thanks for your help in growing the game and lighting other's candles to light the paths of new players and coaches. Now mosey on over the video section of USA Volleyball and see what you have also been missing in free webinars and coach development video since you are done here. <http://www.usavolleyball.org>

### **Cameras, Athletes and Role Modeling:** January 15, 2012

Some of you may know that during my time at Colorado College and after, I worked as a summer hiking guide, did winter ascents, and Outward Bound courses, river rafting thru the Gates of the Ladore (Green River, Wyoming) and climbing in Colorado (they based out of Marble, Colorado, near Aspen and the MotherLode tournament). I spent over half a decade working for Holubar Mountaineering, which was ultimately bought out by North Face. I have skied all my life, as do my kids...and plan to keep sliding down the slopes later this year, once we get enough snow!



I fly fish (as does Terry Pettit FYI...lol) and hunt as an escape from the gyms of the world, to see the REAL country I might be working in. Gyms are gyms no matter where on the globe you find them but when you get out on the water or in the field, with locals guiding you who share a passion for volleyball too, it is heaven. So I have spent time walking in snow in South and North Dakota, or broiling in New Mexican and Arizona deserts. I have attempted to outwit nature's dumbest animal, trout, in streams in the Snowy River in Australia, on the South Island of New Zealand (on a trip during which I was able to meet and help a 17 year old Hugh McCutcheon of all people), in Europe from the Italian Alps to the Scottish highlands and even in South America. The best fishing for me are smaller streams right here in the USA and Canada, from Alaska to Maine, and the best, of course, is here in my home state of Colorado.

I also love taking pictures. My parents had some sayings that stuck...and one of them was "Take lots of pictures." My dad spent much of his youth after returning from China where he was born, in Yosemite.... Uncle Onas Ward had a photography shop on the valley floor, and of course knew Ansel Adams quite well. I have spent countless hours in the darkroom working on the Centennial issue of my college's yearbook, shaking photos in the silver nitrate solution, and still marvel at what digital photography has become. I am a Canon man, and still follow my mom and dad's advice, with over 200,000 shots and a separate hard drive just for pictures. Role modeling...here are some shots from Yosemite and the beach of my dad who was my role model.

You what does this all mean to coaching and parenting. Well, you can teach your players so much with a good series of sequence photos, and Karch Kiraly, our 3 time Olympic gold medal player and now assistant coach of the USA women, did a great job of showing just that, using a high speed camera that I have mentioned before in this blog – but bears mention again – the Casio EXILIM cameras are great and affordable and simple to use. During tournaments, Karch takes high speed/slow motion shots of opponents, and then using a program like

Dartfish, shows the players what he sees early in the sequence that allows better read of the kind of shot the attacker or server is going to do. I love the story he tells about his UCLA days, where legendary head coach Al Scates used the 5-1 defense, with five players going to assigned spots on the floor or net and Karch reading and going to where the ball was headed. He now is teaching his insights into knowing earlier what and how he knows



things to all of us, and it is a great gift. The importance of whole game training, not just skill training, is why we coaches know from the bench as to when an opponent is tipping a ball, before the tip occurs, but too often our players on the court do not. To see what the camera can do, at 30/120/240/420 and 1,000 frames per second, go here

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U3JfGw8YfeQ> as you can see from the narrowing and the lowering of resolution as frame rates go up, it is best to shoot at about 240, plenty fast enough to teach reading with. I have the FH25 version but they all work well.

When we teach only thru drills, not the reality of games, the tips of game flow that allow for great reading, are not happening and thus are not able to be learned. To quote Dr. Carl McGown and Dr. Steve Bain – *“This course of action deprives the learner of the environmental variability and sensory inputs that are essential for the formation of motor maps and implicit behaviors, which are ultimately reflected in the acquisition of functional skills and expert performance.”* Reading at the medium and higher levels only comes from game play, not from drills, and since this “implicit behavior” is so darn important to successful skill execution, we need to not only teach over the net, but teach the flow of the game, by training in the realities of games.

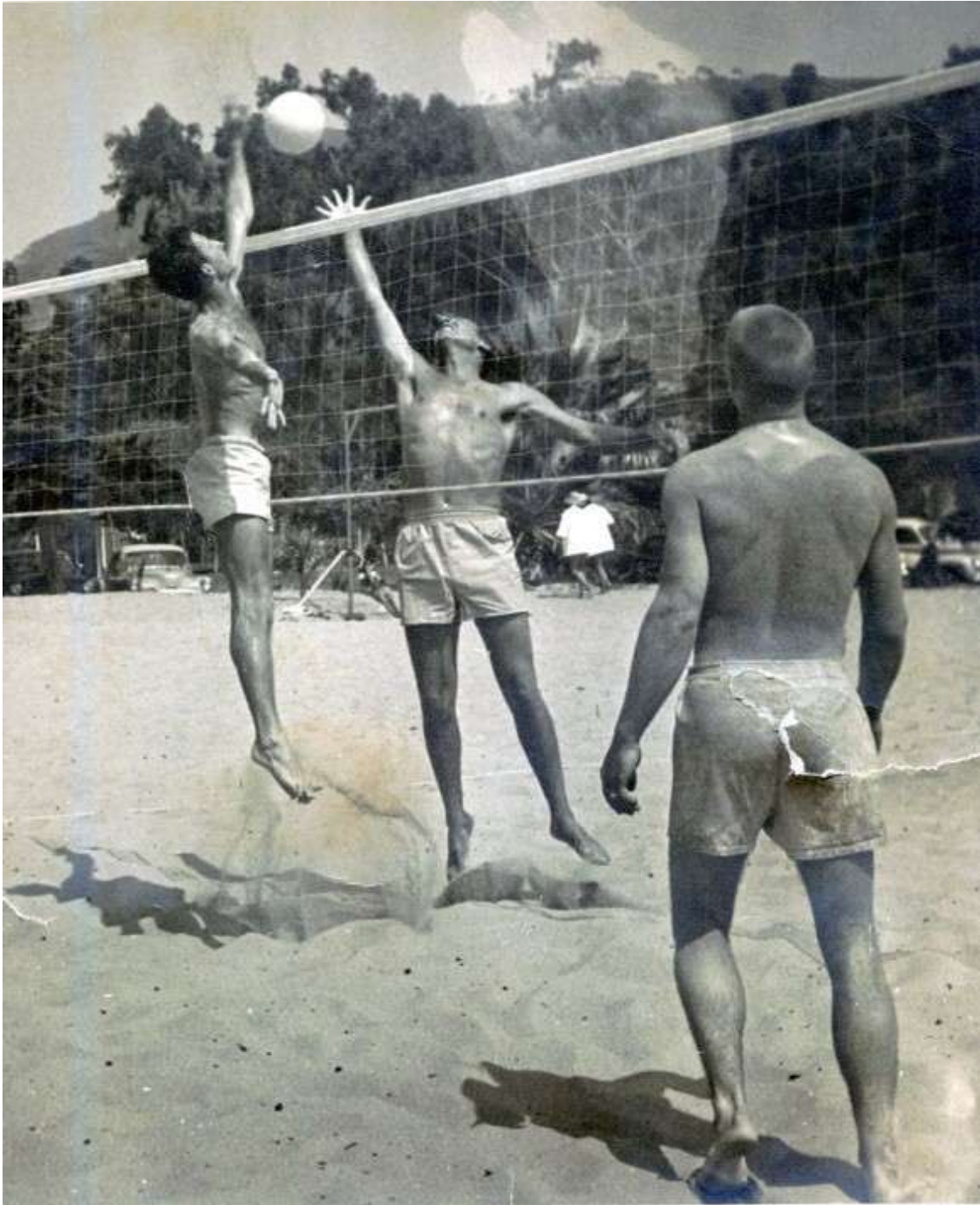
Today, a good friend Jim Huffman, who is one heckuva photographer, shared that the new camera he is getting, the Nikon D4, had been used to take a lot of films, including these two - all from where else, given the thread of this blog...the North Face channel. The first is about Why – and as you remember from IMPACT and other blogs, the “why” is more important than the how (remember my favorite Emerson quote that includes “the man who knows how, will always have a job...the man who knows why will always be his boss...”) So this clip is worth sharing...

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nZZMIo7Zfys>

The second is about parenting – and being a role model. I guess I shared the above to let you know that my kids ski great, and can camp and climb, and fly fish (and Cody and I hunt, but McKenzie knows you can’t catch and release with a gun), and they play volleyball too. As in all we do, we parent our best, and are the most important role model to our children, both on and off the fields of play...

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SfI-VkUHQlc&>

Happy new year all, and thanks for your help in growing the game together. For more on reading, review past blogs, including the last one in the reading section of Ronald vs. Ronaldo – and go back to the myth and facts of teaching reading found in your IMPACT manual, and check out other parts of the grassroots button here on USA Volleyball – and as always, if you have ideas or comments to share, please email me at [john.kessel@usav.org](mailto:john.kessel@usav.org)



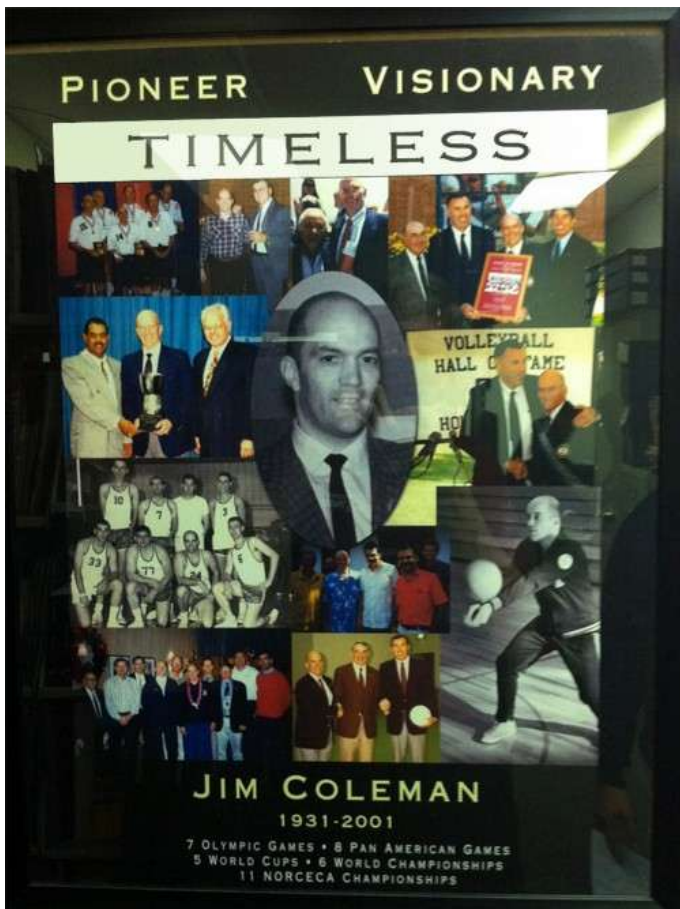


## Jim Coleman Impact & Immediate Feedback Video System

February 26, 2012

On October 22, 2012, Jim Coleman would be turning 80 years old. His passing a over a decade ago, in August of 2001, meant heaven picked up one of the best volleyball minds in the world to ever walk into a gym. At our USA Volleyball offices, all our historical material is in a large library area known as the Jim Coleman Memorial Library. Recently, Natalie Cook and two other Beach Volleyball Olympians toured our USAV offices. One of the things they were stunned by was the vast history of our sport organized around the office, especially in the Coleman library. When we move into our new offices next month, the Coleman library will quadruple in size, and get materials from Doug Beal's, Margie Mara and my own personal library. If you are ever in Colorado, our office is your office, so make sure to swing by, we are located next to the I25 freeway that runs from El Paso TX to Laramie WY, less than an hour south of Denver, off the Garden of the Gods Exit. 4065

Sinton Road. GPS it if you need to, but you can see the big USA Volleyball sign from the freeway easy....



Jim rode for the USAV Brand, as Bill Neville says about those leaders who give to the sport's national governing body. My son during his internship here at USAV, spent time in the JCM Library, and I assigned him to study Jim's work on the Immediate Feedback Video System as one of his project. Later in this blog, you can see the system, using Jim's ideas, which we retested this past summer doing camps in places like San Francisco, Lander Wyoming and even Canada. It works simply, and is VERY affordable. Before getting to that section however, I would ask you to take a moment to learn more about Jim, and let others know of the impact he had on our sport.

Ever look at a volleyball antenna and wonder when those became part of the game? It really was not that long ago, after the Olympics in the sixties, and the creator of them was Jim Coleman – and some fishing poles.

Thirty years ago Jim and I both owned “portable” Kaypro computers – based on the CP/M operating system, 30lb luggable metal machines with 5.25 inch green

monochrome screens. Mine had a 10 meg hard drive, massive at the time, and cost about 2,000, and Jim had almost as expensive dual 5 ¼ inch floppy drive system. It was back then in the 70s and 80s we would share stat ideas Jim really was first at implementing statistical systems which are still used to this day. He also was the one who got the FIVB to add colored panels to the volleyball, and mentored thousands of coaches around both the USA and the world. US National Team coaches Bert DeGroot, Doug Beal, Carl McGown, Marv Dunphy, Fred Sturm, Bill Neville and many more were mentored by him. Virtually every collegiate men's coach in the 1970s to 1990s, including the greats like Al Scates, Don Shondell, Arnie Ball, Ken Preston, Pete Hansen, and so many more were also guided and enriched by sharing time with Jim.

As a coach, Coleman was our second national team men's coach we ever had, and led our 1968 Olympic team to an amazing upset over the Soviet Union. Many might not know that en route to that match, a lighting storm had struck two locals standing under a tree by the road. The team happened along just after the bolt, and Jim got out to help save their lives, then they continued on to the gym....classic Jim Coleman... He coached the USA men until 1970 and again in 1980 and yet again in 1990.

He also led George Williams to an NAIA National title in 1974. He was an FIVB Instructor, and a USAV CAP Cadre member for decades. He even spent a year coaching a women's team in 1987, the MVL (Major League Volleyball) Minnesota Monarchs. He was a member of the FIVB (International Volleyball Rules Commission) for 24 years and was an editor of the FIVB Rules Casebook. So many of our best rule modifications which helped grow the game were tested and enhanced by Jim. In our NORCECA zone, Jim helped nearly every nation's elite coaches become better, in person, by lengthy letters and phone call conversations, and over team dinners and commission meetings.

As the library entrance poster above notes, Jim was part of 7 Olympic Games, 8 Pan Am Games, 5 World Cups, 6 World Championships and 11 NORCECA Championships. He was rightfully inducted to the Volleyball Hall of Fame in 1992. He is missed, but his impact is felt still in America and around the world, each and every match played.

If Jim were alive today, you would see him in the gym, busy wondering how to improve DataVolley, tweaking things using Dartfish, recording players an Ipad2 and the Coaches Eye, or taking things recorded on his TIVO and/or laptop and running it through Kinovea. So in his honor, and because it is both affordable and functional, using his own words below, you can record players in skill performance, and delay it from 10-30 seconds (or longer, you set the delay time) so they can perform the skill, then swing by the TV and see themselves before returning to the skillset. It also allows you to record the scrimmage and at any time, stop and take the team to see the moment/situation on the screen before returning to play. At the USOC, dozens of cameras and large 60in flat screen TVs are permanently mounted in every training area – from gyms, to the training rooms for judo, boxing, wrestling and more...

These can be set to record the court action in real or delayed time, and the overall wonderful system cost over a million dollars. From what Jim created, and we have updated below, your gym system will only cost about \$200, and you can move it from court to court, and even from site to site. As you know, from the IMPACT chapter five on motor learning, immediate feedback is best....



## IMMEDIATE FEEDBACK VIDEO SYSTEM (IFV)

July 2001 Jim Coleman

- 1) Learn to use your remote control. Read the manual on this. There are two areas of the remote with which you will become familiar.
  - a) The top group of buttons which begin with the "Tivo" button and finish with the "select" button. These were used in programming your Tivo unit and will be used to select screens to view.

b) *The lower middle buttons beginning with “play” and finishing with two buttons under the “slow” button. These are used to control the Tivo unit in the gym. You need to read your manual on these buttons and become skillful in their use. The most important will be the “pause” button (the one which looks like an equal sign turned vertically).*

2) *Basically, you will connect the camera, Tivo and TV set as given below. Begin recording on the camera, then push the “pause”. Then push the “pause” again after the number of seconds that you wish the delay. For instance in a spiking line, you may have a 10 second delay. In this ten seconds, the spiker will walk over to the TV set to see himself/herself. This will take place while the other spikers are being filmed. For a group of blocks the delay may be on minute, for a defensive drill the delay may be two minutes. It is your skill which determines the correct delay.*

3) *Whenever you have an athlete watching himself/herself, always have a specific goal for that viewing. If you tell the athlete, “Go watch yourself spike”, the athlete will tire in about three viewings. If you tell the athlete, “Make certain that your last step with your left foot is just slightly forward of your right foot”, the athlete will observe this and stay focused on the task for a longer period of time.*

### *CONNECTING YOUR CAMERA, TIVO AND TV*

1) *Your Tivo unit has been programmed to work in the following manner.*

2) *Connect the output from your NTSC Video Camera to the Input of your Tivo. Make certain that the colored coded wires match.*

*(Normally there are only two output jacks from your camera and three input ports in the Tivo. Don't worry, just use the two. Actually you may not wish to connect the sound cable and may use only one cable.)*

*The Tivo manual will call these colored cable/jacks “Composite” cables or jacks. Normally we call them RCA cables or jacks. They are just the normal colored cables that we use all of the time.*

*(Note: Cameras made for use in other parts of the world may be PAL or SECAM format rather than NTSC format. Tivo is programmed only for NTSC.)*

3) *You have the opportunity to connect the camera to Tivo with an “S-Video” cable or an “coaxial cable with RF converter”. Don't use these unless you reprogram the Tivo unit. They will not work.*

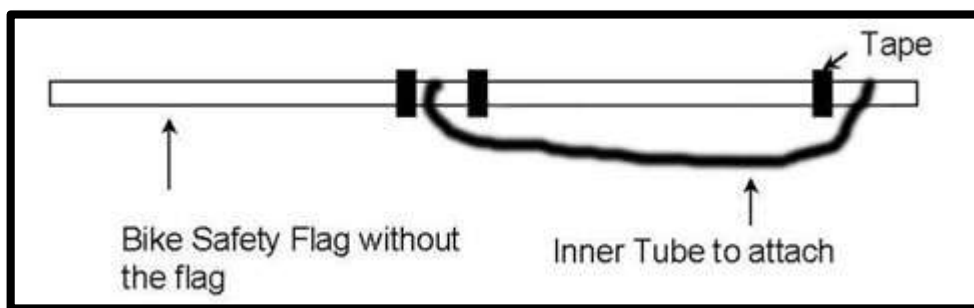
*S-Video gives you a slightly better picture. Cables are normally short and expensive.*

*Coaxial cables can be much longer than the other cables, but give a slightly poorer picture. They also require that you purchase an inexpensive RF Converter (Radio Shack) and have electricity for the RF Converter.*

4) *Connect the Tivo unit to your Video Monitor (TV set). This cable makes little difference. Again, normally the RCA cable/jacks are used.*

5) *Plug in and turn on all units. TV on Channel 3 normally. Normally a Tivo commercial will come on and take a few seconds to boot up. Make certain that the camera has a picture showing.*

*The screen which comes up will be the “Tivo Central”.*



Arrow down to “Watch Live TV” and arrow right.

Your unit should now be working.

There is normally about a one second delay between time that the camera records an action and the time that it is seen on TV. You adjust this pause longer for your purposes.

Experiment on how to use the “pause”, “9 Second replay”, “slow” “return to real time”, “forward” and “back”.

6) With practice and experimentation, you will learn the use of the Tivo, which I have not yet learned. This is truly a versatile tool for coaches and educators. It takes practice to learn to use IFV efficiently. I play match tapes into the Tivo system from a camera or VCR and use Tivo to view matches. It is very good this way. Over ten years ago those were his words....a man well ahead of his time....Meanwhile, here is a system USAV Region Services, with Cody’s work, created and used in summer of 2011, using the TIVO series one or two box (do not get a TIVO 3 and 4 do not have the RCA input jacks you need for the video camera to work), and a battery system – it is less expensive to forgo the battery and simply plug the cart system into a long extension cord, as long as you have a plug! Also note in advance, the default on TIVO is cable, and you will need to use the remote to move the input to camera/RCA input. We were able to get new/hardly used TIVO recorders for under \$50. Note also that these need not be a TIVO brand digital recorder – so you might find good prices on other systems that have been developed in the last 10 years – by Sony and others. We just wanted to make ours using the TIVO brand, to honor Jim’s work....



PostScript... In that same spirit of Jim's fishing pole antennas, from the MiniVolley book, is this way of creating antennas from Bike Safety flags/used bike inner tubes. I created these many years ago when on a US State Department training in El Salvador, their national women's team coach asked for a set of antennas, as there was only 1 set of antenna in the country, and the men's team owned it. So with the 70 bucks I was given, I repaired a set of real antennas that was discarded in the vball storage closet at the University of New Mexico where I was coaching, and then bought 20 sets of bike safety flags. A request to the local bike shop to save inner tubes they were replacing got the attachment method at no cost, and some duct tape kept them on... Coleman approved of the idea wholeheartedly...

## **No More Drills, Feedback or Technical Training...: December 18, 2009**

OK coach, hopefully this title has made you click through to this blog to see what the heck I could be thinking here. Please take the time to read and chew on what I am asking you to consider. I will take them in order as each need their own points of consideration.

### **No More Drills**

Lately in teaching IMPACT, I have come to the drill development chapter and asked those listening, who are of a growth and not fixed mindset, to simply stop saying the word drill, and start saying the word game, for any exercise they have opted to teach their athletes. It comes from children and my childhood. We played tag games - we did not do movement drills. We learned to ride our bikes and skateboards by simply doing them - we did not do bike riding drills, get a bike riding coach hired to train with or get sent to bike riding camp (even though learning to ride a skateboard or bike is hundreds of times more dangerous than playing volleyball). We created games and scoring like exponential scoring for ways to race, or chase or conquer. We played dozens of board games, kept track of who won - even gambling to say losers did dishes or laundry, and never once did a board game drill. I would put my name on the sheet of paper on the doubles court railroad tie net post, and when my turn to play came up, I would battle with all my skill and cunning, then sit down to wait to play again, losing to better players and seeking to be the winners who stayed on. That desire to stay on, which is all any state or national tournament is like this Final Four I am at right now, brought the best form of deliberate practice that can be found. I never ran lines or did pushups or burpees. I simply wanted to stay on, and while off, watched and learned from those who were king of that court.

When you ask any kid - "Do you want to do a drill for passing, or do you want to do a game for passing?" you know what any sane player will desire - that you create a game - for whatever skill you seek to improve, with scoring of some sort so they know who wins. We seek to teach in our precious 120 minutes on the court, players who deliberately practice and intently train for each and every one of those minutes. The best way to do this is to simply listen to your kids, and stop doing drills and start doing games. There is a mind shift you will have to make when you step in front of your athletes and say "OK this is a game with a focus on 'insert skill/skill combo here' and the scoring is..." Give it a novel name, as Bill Neville is so adept at creating, and you will even more intensity. Just refrain from giving it a name that you would NOT want to be on the witness stand, telling an opposing counsel in response to the question "My client was injured doing a game/drill you were making him/her do, called what?"

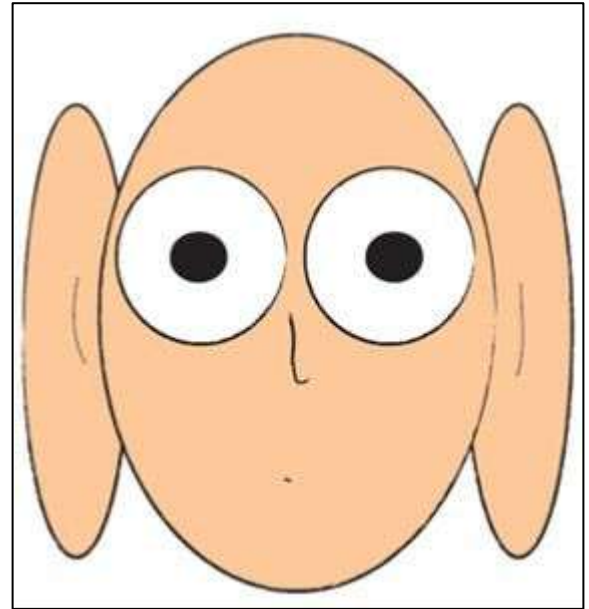
To help you, I have posted my list of game titles into the coaching section of the USAV Grassroots button. I also have included hundreds upon hundreds of games in my new Minivolley book which can be download from

the same button, under the best practices section.

And to make sure you all understand clearly. Deliberate practice is important. Many of you then should continue to do drills, and not make the change - but you still must make them more gamelike, with more scoring and competitive cauldron tracking, and follow the principles of motor learning....so keep saying drills if you want, just do them better so the kids have success in competition.

### No More Feedback

In these same IMPACT, FIVB, CAP and soon Gold Medal clinics, I have been pressing to help coaches stop reacting and start teaching. Coaches spend way too much time talking about what cannot be controlled at all - a past skill performance - and nowhere near enough time focusing on the only thing that athlete can control - the point being played right now. This change I am asking in your teaching to take place, is working to guide your players to focus on what is ahead, mentally and physically. To look beyond the ball flight and contact and to see what is happening BEFORE the contact. To focus on the only thing that they can control - not the past (gone), not the future (life and this game is random), but THIS POINT, in what we call "Right here, Right now" focus. Karch was the best at this, and my bet is he is doing a great job of teaching our women's national team members to start down this important path, and he is doing it by focusing on Feedforward cues, ideas and insights. Going back to our shared



collective of learning to ride a bike....you wobbled and fought to stay upright, thinking about THAT moment of riding, learning the KEY skill of LOOKING AHEAD to see what was too soon to come, and you adjusted and...you fell down too. When you fell, if your friend or family member was there teaching you the best they could to stay on that damn contraption, they did not run up to you and yell at you to drop and give me twenty...They counseled you and consoled you and got you back up on that bike and told you what to focus on this time... They likely erred some by telling you "Don't \_\_\_\_\_" and err in feedforward as you cannot teach a negative. Please, think about this. You can't teach negatively, as the brain does not NOT register what you are saying - let alone my poor English teacher Mrs. Vest who is turning over in her grave seeing that double negative - things ALL register. So what we want to focus on is what we SHOULD do, and what we DID do right, never ever on what we should not do. This is a key part of feedforward, to be thinking of what should happen ahead.

Let me explain ahead a bit more. Why can you, the coach, walk out and get the tip, from your spot sitting on the team bench, yet your players who are much closer right there on the court, cannot save the ball? You are seeing the opponent's actions BEFORE contact, better than your players can is why. You are reading the CONTEXT of the developing play, in part by remember all the things that player has done and, with little or no time to consciously think about what is unfolding, your expertise starts to shout "SHE IS TIPPING THE BALL" well before the contact. It was the repeated blocks your team put on that player before, and the fact that she is running in less quickly and/or has underrun the ball. Maybe it is because she is running in with BOTH hands up above her head? Yet kids, trained by just "tipping drills" with a coach standing on a box, never get the incredibly important prelim information in real time - they just see a coach tipping over and over... So we must get better at teaching the game between contacts, teaching them why you KNEW that was coming, and teaching them to look wider, through the net, and see the flow of the game. Then give them feedforward when appropriate, so they can learn from you experience and make it their own. Oh, and one last thing...you still can give feedback....just make sure it is educational and not punitive or demeaning. Ever

## No More Technique Training

This one I need you to stay with me through the end, for I am a very technical coach, and technique, biomechanically doing things the most efficient way, is a HUGE part of what I seek to impart to each and every player I coach. However, I think that knowing the technique, and being able to demonstrate it without a ball to show you that the skill technique is known, is VASTLY different from being able to be in the right place and time at contact.

Let me explain. Nearly every coach I see, is too caught up with talking about the skill being done AT contact. I was surprised to see the research being done in other sports - like soccer goalie training - films the action Before Contact (BC) and At Contact (AC) and then stop filming, when providing teaching information to a goalie how to better defend. No flight of ball time is recorded. The Australian Volleyball Federation program in this last quad were even putting a special kind of glasses on their serve receivers which the coach could flip a switch at any time and "blind" the player at any point of serve reception. So the jump server would run in, then hit the ball and before the ball could be tracked, the passers glasses would go opaque. Then the passer would pass the now unseen incoming serve, based on what they saw through the net at the other endline.

The importance of preparation, reading and anticipation over the actual contact can perhaps best be seen with these facts from the Beijing 2008 Olympics. The average USA player contacted the ball 17 times per set in the indoor games (44 times for beach). Both teams played 8 matches in their runs to the Gold Medal finals, averaging 4 sets per match. Most coaches do not know the average contact periods per skill - so I will share those now - .10 sec for setting; .05 for passing; .01 seconds for hitting and .03 for blocking. So using an average contact time of .05 seconds - the average total time of CONTACT by a player through the entire Olympic games was - 27.4 seconds. It is not about the contact as much as it is about the preparation for contact that we must get better at teaching.

Volleyball is not like other sports America parents and players have grown up with. In those traditional games like basketball, football and baseball/softball - the amount of time a player gets to contact and control the ball is huge in comparison to volleyball. These other sport athletes still make countless errors in skill, even with this advantage of holding onto the ball. The rebound sport which volleyball is, with no option to let the ball bounce, or strike it with ever improving devices like tennis or golf can, makes the skill of advance preparation the most important part of our game at every level.

In impact this is "seen" even in the webinars, when I ask for the feedforward you would give a player spiking a ball down by their ear, not reaching at all. Clearly bad technique. The coaches provide these most common feedback comments - "Reach;" "Extend;" "Get on top of the ball;" "Keep your elbow up;" and the negative coaches say "Don't drop your elbow!" They first forget to check for understanding by asking the player to show them the skill without the ball. If they did, my bet is the athlete would show good technique, reaching high, for they understand the technique. The problem is they are not at the right place and time, and simply will not fully extend and hit the ball off their elbow to show the reach you are expecting. The answer is not more technique, it is to come up with ways to guide them to be in the right place and time - in this case earlier and/or faster, which, by making that timing adjustment, will result in the ball being at a higher point in time for contact.

I have taught a 2 year old the "technique" of blocking - they stand there, arms aside their head, and leap up with jackrabbit eared arms and look technically solid. Can they block? Nope, not ready to be in the right place or time. I often ask what is the difference between the amazing jump serve of Clay Stanley and that of my daughter's - technically. The answer is hopefully nothing. They both have simple efficient motion, consistent

tosses, biomechanically correct arm swings, and so forth. The difference is...Clay is Citius, Altius, Fortius - as in swiftER, highER and strongER than my daughter, and both are seeking to be more "ER" individually. When you look at the closed motor programs of music and dance - where performers rehearse towards perfection of playing the score (with their own subtle variations of fundamental technique) or dancing in form of the song or performance - some amazing things happen at those performances, but the "coaches" simply sit and watch and take notes to see what needs to be improved upon next training. They work deliberately towards perfection. The "technique" can be learned by watching in dance, and listening in music. Just look at the amazing dance variations and copies of Thriller being performed around the world in tribute to Michael Jackson on YouTube. Look at the amazing "Covers" on YouTube of complex music pieces being performed on varying instruments by talented musical athletes. All this is basically self taught technique.

In our sport - we perform technique in an OPEN motor program world - competing against an opponent who will in the end ALWAYS win - gravity. In the meantime, we need to spend much more time teaching the game between contacts, not that at the point of contact, so that the players have the right technique at that contact. Simple...while also infinitely complex. For you see, no point every played in our sport in the history of this game, is the same. Not one. So the more you can help your players take the technique they understand already well - so well they could and should teach it to less experienced players of any age - and learn to anticipate, read the before and at contact actions, and remember the flow and tendencies under stress of opponents...and do it at the right place and time, the better we all will be....

Drills, feedback and technical training will be important forever. I just hope you all also realize the importance of the words "game" and "feedforward" in maximizing your impact as a teacher, and in teaching more of the game between contacts than ever before...



#### **Never be a Child's Last Coach : October 04, 2010**

Last week at the LTAD Conference in Canada, I found it most intriguing that of the many ideas I shared, the one that resonated the strongest was the title of this blog. After my keynote speech, just about every following speaker noted it in some fashion, tying it into their own presentation. So I thought I would dig a bit deeper into why I came up with that measure of coaching success.

I simply think one of the ways coaches need to evaluate each season is in seeing how many kids play that sport again in the following season. It is a key role of the coach to be a relationship counselor between each player and their love of the game. These athletes have chosen a very random sport, and one where every match played always has a loser on the scoreboard. So, along the way of the season you are being a sport's coach, you need to be aware of how your teaching, line up selections, and both on and off the court actions and decisions, are impacting your athletes love of that very sport. Ask yourself- "How many of the kids YOU have coached are still involved in volleyball, how many have quit the sport?"

One of the reasons we MUST focus on this love of the game with younger players -- through the process and effort and fun parts of the game -- is because of future coaches. If you give a player a real love of the sport, not



only will you not be that player's last coach, but you will have given them the passion to play past the poor coaches and adults they might encounter after they leave your tutelage. I have no doubt that your players, as my kids have, will run into coaches who demean them, punish them, and put them down for reasons of their own coaching incompetence. If you have given them a true passion for the joy of playing, such adults cannot stop them from returning to play.

While the conference was going on, reports would be shared of how the Canadian men's team was progressing in the FIVB Jr. World Beach Volleyball Championship. They ended up winning the gold medal, a first for their nation. What they did not know is that two USA players on the women's side were doing the same thing. One was a player I had the fortune to coach and guide when she was just 14 years old. Tara Roenicke's mom wrote back in 2004 when we were selecting players for the HP Beach Volleyball Camp I was directing that "*She would definitely benefit! Gotta have good coaching to get where you need to be. We all understand that! She just wants a shot at beginning her dream! She works hard and is extremely focused on what she wants!*" That is an understatement. Tara went on gain her AAA beach rating (one of the youngest ever) against adults, and while still playing indoors, her love of playing volleyball was as clear as she also grew taller and stronger. Earlier this month, this passion culminated in her winning the gold medal in Turkey at worlds, with another great role model for our sport, Summer Ross.

Tied into this concept is making sure your athletes understand this Chinese proverb – "*Winning and losing are temporary, friendships last forever.*" Some of you may have seen our silver medal winning coach from Beijing, Lang Ping, back in 1984 when she defeated our USA women in the gold medal match. What many may not know is that just a few months later, she was living in my home in Albuquerque, N.M, learning English and sharing volleyball ideas. She spoke those very words of the proverb at the opening ceremonies of our 1987 Jr. Olympic Volleyball National Championships...and then 20 years later was coaching in her home nation, against her old team, and leading our USA team to another silver medal. Since then, I have made extra efforts to help the teams I work with bring that proverb to life, and to meet our opponents, getting to know those who share our same love of the game, but just happen to be on the other side of the net when you play. Get to know them off the court, you are likely to make some great friends for life.

Rick Reilly, who lives up north of us in Denver, has been voted National Sportswriter of the year, and wrote a related article on giving back to the sport called "For the Love of the Game" [which can be read here](#).

Remember, we will be asking for players' and coaches' signatures and words of wisdom on at least one used volleyball at the end of the season each year, so that others not as fortunate as your program can benefit. The "Leave a Ball Behind" program ([CLICK HERE to learn more about this program](#)) is growing larger each year, and we thank you for your help in sharing the love of sport in this way too.

Finally, I think a club should take a long look at their own success by seeing how many of their coaches return to coach the sport again – even if they do not return to their own program. With good coaching education, you can take the core concepts and philosophy, and have success in other sports too. I have coached ice hockey and lacrosse since the mid-1970s and loved seeing all the jr high aged boys and girls move en masse up to their next year's coaches. I also take a lot of pride in seeing so many of the kids I have coached, returning to coach our sport after they finish with their university education. Those former players make me so proud to have worked with them, for they are giving back to our sport in the most valuable of ways.

Our "enemy" is never another sport, for what counts is that our youth are being active in whatever sport(s) they love. What we need to fight with and for are those who are not active, and those whose coaching "skills" drive players out of sport. It is not any other sport... We must remember the research that notes that 75% of kids quit a sport because is simply is no longer fun. That is one very, very large percentage to be aware of – while also noting that "not winning enough" was ranked down at about the 10<sup>th</sup> reason they quit. Number two? The coach

was a poor teacher...I hope you all do your best, in learning how to be the best teacher you can be, and never end up being a child's last coach.

My son is on a recruiting trip to a men's Division One volleyball program this weekend, after being his high school varsity lacrosse and tennis captain, as well as becoming a pretty darn good skier and flyfisherman. He is also coaching at a local high school this fall, for that which you teach you learn. Most rewarding of all, is that he and his sister both love to play volleyball, and will be playing it next year no doubt....and skiing with me when fresh powder falls and our schedules allow. Give your players a love of sport and physical activity – even if it is not our lifetime sport. While you are at it tho, do me one favor – make sure your players ALL know that after their school careers end, that they can play for decades more in USAV adult competition and the US Open, where we have 75 & over age group competition. Too many kids are not aware of how volleyball remains an option – coed, beach, grass, masters, and beyond...remind them as they continue on and ensure you are not their last coach...We all thank you.



#### **Coaching by Fear:** April 25, 2012

There is a famous segment in one of my favorite movies of all time – Monty Python and the Holy Grail – where the “team” of knights, led by Coach, I mean, King Arthur encounter a little white rabbit. They had been expecting a horrible beast by all accounts, and yet all they saw was this cute bunny. They gained confidence for a moment, only to be ravaged in seconds by a vicious, throat tearing flying terror – the rabbit – and then the team responded...RUN AWAY!.....

Flight or fight is our primal response to fear. Coaches who use fear as a tool, just be thinking

their players will fight, when they say things around the concept of “Do \_\_\_one more time, and I will put you right on the bench...” They are forgetting to coach for people, and begin to coach for points. Most importantly to understand, a coach who does this, loses the trust of his or her players. This loss of trust is a far bigger problem than the loss of a game. The ever-wise Dr. Paul Arrington, whose niece is the US Olympic Committee's Director of Ethics and Safe Sport, has addressed one example of this well heard on too many fields of play, in a very solid paper called “Yelling: Is It of Value in Coaching Volleyball.” He covers the physiologic responses, training methods, optimal arousal states, effective communication and much more. If you would like a copy, email me at [john.kessel@usav.org](mailto:john.kessel@usav.org) and I will be glad to send you Paul's paper.

Remember coach (and parents), you are a TEACHER first. Teachers build confidence in their students, and are a central part of building trust within the students. Studying (aka practice) success is then met with testing (aka matches and tournaments), and there will always be regression under stress. Do not ADD to your player's stress in competition – for the competition will do enough of that for you. Your players need to trust that you are there for them in this contest, not against them. We coaches have it even better than teachers, for, during the test, we can provide help. Choosing to provide more fear by your words (aka threats) is simply not a principle of good teaching. Losing the match, in front of teammates, parents and fans, is provides plenty of “fear” and stress. They need you to believe in them, not doubt them, for if they are losing, they are likely already doubting themselves.

Help your team have a holy hand grenade of confidence, by never resorting to using fear in teaching. Each game has six opponents who have been hoping to put fear into their adversaries, from the very first hits of the “warm up display...” Your team does not need another opponent to be sitting on their own team bench, ready to leap at their throats when an error in judgment or timing happens on the court – they need another leader of character building, who says in both body posture and soul – “Never, never, never, never give up” as someone else from England once said, by the name of Winston Churchill... whose counterpart from the USA said in that same period of World War – “The only thing we have to fear, is fear itself...” There was no need to fear these leaders – for they clearly were on the side of their own countrymen, fighting against fear, not using fear to “lead.”

The process of becoming the best you can be, is a journey fraught with failing. Indeed, one of the uniqueness of the sport of volleyball, is that every point, is in no small way a “fail” of one or the other team. Since every rally now results in a point, that is a lot of little moments to fail.... But perhaps one of the most important jobs of a coach occurs in each of these moments your team fails....letting your team know that is ok to fail....but you and the staff – even if your team “staff” is just you – will NEVER let them be a failure.

A Russian coaching friend for many decades, [Yuri Tshesnokov](#), who I had the pleasure of working with over the years we worked together on the FIVB Technical and Coaches Commission, was asked by our USA coach Bill Neville, how many Olympic level players do you have in the Soviet Union. He estimated about 1,000. Bill followed up with, so how do you pick your top 12? To which Yuri responded – resilience. He felt that perhaps the most important “skill” is the ability to deal with the fact that basically every point scored against you, was happening due to an error – and that those dealt best with this never ending roller coaster, river rapids like ride of a game as it ebbs and flows and grows point by point with errors - were who he wanted on the team.

A recent and WONDERFUL talk on TED.com by the head of DARPA is a personal must view. She makes clear that she is not encouraging failure, but discouraging fear of failure.. The TED site intros it with... *“What would you attempt to do if you knew you could not fail?” asks Regina Dugan, then director of DARPA, the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency. In this breathtaking talk she describes some of the extraordinary projects - a robotic hummingbird, a prosthetic arm controlled by thought, and, well, the internet -- that her agency has created by not worrying that they might fail.*” In it she quotes Georges Clemenceau - **“Life gets interesting when we fail, because it is a sign we have surpassed ourselves....”** THAT is such a great quote...

[http://www.ted.com/talks/regina\\_dugan\\_from\\_mach\\_20\\_glider\\_to\\_humming\\_bird\\_drone.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/regina_dugan_from_mach_20_glider_to_humming_bird_drone.html)

Sure, you can use fear, including punishment, to “teach,” – but as I noted in my recent blog on [“Coaching the Human Animal”](#) it does not result in greatness or a desire to pursue deliberate practice. You know there bear, if you miss that trick one more time, I will have to put you in your cage for a day... Yeah THAT gets results. NOT.

Time to take a proud dad moment too, to give a shout out to the Princeton Tigers and especially my son, Cody, the group that helped me write perhaps my most popular blog "[What Can a Player Control.](#)" Tomorrow nite head coach Sam Shweisky leads his three freshmen and five underclassmen starters to play the venerable Penn State, coached by an old friend and wonderful coach, Mark Pavlik, in the EIVA playoffs - one of these teams is just two wins away from making the NCAA Final Four next weekend.

[http://www.goprincetontigers.com/ViewArticle.dbml?DB\\_OEM\\_ID=10600&ATCLID=205419166](http://www.goprincetontigers.com/ViewArticle.dbml?DB_OEM_ID=10600&ATCLID=205419166)

Cody was just named newcomer of the year for the league and to the league first time, as he is leading the league in points per set and kills per set, and 6th ranked in the nation in kills per set - most of any freshmen. Cody grew up never being coached by fear....but the press release alerting me to his awards had a name that brought some tears to my eyes - "*Uvaldo Acosta.*" To see they have named the EIVA player of the year (fittingly given this year to the great Joe Sunder) in UV's honor, brought such a rush of memories. I played against UV in USAV adult tourneys when he was a joyful high school player from ElPasoTX/Juarez, and supported him thru his career from player to coach, and still miss him greatly. That he died in the heavy surf off of a Hawaiian beach attempt to save one of his George Mason players shows the team player he was till the very end. I see the same joy to play this game in my son's play on the court, that UV exhibited all the way through his USA National Team practices and playing career. No fear, just joy. We all must ensure we give our players this passion to fight, and not for flight from what is ahead.

It seems fitting to end with the lessons from another great movie – the Wizard of Oz. The venerable Terry Pettit wisely notes about this classic “*“The question is not whether or not the monkeys will come. **The monkeys always come.** The question is whether or not your team committed to behaviors that give them the best chance to be successful.*” Just take some time to reflect on the final lessons learned by Dorothy, the scarecrow, tin man and the “cowardly lion,” from none other than the “all powerful wizard.” How did the witch rule her charges, AND the Wizard of Oz, before he was discovered behind his curtain? There may be no place like home court, but it is our duty as wizards of our playing area, to instill our athletes to PLAY smart, PLAY with heart, and PLAY courage, founded on a JOY to compete – not one of fear of failure or losing. This is not to be feared, but to be rejoiced. It is done by being a true team leader - not through fear - but by leading our players to believe in themselves, by believing in them. ESPECIALLY when the monkeys are flying around....

## **We Hire the Worst Coaches**

April 24, 2012

No matter where a parent looks, every club program will state something to the effect of “We have the BEST coaches...” They then usually add next a list how a coach “played at college” - D1/2/3/NAIA/JC ...it does not matter, they were a COLLEGE player for gosh sakes. The list then mentions that the coach coached at school levels - mostly junior high or high school – and sometimes even college, and, in time, they also, or only coached club.. My question is – what certifies that they are “the best?” In this ever expanding world of marketing and hype, do you think any program would proclaim “We have just average coaches!” ...or “Our coaches are learning how to coach by trial and error on your child, please come join us!” ...or "We hire whoever will apply even if we really don't know them".... or the title of this blog, "we hire the worst coaches!" Do you think that the fact that the program has a winning record, means that the coaches are skilled? More likely in club volleyball, the record is due to the recruiting work of the club, taking the best players from the smaller clubs, with promises of superior training, and even the magic word..."scholarships."

Rarely do you see what these “best” club coaches’ college degrees were in, and if they do, you even more rarely see that they had a teaching or physical education degree. This last point alone has been a change I have seen in my over 40 years of coaching coaches; it used to be if you asked the clinic attendees how many had PE or education degrees, the percentage was over 75 percent. Now it is under 10 percent. I remember doing a clinic in Anchorage, on behalf of the late, great Liz Hooe (who sadly passed away last year due to cancer), where the percentage was 100 percent PE teaching degrees. That was decades ago however...

So why do parents allow their children to be taught by uncertified coaches? The coach is dealing with the mind, body and soul of your child. Would you let an uncertified doctor treat your child? Be happy with a school district which let your child learn from uncertified teachers? Trust your legal matters to a lawyer who did not pass the BAR? Trust a bus driver for your kids who did not have a bus driving license certification? Heck, I don’t know about your state, but in mine, the person who I pay to cut the hair of any family member, has had to have 1,000 hours in training before being certified to cut a single hair off my head...my hair after a horrible cut, grows back. Does the spirit and passion for being active and playing volleyball grow back as easily? I think not....

Yet in the majority of coaching found outside of USA Volleyball, we let uncertified coaches deal with the lives of children for hours a week, for months and even years at a time. Even more amazingly, the vast majority of volleyball programming done in the America, also does not background screen their coaches. USA Volleyball screens every coach, official, and even the chaperones who will be around junior players. We do it, even if it costs more money, because it simply is the right thing to do.

Here are some facts from the screening service. We have been background screening coaches for over half a decade. Some 500 coaches so far have failed the screening. Last year, we denied 84 adults, and the screening service had alerts that they had to check deeper into for 2,100 officials, coaches or chaperones who had some sort of serious criminal record. Even though these 84 people knew they were being checked, they still tried to coach or officiate in USAV junior programming. What club wants one of the 26 people who applied but were previously convicted of violence, or 10 convicted sex offenders/crimes against children, teaching in their program? USA Volleyball sure does not and we know informed parents would not. We have millions of convicted criminals who are out on parole or after serving their years in jail, who are banned for life to be able to coach or officiate USAV juniors for their convictions and/or transgressions against society. Sadly, most sports youth programming does NOT screen all the adults working with kids, and thus by default they condone letting these dangerous adults to possibly work with the children.

Bill Neville, our gold medal winning assistant coach, once reminded me that his son was only going to be 15 years old once in his life, and he did not want some self-titled “coach” to use his son as a guinea pig for their own learning about coaching. The great John Wooden encouraged everyone thinking about becoming a coach to get a degree in teaching – for as I have noted time and time again in this blog, coaching, and parenting, both should follow the laws and principles of TEACHING. You know, that one that says elementary school kids should all do physical punishment like wind sprints or pushups after they make a mistake in class, as it is a “good way to learn the lessons we teach...” NOT....but still in sport after sport, “coaches,” not teachers, have the belief that “it works...”

Recently I watched an apple not falling far from the tree in a post contest diatribe, where the coach simply blamed the athletes for the problems. [CLICK HERE](#) to see this rant. Rather than understand Coach Wooden's important concept that states - "You haven't taught them, if they haven't learned" - this paid (I am not sure I would call him "professional") coach vented personal demons of frustration. These talented, Division 1 level players with clearly high skill sets and averages compared to the average population, had performed well below their mean, and the coach listed those poor percentages, player by player, in astonishment that such below average performances could even happen on the team. Those of you who have read my blog enough to know the science of regression to the mean, know what likely should happen in the next match – and I can simply say, yes, it did, these skilled players regressed to their mean, performed better and...the coach then was able to

justify the rant, showing that the players had "learned a lesson..." There goes another coach, fooled by randomness...and the players suffer for it sadly...



Twenty four years ago I put the most important stuff I knew about teaching volleyball into a book called **IMPACT**. 23 editions later, it remains a place that research I find, - thanks to our partners at the USOC and around the world, that is appropriate to this level - is then included. The 2012 edition of the manual is different this year than last. And will continue to be new. Last month on a Friday night I stayed late at the office, until 11pm – trying a new way to deliver this science and facts to some 50 new coaches, not by webinar but interactively using GoToMeeting. USA Assistant 2008 gold medal coach Jamie Morrison (and current assistant

on our #1 in the world USA Women's team), jumped on for about 15 minutes of sharing lessons and answering any questions. Later in 2012, you will see that you can take **IMPACT** on demand, further helping new coaches begin the certification process.

We ask USAV new coaches to spend 4-5 hours learning about many facts, not opinions, in risk management – Why should our injury report form have even one single slip on a water bottle, clip board or sweatshirt on the floor, for our goal is that there is **ZERO** – We get them to write, and re-write their coaching philosophy, after spending an hour sharing thoughts and insights into what the skills of coaching really are. We spend over an hour teaching the science of motor learning – something you can get a PHd in, and take for several semesters at the college level – but we share the principles and most important research of why we should train randomly,

and teach the whole skills, and what this means to drill design. Note to those wanting to learn more – email me at [john.kessel@usav.org](mailto:john.kessel@usav.org) and I will send you a copy of Dr. Steve Bain and Carl McGown’s superb article “The Superiority of Whole Training over Part.” We address parent issues, and share information on beach volleyball, Paralympic, Special Olympic and Deaflympic volleyball and all the things leaders in our sport – starting with coaches -- should know. It is not just about juniors, volleyball is a lifetime sport, and we want the coaches, and players, to learn to love the sport so they don’t stop after high school, but ALL play in college, varsity or intramurals, and as adults long after their college days have ended. When a parent has to choose volleyball programming, you should know if your coaches are certified. Not trained by experimenting on past children, and this year’s group, but certified, through the USAV co-sponsored National Federation of High Schools (NFHS), or by USA Volleyball or the International Volleyball Federation (FIVB). You see, you have a choice of programs.

Why USAV? We set the standard. And if you want to know more of what we do, [CLICK HERE](#) to download a solid summary that shows why everyone should be supporting USAV as the National Governing Body, because we do so much more as part of setting the standard....

Advance note prescript....VERY soon you can click on our partner in where Olympic journeys begin, the US Olympic Committee, and see the work they have done, with quite a bit of USAV staff assistance, on the important "Safe Sport" website - click and see if it is working, likely by May 1st... <http://www.safesport.org/>

## **Perpetually Dissatisfied**

April 12, 2012

I was looking back at my previous blog posts and comments, as our website is soon to be moving to a new provider and taking on a new look, while wondering if the comments would be lost. One comment caught my eye, that brought this blog to life – related to the Olympic motto of Citius, Altius, Fortius. Here is part of the exchange, found under the blog about changing from club to beach/high school volleyball seasons “A Change of Seasons.”

Hugh McCutcheon, our USA Olympic head coach for 2008 and 2012, has often said that his job is to be perpetually dissatisfied. This fact of coaching is another way of saying the “er” is the focus, by players and coaches. This is part of deliberate practice, the balance of being aware of and celebrating improvement, while pushing to be better each and every day, and not rest on your laurels. The motto of the US Olympic Committee is related to this push – “It’s not just every four years, it’s every day...”

So many things come to mind when you are constantly striving to get better just a little bit each day. An important thing is to make sure you focus as a coach on YOUR side, where you have a bit more control. It’s going to be won or lost on your side – and a coach can only control his line ups, time out and subs... My message continues to be to remind us all of the huge importance of focusing on what you can control. When you play for the USA, you might be the third best player in the world at your position, and yet you will not be starting on the court. It does not change your focus on being the best you can be – and you cannot control that you on a team. If you missed it, my blog on “What a Player can Control” is found here...

<http://www.teamusa.org/USA-Volleyball/Features/2012/February/03/What-Can-a-Player-Control.aspx>

Indeed, in golf, things are much more in your own control - as it is not a team sport... Just finished reading Alan Shipnuck’s Sports Illustrated story on Master’s winner Bubba Watson - “Power and Grace – Ridiculously long,

sublimely creative, yet absolutely just a regular guy..." For me, I love it that he learned to play, by playing. Admits to not having taken golf lessons, nor hired a swing coach – he just played golf to get good. These are other quotes from the article I found great....in a playful yet perpetually dissatisfied way, as Bubba coaches himself...

"When he came out on Tour he was so hard on himself he scared people away with his brooding. As he has learned to minimize the negativity...."

"His late father, Gerry, a Green Beret who was forever admonishing his son to swing harder at the Wiffle balls he batted around in the family's back yard. 'My dad taught me everything I know,' Watson says. 'It's not very much but it's all I know.'

"They imbue their club and tournament with an absurd solemnity, but Bubba knows that golf is supposed to be fun, and he plays with a childlike wonder. At 313.1 yards he is the PGA's longest hitter by almost six yards. He swings a driver with a macho pink head and shaft for cancer awareness, and for all four rounds at the Masters his attire was all-white, in support of children with disabilities."

"Oosthuizen, who dueled with Watson for 20 holes, was still trying to digest what had befallen him; 'That's really entertaining to play with him, to see the shots that he's taking on and shots that I don't really see or I would ever hit' ... Watson may be a trick shot artist but he is no fluke....has become one of the games most consistent performers, finishing no worse than 18th in eight starts this year....As Jim Furyk said on Sunday, 'The most important thing at Augusta is creativity, and Bubba can do that as well as anyone.'"

So balance the tens of thousands of errors your team will make, with the success and improvements. It is the job of a great teacher or coach to be perpetually dissatisfied, but it is also the job to sit back and note, even celebrate, the successes also sure to come along the way. You all earned it...

And in a timely postscript... Stacy Sykora said on her amazing return to the National team practices, just four months after nearly dying - "These are my teammates, they are my sisters..." It is hard to believe that accident happened a year ago today, on April 12, 2011. Stacy spent April 12-23rd not cognizant. Now she says simply "I'm going to enjoy every ball..." THAT is the mark of a player who loves the game...and one not likely satisfied until she knows she has done all she can to be the best she can be, and even better than before the accident. High five from afar to Stacy for all she has done.

## Promoting Volleyball

April 20, 2011

Promoting volleyball is a duty of every coach and player. Luckily, we have a great lifetime sport to share with others.

There are lots of material on the USAV website, including the handout on "Why USAV is the Right Choice," and the "Volleyball Basics Guide." Articles like "How to Stage a Successful Youth Clinic," and the [whole blog on Youth and Minivolleyball](#), including the book [Minivolley](#), can help you get things started off right for the younger ages.



While doing a recent clinic in the Dominican Republic that USA Volleyball developed with the help of a U.S. State Department grant, we shared with over 50 coaches from five nations how to grow the game for not just indoor, but for beach, sitting and Special Olympic versions. The one thing that the rest of the world has, where American Football is not played, is that many of their top male athletes choose to play volleyball. Here in the USA, the game is still too often seen as a girls' sport. So with the help of my intern and son Cody, we are listing here some top clips to show to parents and boys alike, so they can see the power and dynamism found in the game for boys and men.

[133 Digs in three minutes](#)

[Born 7/31/1993](#)

[Best setters of the world](#)

[Dramatic Black and White 2008 Olympics Highlights](#)

[HD Olympic Highlights 2008](#)

[Best 2008 Olympic spikes](#)

[Giba](#)

[Dante](#)

**USA Guys...**

[Clay](#)

[Reid](#)

[Lloy](#)

[Ryan](#)

[Rich](#)



Remember also that we need to teach hitting first. Kyle Salisbury, Cal Wickens and the Western Empire Volleyball Association (WEVA), a USAV Region under the leadership of John Hughes, brought me in to assist at the last Molten Division III Men's Invitational Volleyball Championship – as it now will turn over to the NCAA as its first men's national championship created in over 25 years. Gary Sato and Bob Bertucci also were there to teach and watch Nazareth College defeat Springfield College in a finals match that saw host Nazareth have to turn away hundreds of spectators due to it being sold out.

The morning of the finals, Kyle set up 10 courts in one high school gym, cutting regulation nets into 15 foot long kids court nets. With the help of many high school boys and girls, over 80 second to eighth grade kids started their morning not watching Saturday cartoons, but by first overhead passing to a high school coach/setter

and then getting the chance to jump and hit. Some forearm pass-set-hit then was taught, followed by serving. Then, the whole group played in and everyone plays everyone four-minute games per team in a huge round robin tournament. The three-plus hours flew by and new friends who shared a desire to learn volleyball were made, along with a healthy dose of learning to love the game. Meanwhile, for two full days, over 20 boys' and girls' coaches got to learn new ideas and watch the finals as part of their coaching clinic on "Evidenced Based Coaching vs. Belief Based Coaching." Kudos to WEVA, the kids and the coaches, and to the Molten Division III Men's Invitational Volleyball Championship participants for a great gathering of the volleyball family.



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## A Rare Find

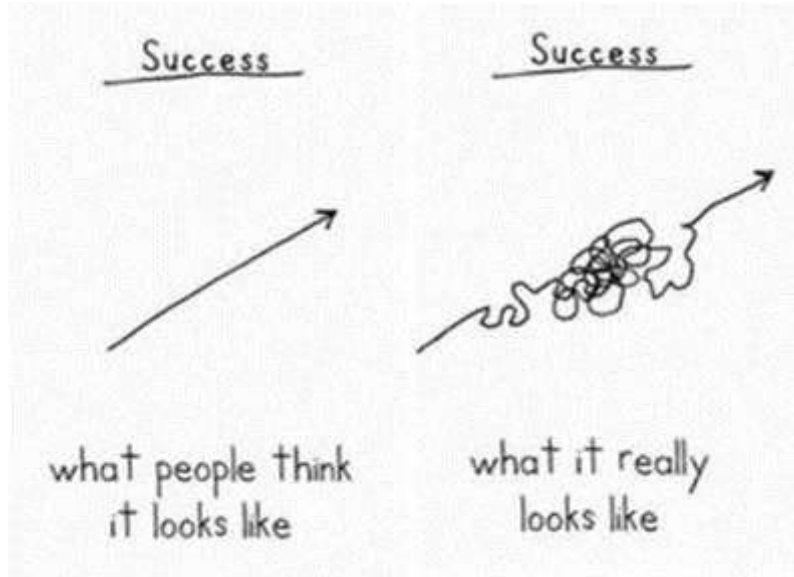
October 26, 2011

I just finished one of those books that I feel all readers of this Growing the Game Together blog should also take the time to read. Then re-read. Long ago, then US Olympic team coach Terry Liskevych, told me of a study on talent, done with the National Football League general managers at that time. As I recall it now, they were asked what was the one thing an NFL team needed to win the Super Bowl. Since I work to teach socratically, I then ask coaches what they think the NFL GMs said. Answers such as "Communication..." and "Teamwork..."

and many others pour in, but what over 25 of the 32 NFL GMs said was “Talent.”

One of my favorite single sentence principles from the science of motor learning is that “initial ability does not relate to final ability.” So the inside cover jacket of The Rare Find – Spotting Exceptional Talent Before Everyone Else reads: *One of the nation’s biggest music labels briefly signed Taylor Swift to a contract but let her go because she did not seem worth more than \$15,000 a year. At least four book publishers passed on the first Harry Potter novel rather than pay J.K Rowling a \$5,000 advance. And the same pattern happens in nearly every business.* So you know you are in for a treat before you open the book to the table of contents. And when you do flip a few pages to the Table of Contents you will read...

Sand, Sweat and Character...Talent That Shouts...Talent That Whispers...Decoding The Jagged Resume...Where Insights Are Born...What Can Go Right?...Lottery Tickets...When To Say No...Picking The Boss...Fitting Pieces Together. So many good chapters, I can’t tell you what I found most important, but I can say that in the book, resilience struck a chord, along with curiosity and self-reliance.... See this drawing a friend sent of “Success...”



This is why we need resilience in our sport. Every point ends in an error, not by a team, but most often by a single player basically. It is the player who comes back, point after point, no matter how many errors, but learning from those mistakes, that will reach the top. I wrote about this back in my blog titled “Creating and Training Resilient Athletes,” and it is even truer today.

<http://www.teamusa.org/USA-Volleyball/Features/2011/February/07/Creating-and-Training-Resilient-Athletes.aspx>

The most important coach and club help based chapter is called “Auditions That Work.” This single chapter alone is worth the price of the book for USAV junior clubs and the college coaches who are looking for the wheat in the chaff of tournament play. While I loved the line “Typically, scouting these tournaments is a group exercise in recalibration rather than a solo journey of discovery...” I am going to excerpt one of the most important paragraphs in the book, IMHO...

*Ask audition masters what they are hunting for, and the deepest answers involve subjects’ character. Regardless of differences in the exact ways that talent is expressed, each domain’s underlying quests are strikingly similar: Who tries hard? Who prepares well? Who recovers quickly and calmly from a setback? Who works well with others? Who can size up a turbulent situation and come up with a plan? Or, taken from the*

*other direction, which people cut corners? Who turns brittle under pressure? Who is clueless about group dynamics? Who ultimately doesn't care?*

There is one book on my desk. Small, just 80 pages. It is by Princeton philosophy professor Harry Frankfurt called On \*\*\*. This nearly 80 year old prof writes how come people fake their way thru moments and even life, and society tolerates such, despite the harm. What Anders does is shares how this book came to be, indeed, The Rare Find, is also perhaps the best example of the “power of story” that I have read in years.

Rather than say more, I will let Dan Coyle, author of *The Talent Code* (and remember GTG readers..you MUST bookmark his website... [www.thetalentcode.com](http://www.thetalentcode.com) ) give the closing. *“How do you find brilliant performers? The first step is to read this remarkable, groundbreaking, profoundly useful book- which is not so much a book as a detailed map of the newly revealed landscape of modern talent hunting. Quite simply, the best book on the subject I've ever read....”*

George Anders has put a lot of the topics about this all in one convenient book, that belongs on the shelf of every USA Volleyball club director. Go get it, as I am also sure, in the vein of that which you teach you learn...you also will enhance your performance as a coach, parent and player, on and off the court.

### **Random Observations on Coaches...**

October 17, 2011

I have observed thousands of coaches presenting skill and drill ideas to others – both players and coaches – in the last 40 years of my coaching career, and have come to some observations to consider.

*Coaches on the court like to hear themselves talk.* And talk. And talk. Some practices you observe have coaches talking to their players more than 50 percent of the total training time. What a huge waste of time for these athletes needing to learn the game. I love to ask players at the end of such long talk practices what they learned. Invariably they can only recall 1-2 things, if any. Humans have a limited ability to process information. Coaches forget this motor learning principle nearly every practice.

*Coaches too often tell their players what do to, rather than questioning them and guiding them to the answer.* Coaches say they do this, then in their presentations, never ask the attendees a single question. I guess we are to do what we say, and not what we do...

*Coaches love to say “gamelike” and “motor learning” when sadly they have no clue to the realities and truth in those terms.* Let me give you an example – Coaches will toss to hitters, who are statically waiting already off the court – and call it “gamelike” I watched one Youtube “expert” showing a drill where the players on one side kicked the volleyball under the net, while the blockers were supposed to stand on the other side of the net, backs to the net, and look over their shoulder to intercept and “block” the rolling ball. All the while, the coach was pronouncing how “gamelike” the drill was as the blockers were learning to get in front of the ball flight....Coaches will stand on the ground, off the court, and spike balls at athletes and call it “gamelike” for teaching digging. For those who are understanding REAL gamelike training, this recent fact gathered from actual competition will make

*Coaches are WAY too wrapped up in making players technically “perfect.” WAY TOO MUCH.* I believe it is in part so they have something to do in practice and matches, while the game is teaching the game. I have taken over 250,000 pictures of Olympic and Paralympic play, through college and high school, down to youth in the

last 30 years. The vast majority of these moments in time, capture players who are technically imperfect. About 80 percent I would estimate. Great players who clearly know the right technique but, because they are in the wrong place and time to perform such, they make personal adjustments to make sure the principle of the ball going in/to the right place, happens.

*Coaches say “I” too much* – Maybe this is from the fact that while there is no “I” in team, there is in “win?” These coaches fail to understand that when you speak to your team by saying “we” and “us” that the team bonds get stronger and the confidence that my teammates will help better the ball if I make an error is developed.

*Coaches complicate things way too much.* I guess it tied into the “technical” side of things. In serve reception, “the ball knows angles” is a term that makes it simple. The ball does not know how old you are...what your legs are doing (question- can a double leg amputee Paralympian serve receive well?)...The famous “KISS” principle, of Keep It Simple Silly...applies in coaching and in playing technique, whenever possible. Thus Hugh McCutcheon can say “less is more.” I think Albert Einstein would have made a good coach as he has a great quote in “*Make everything as simple as possible, but not simpler.*”

So there are just some thoughts to consider on your journey to becoming the best teacher of this wonderful lifetime sport you can be...

**I Just Need a Line:** February 22, 2011

The dawn drive to the Santo Domingo airport to begin my all day journey home to Colorado, goes mostly along the coast of ragged lava rocks - no beaches on this stretch, but lots of palm trees. Every few hundred yards I see one or two fisherman, patiently waiting to see if their offering on single strand of monofilament will bring them some luck. In our meetings, NORCECA President Cristobal Marte referenced the biblical principal of teaching someone to fish rather than giving them fish, so we can grow our sport. I was more thinking about my roommate Carl McGown’s observations that soccer and basketball are so popular as they are so simple to play, and that we need take advantage of the ideas in the [Minivolleyball Book](#) to do the same in our sport.

So while a fisherman can use a rod, there were several on the volcanic shoreline simply using a handline, including the one I watched landing a fish. They just need a line, and a hook. Same for volleyball, only our “hook” is the joy of keeping a ball off the floor. Of rebounding it off varying body parts, spiking it, blocking it, digging it as it goes so slow on a tip or so fast on a hit, playing near the floor or way up in the air, on the most crowded sports surface around, point after wonderful point. At the 7<sup>th</sup> annual NORCECA Physical Educators clinic, we had two nice Sport courts and net systems. However, I strung some of my 2 inch wide white ribbon down the court’s middle, from a chain link wall section, to an empty flag pole at the other end. The players find the “top of the net” like width to be easier to see than my customary yellow and black braided rope, and the cost is about the same, at well under \$10. In our sport’s case, we just need a line...

...and a ball. That is our end of the line “hook,” to catch players. With just a line, you can’t catch anything or play. Give me a ball in addition to the line, and people around the world are set to play volleyball. The ***Leave a Ball Behind*** program, now in its 10<sup>th</sup> year, was just covered in our Volleyball USA magazine, and we are getting many of you reaching out to get involved in the program at season’s end. Thank you for your generosity, on behalf of all those less fortunate programs who will receive a ball, no matter what the volleyball’s condition. You see, our sport’s world wide growth is really limited by the availability of volleyballs. At the airport “duty free” shop in Santo Domingo they were selling a low quality, hand stitched volleyball, for \$45. I am glad I brought each member of our Technical, Coaches and Development Commission a Molten “Soft Touch” kids volleyball, for none of them had seen it and they were very glad to hear of the far less expensive cost of the ball,

as low as \$11 online from what I have found. Please consider giving one or more of the old volleyballs which are just not good enough for training, that are stored in a gym closet to the LABB program. The other option is simply to wait until season's end and "leave a ball behind" (or more than one!) at your Regionals or other season ending event. Just email [leaveaballbehind@usav.org](mailto:leaveaballbehind@usav.org) with your contact information and our partners at PSA will get in touch with you to arrange for the transfer. One more thing, make sure to use a sharpie pen and have your athletes sign good luck wishes on the ball.

At the end of the clinic, a Questions & Answers session is held with all the teachers. One stated that in many of their schools, they only have one, or if lucky two balls, and wondered how to run training sessions with such a situation. Stations and fun games, as found in the minivolley book, is one of the answers, and Eugenio George, 3x Olympic gold medal coach for the Cuba women's program, spoke at length of the value and ideas found in the book, saying he had learned many good ideas for kids and top level teams. I then went up and offered him some cash, much to the delight of the crowd. Then when Marina Contreras, former Dominican Republic National team star and now an ESPN Spanish and international level commentator told them that it was FREE, they were stunned. I told them I had the book in Spanish on my laptop and would be happy to give it to them at the course's end, and many took advantage of an usb stick they carried, to download a copy. It was a good ending.



This is the same site, the FIVB Development Center where part one of our USA Volleyball State Department Grant will take place starting in early April. During our meetings a huge school championship was being held, and I spent some of my non-

meeting time outside watching the kids and coaches interact. My favorite shot is included, as the nuns went to play during a break in the competition. You can see they are having fun, and, like so many around the world, playing on a wonderful flat but hard surface....

Concrete, as in tennis courts are the fortunate ones. The next level down is playing on asphalt, either training courts or in the street. Then there is grass, sand, or just dirt. I would guesstimate, after coaching and teaching in over 40 nations, that over 70% of the players in the world compete mostly on dirt, and some sand or grass, and 20% play on concrete or asphalt. For us lucky Americans who have primarily wood or Sport Court flooring, the fact that the vast majority of the world plays on such hard surfaces might come as a surprise.

Over 25 years ago I taught in Belize, where they had a used wood court brought in at considerable expense from the USA. Sadly in just one rainy season, as so many of the gyms are covered but open walled, the floor was warped beyond use or repair. They replaced it with Sport Court and have had no problems since. At these meetings Cristobal announced NORCECA has been in the process of buying and gifting Sport Court flooring in zonal nations, including Guatemala and soon Haiti. An example of a sponsor working hard, as Molten and Sport Court do, to grow the game together.

If you made it this far, I will share a “best practices” that came first from my trip to Bolivia and was hinted at during the start of this blog. There, instead of a rope, they were stringing up 2in wide elastic webbing. Far easier to see, far more “net like” as it is just like the top of a regular net band. Recently I was in Costco and found 2 inch wide white ribbon, 50 yards long and wire reinforced both top and bottom. It can be tightened up straight and flat even the 70 feet that happens when putting up two “nets” down the middle of a regular court, endline to endline, using a “trucker’s knot.” It is also lots less expensive, and sags much less, than the elastic option. Some coaches say they are using plastic tape, like yellow “caution” tape, as an inexpensive solution as well. Then again, the kids in Chile waiting for their fathers to be freed from the mine, played many games over the street sign barriers that are similar to sawhorses. You see in the [Minivolleyball Book](#) how the boys at Karch Kiraly’s high school alma mater, East HS, play on asphalt over a chain link fence. One of the most intense games ever played was between Karch and Steve Timmons, using a balloon, over a living room table.

You see, all we need is a barrier to play over, a line or whatever, and a ball. Email me at [john.kessel@usav.org](mailto:john.kessel@usav.org) with other ideas to share, or put them up on the USAV Facebook site. Thanks for helping grow the game and for making sport be an important part of every kids’ life.

## Choosing the Right Words: February 15, 2011

I have been reflecting on the lack of specificity in most coaches’ teaching, as well as the choice of words we often make by habit. I am reminded of this as we are scripting some free videos to share this year, but mostly it is due to the difficulty I see coaches go through and how their own old habits are repeatedly slowing down successful learning and retention.

### Fixed vs. Growth Mindset Words

At one end, there is the choice of words which focus on things we can control. Carol Dweck’s Mindset shows some great research on this, where choosing words like “*You are so smart*” – something that is not in a person’s control -- makes for kids who cannot excel at later levels because they have not focused on things which they can control. These words that are controllable revolve around things like effort and mastery, etc. In volleyball, I am certain that telling developing players that they are “good spikers” or “great players” slows down their development. The level of “great” is such a long continuum, which allows a player who is 14 and under to be “great” using skillsets which at a high school level simply will fail...for there is so much more speed and range as you move up the ladder. We need to reward and pay attention to using words more like “hustle,” or “hard work” and even deliberate practice, while also showing how their mastery is increasing. Feel free to use my frequent opening “the way we play the game here” quote told to my players for decades before the start of lacrosse, volleyball or any sport I taught – “*I don’t care if we win or lose, but NOBODY will outhustle us...*”

### Specific Words not Just Rants or Raves

Second to change is the amazingly large amount of feedback and feedforward we give, which is simply non-specific. “*Good!, That’s it!, Way to go!, Nice Try!, That’s not it!, I like it!, You got it!,*” etc. Please, stay upbeat and encouraging; simply be a better teacher and BE SPECIFIC about what you are happy about. Your players, having learned about “how we learn fastest” from you at the start of the season, should be part of this process, by saying back to you every time you are not specific “*This ‘IT’ coach you are so excited about, care to be more specific?!!!!*”

### Professor Obvious Words

My story on these words to eliminate revolves around many coaches, and my timeouts of the past. After we shanked a streak of passes, I would call a time out and bring the players together and say...”We need a pass”....No kidding Sherlock Holmes, gosh we thought we were supposed to spray balls all over the court. PLEASE, stop being an observer and be a teacher. There is no need to say “You gotta hit the ball in!” if you are a real teacher/coach. Give them feedforward using words that guide them to improve their next similar contact, and let it be. Find the teachable moment in the performance, as you are a teacher first and foremost, even when there are the streaks of errors.

### The 1,000 Words in a Picture

As a picture is worth a thousand words, we are working on these “words thru pictures” by using technology in this day and age that allows for so many words in just the images of their skill performance. From using the GREAT computer software program of Dartfish at the highest level, to phone video and pocket video cameras, we need to use these 1,000 word options to teach more. There is a Casio EX-FH25 digital camera I use which records at 1,200 frames a second. Even at 400 frames per second with this camera, you can REALLY see what is happening and the errors in timing and judgment. Jim Coleman created a Tivo based system over a decade ago which, given the cost of such used devices on Ebay, now allows you to create a low cost, one speed only video station. You can teach in real time, and they see what they see. Or you can edit/just show when the player does it right. The images of a player doing it right are very important, worth collecting and worth re-watching, far more than any single error performed. Building a positive image in the athlete's mind is a crucial learning tool.

This does not take into account the core principles of reading and best options. In reading wrong, a performer who knows the skill, or their coach, will think they might have poor technique. The real focus should be on how they still made a successful performance DESPITE the misread (even if the technique is not perfect) – the sign of a highly skilled player. [Remember this great “set” by Eric Shoji?](#) In best options, that a player can hit a shot cross court, into the block, but not choose the right option in time of hammering line or sharp angle or off the top of the block, again may need the coach’s words of reminder or new option teaching to bring that out.

### Tone of Voice

The importance of words also carries the manner in which they are delivered... This has been a favorite teaching/parenting/coaching poem of mine for many years. Not sure who wrote it, but it says a great deal about how those words are delivered.

*It’s not so much what you say  
As the manner in which you say it  
It’s not so much the language you use*



*As the tone in which you convey it. "Come here!" I sharply said,  
And the child cowered and wept.  
"Come here," I said  
He looked and smiled  
And straight to my lap he crept.  
Words may be mild and fair  
But the tone pierces like a dart;  
Words may be soft as the summer air  
But the tone may break my heart.  
For words come from the mind  
Grow by study and art  
But tone leaps from the inner self,  
Revealing the state of the heart.  
Whether you know it or not,  
Whether you mean or care,  
Gentleness, kindness, love and hate,  
Envy, anger are there.  
When, would you quarrels avoid;  
And peace and love rejoice?  
Keep anger not only out of your words  
Keep it out of your voice. -- Author Unknown*

Add in your body language as you deliver your words and you can really think you are helping, when in reality you are harming. I'll just use one favorite example on inflection, to make a final point about delivery – "Let's eat grandma...or...Let's eat, grandma." I think the punch line is something about how punctuation can kill...

## Car Ride Words

It is simple. Say the following. *"I LOVE to watch you play."* Then be quiet. Win or lose, the rest of the conversation needs to come from the PLAYER, not the parent or coach. Talk about the things you can control, which includes, *"Where do you want to eat?"* or *"What is your homework level for tomorrow?"*

## Words Worth Changing

So what specific words do I think we coaches need to eliminate from our vocabulary when developing amazing leaders? Here is my list, most of which I put into the IMPACT manual long ago, in order to help novice coaches not make the same errors I had...in most cases the principle is to change from negative phrasing to positive, largely due to the way the brain works – which is only in a positive imprinting way. Let's see....

**Don't** - This is my #1 word to reduce or eliminate. Simple. Stop using it. You just can't "teach" a negative, as the mind stores everything as a positive. The old classic about "Don't think about pink elephants" then lets you determine what shade of pink they are and if they are wearing party hats. I oft tell a story of serving backwards into the crowd at a match overseas, after two teammates served into the net and I was commanded to "Non batte la palla nella rete" - yep, my coach said, "Don't serve into the net..." I did what I was told, I did not serve into the net. We simply must, time and time again, talk about what the desired result is, and focus on that, rather than what not to do. This article is a challenge in that way, for some negative examples keep creeping in....

**Should** - Replace it with **WILL**. There is a big difference when you speak to yourself with will, as things will go that way, while "should" simply gives more reasons not to make it so. "Should" mean's "might" to your future

actions while “will” means it is going to happen. I am not even going to go into the past and the option of saying “would,” for that is even worse...

Try - Yoda and I agree, eliminate the use of this word. He said, “Do, or do not. There is no try...” The word try just gives players and coaches an excuse for not doing it. When we say, “Try to do this,” the players can fail to do it and then say “but I tried....” - No, the real answer is, you did not do it. So use goal setting and scoring to take a player’s average from .5 out of 10 to 5 out of 10, and in the end to averages like 99 out of 100 even. This way “doing it” is a road on the Citius, Altius, Fortius path of achieving excellence and becoming the best player one can be.

You - Change it to “I” or “We,” as “You” is threatening. “I” puts it more on the coach/parent and “we” is best as it is tied into creating the team culture you want. So in the process of being the best Socratic parent/coach, ASK Questions about the six friends, rather than tell them what you think or believe. In the gym, we can say “Why did....”; “Where might....”; “How did....” In advance of the competition “What are our team goals again?...” rather than telling them what they are. In the car ride home, if you MUST talk to your child and not just listen to music, ask “I’d like to know more about what....” This poem is one I use every day in guiding my kids, players, staff and myself to cover things well. I have six friends//Who serve me true//Their names are WHAT, WHERE, WHY//HOW, WHEN and WHO.

But - Change it to AND --- “*That was the fast armswing we want!, but....*” So what is coming? Yep, a slam on what was done, some flaw in the positive, specific feedback you are sharing. It slams the door on the feedback and all the player is hearing is.... “*But....whatever you say, likely negative/correctional here...*” They do not hear the good, just the bad. Changing the word to “and,” or simply saying it without “but” and giving positive feed-FORWARD. For example - .... “*now let’s keep that fast arm and start doing new shot variations,how about a line shot or do you want to incorporate some other option?*” can work wonders, by asking a question/letting them influence their own direction and by never having the word “but” slamming the door. Can’t - This one is a no brainer to eliminate too, but we need to guide the self talk of players to not use all these words with themselves. Sometimes it is like “trying” where can’t becomes a focus on “how many out of X” trials is done to be defined as “Can,” and then sharing with them over time how the number of successes are growing. We need to make it clear to them at the start of a new variation or totally skill that you are not focusing on the errors, only the successes, and that you are asking them to do something they are ready to do and CAN do, just not 10 out of 10 times...yet....Oh, and since mom was a first grade teacher for decades, let’s remember it is “May” when asking for permission, not “can,” for we are pretty certain, having reduced the use of “can’t” from your vocabulary, that you will be able to...

Also, since I’m on a poem trifecta here (wait till I tell Terry Pettit about that!), let’s share this good one by Edgar Guest remarkably called “Can’t,” knowing that when I tell it, I change the word trying to doing...

*Can't is the worst word that's written or spoken;  
Doing more harm here than slander and lies;  
On it is many a strong spirit broken,  
And with it many a good purpose dies.  
It springs from the lips of the thoughtless each morning  
And robs us of courage we need through the day:  
It rings in our ears like a timely sent warning  
And laughs when we falter and fall by the way.  
Can't is the father of feeble endeavor,*

*The parent of terror and halfhearted work;  
It weakens the efforts of artisans clever,  
And makes of the toiler an indolent shirk.  
It poisons the soul of the man with a vision,  
It stifles in infancy many a plan;  
It greets honest toiling with open derision  
And mocks at the hopes and the dreams of a man.  
Can't is a word none should speak without blushing;  
To utter it should be a symbol of shame;  
Ambition and courage it daily is crushing;  
It blights a man's purpose and shortens his aim.  
Despise it with all of your hatred of error;  
Refuse it the lodgment it seeks in your brain;  
Arm against it as a creature of terror,  
And all that you dream of you someday shall gain.  
Can't is the word that is for to ambition,  
An enemy ambushed to shatter your will;  
Its prey is forever the man with a mission  
And bows but to courage and patience and skill.  
Hate it, with hatred that's deep and undying,  
For once it is welcomed 'twill break any man;  
Whatever the goal you are seeking, keep trying  
and answer this demon by saying: "I can."*

## Stay Positive

When young we learned that “sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” The intent there is to teach players to let harmful words flow off of them like water on a duck’s back. I have used the example of what if they said it in another language you did not understand, would the words still hurt or bother you? Since you don’t know what they are saying, those words wouldn’t effect you. So pretend they are speaking in a tongue you cannot decipher – even if you can – and move forward beyond those harmful words. Sarcastic words (did you know the words roots are from a Greek word that means “To tear flesh”?) also have no place in coaching youth. Still, [as this article on words shows](#), a coach is also still using swear/harsh words, which simply have zero tolerance for use in coaching young athletes...

Lots of words, and hopefully you have learned some better options for using our amazing language to become the best teacher you can be. I will close with some Latin – “Fac Diem Meam,” is on a golf hat in my office that a friend gave me on behalf of a famous great actor. Google it (and tell me when google became a verb). Citius, Altius, Fortius – now those are some words we all should know and use daily on our path of excellence. As always, thanks for coaching, parenting and teaching. Holler at <mailto:john.kessel@usav.org> if you have any other word thoughts or future suggestions. Please take a moment to tweet this story or share it with friends through Facebook. There are handy little buttons at the top of this blog to make it easy!

## Creating and Training Resilient Athletes

February 7, 2011

What a great IMPACT webinar last week, with Andy Pai answering the 200 coaches' written questions that poured in, while Phil Shoemaker, head coach at University of Alaska Fairbanks, and I shared about 100 total years of collective insights for these new coaches to learn from. One coach made our night, typing in that he felt he was getting a \$1,000 coaching clinic for under \$100. When I wrote the first edition of the IMPACT manual back in 1988, that was the intent, to share the science, facts, ideas and even secrets so a new coach could be far more successful in that crucial first year. It is nice to see that 23 editions and years later, it is still doing that. As the questions came in, I was struck as to how many caring coaches we have in our sport, but also as to how many wanted to fix their players, rather than guide them. It is part of the coaches (and teachers and parents) paradox – we want the best for our kids, but often step in too soon to problem solve and deliver the solution. This is explicit learning, which results in their being dependent on the coach for the answer, rather than being able to solve it, albeit more slowly, themselves. It also results in players who, when they err, head swivel to look at the bench “for the answers,” rather than inwardly and using implicit learning to figure things out themselves. This not only creates dependent, not independent athletes and thinkers, but athletes who are not resilient.



Developing resiliency in your players is one of the top three things you can do as a coach. I have oft written about the “Right here, Right now” focus of great players and teams. Of players who will play with drive and purpose and passion through matches and tournaments, focused on getting better, one point at a time. They know it is about raising their averages, in a game fraught and filled with the chaos of randomness. This random training is VITAL for the athletes to retain what is being learned and problem solve novel situations. It will LOOK, to quote USA Olympic Volleyball Coach Hugh McCutcheon “*a little squirrely out there...*” but the players are learning faster and remembering what is being learned better.

Like it or not, as good as a coach as you might be, we all are still subject to the randomness of our sport – and, as I wrote long ago “[Stuff Happens](#)” ... we must be patient, and never get angry when streaks of errors occur. They will occur. A lot. As will good streaks. A key is to thus be calm, optimistic and consistent, focused on mastery, not the outcome.

### INTENT vs. RESULT

What we need to do better is focus on the INTENT and not the result, as we teach. At my last practice, while working with a talented and self critical player on my 14er team, I had a one on one with her after a great serve that went long, corner to corner zone one. She looked disgusted with herself, a habit in our sport that is shown by body posture, gestures and even verbally which coaches continue to work to eliminate. So many players who come from situations of being alone, or even sports, where one's actions are not seen in total, do not realize the power they are giving opponents by these external displays of frustration. So that was part of the teachable

moment, but at its core was that I wanted to reward for the intent that I saw, when she chose the right serve to do at that moment. I also got to remind her of the positive vs. negative error options in her choice. She served over, not into the net. Good. She served long, not wide left to zone one. Good. It was a GREAT choice of serve, she just missed. That result was ok at this stage of her development, for I saw the right intent in her eyes...

## Helping is NOT Fixing

Helping is guiding them to discover the solutions, not giving them the solution. At my core of this fixing vs. coaching focus, is my own coaching philosophy of Developing Amazing Leaders. This means that I am using volleyball and its wonderful, best of all sports TEAM game realities, to grow the leadership, problem solving and resiliency skills of each of the players. The athletes on my Team Colorado "14ers" team know that:

1. They must get their own water bottles; they cannot ask a parent to bring it to them.
2. They are to serve to weakest passer or toughest to pass areas of the court based on their experience and information we give in practice and advance of the match – they will never see me signaling where to serve a ball in a match.
3. They can call a time out to celebrate or talk about things happening in the game – it is not just me who might call a time out to celebrate the success of our team.
4. The game will ebb and flow, and that is not to be worried about. That they play with passion and joy, while focusing on the only point they can control – this point. Not the last one or the next one. This point.
5. Knowing why is more important than knowing how.

## Thoughts on Resiliency

I wanted to share some other thoughts on developing resiliency in players. In no particular order, they are.....

1. ***Catch them on the comeback path.*** – The book Mindset by Carol Dweck is filled with guidance on creating confident, independent kids, from a parenting/coaching role point of view. The key remains to praise things they can control, not things out of one's control. So we all must "catch them being good/nearer to the desired actions and behaviors" with things that show their being more resilient. Saying things like "That's how we compete hard always!;" "See how your hard work brought us back into the game;" "Great job sticking with it!;" and rewarding with your attention, the efforts they give along the way, even if they are losing on the scoreboard. Remember the USA Team "*Relentless Pursuit Rule*" – 1. Go for every ball. 2. When the ball is too far away, see rule one...
2. ***Seek first to understand, before being understood.*** – The ability to be empathetic is a huge skill for a coach. Develop yours. It is like the great Canadian Hockey clips we have on the MVP Youth CD say at the end "What if kids treated us the way we treat them. [CLICK HERE](#) for the best of the bunch, the child teaching his dad golf....
3. ***Be consistent and respectful*** – Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde coaches develop very non-resilient players, for they cannot trust or respect your teachings, when given inconsistently and without respect for who they are. One of the places to help guide the whole team in this process is to cease using the words "always" and

“never” - Be specific and be respectful, and I can promise you, that it is not accurate to say “You always” or “You never...”

4. ***Focus on MASTERY over outcome.*** – The best teachers do, and the research shows that it is 10 times more important than the tourney’s results in impacting your players on all sorts of levels. It is neat to see the research on mastery focus, given that the title of IMPACT is Increased Mastery (and Professional Application of Coaching Theory).
5. ***Teach and show adaptation.*** – Walk the talk. Be creative. Change line ups. Teach non-traditional skills. Do the unexpected.
6. ***Coach to the individual.*** – know who they are from the player information form. Remember, kids don’t care how much you know, until they know how much you care.
7. ***Mistakes r oportunies to lern.*** – Marty Miller in Iowa showed me his t-shirt with such a phrase on it, and it is an important lesson in developing resilient athletes. Stay consistent to letting your gym be, what Bill Neville calls an “Exploratorium” – As the Olympic motto says, “Citius, Altius, Fortius” – swifter, higher, stronger – all of which means mistakes will happen along the way, and they are simply part of the learning process.
8. ***Guide their discovery, but don’t give them the solutions.*** – Give them “hints without a rule” and they will learn it far better than you telling them what to do.
9. ***Let them influence you.*** – Over thirty years ago I learned that teams have needs, which include affiliation, competency, and influence. Let the players chose to serve or receive. Let them pick where to go for lunch. Let them pick games and scoring options in practice. Let them determine the rewards for performance and effort.

***Remember coach, there is a reason we have TWO eyes, TWO ears, and ONE mouth....***

### **Increasing Deliberate Practice of Resiliency Through Reading...**

While the most important skill in our sport is reading, this same verb applies to developing resilience in our athletes by learning about role models and examples through stories. So my top choices for players to read on this topic are:

1. [Unbroken](#) – my new #1 read on resiliency - the true story of Louie Zamerini, by the author of Seabiscuit. From juvenile delinquent to Olympian and WWII hero...a great, but tough and gritty read about wit, persistence, ingenuity and the will of man.
2. [A Man’s Search for Meaning](#) – I have oft mentioned, shared and gifted this book by Viktor Frankel, where a man’s choice to chose your own attitude is so powerfully stated. It was at #1 for decades, and worth the read.
3. [Vision of a Champion](#) – Anson Dorrance’s book for soccer players which largely fits how to be a great, resilient, team sport competitor. (Coaching friend Jason Trepanier in Canada notes that in another great book, [The Man Watching](#) - a biography about Dorrance - that Anson’s father is quoted saying that “Anson is the most confident athlete with no talent that he’d ever seen...”

4. [Get with it Girls – Life is About Competition](#) By Teri Clemens, our own USAV CAP cadre member, who about a decade ago wrote this great book for volleyball girls. Thanks to Amazon, you can get a copy used or new, and it is worth sharing with your team on a pass around basis. I actually have five copies for loaning and sharing.
5. [The Little Engine that Could](#) - I think I can, I think I can...I thought I could, I thought I could. Over a century of versions of this tale. Now, with digital technology, in 2011 you will see a 3D version of the story in film. [CLICK HERE](#) to get lots more information on this classic....

And a couple of websites on the topic:

1. [A Nation of Wimps](#) – a classic and still favorite site on helping kids be strong and able to bounce back on their own.
2. [Raising Resilient Children](#) – Read the book many years ago when my kids were young, now a website with some helpful insights too.

Thanks for your help in growing the game. If you like these blogs, give it a Facebook like or share, and forward to your fellow coaches. You are welcome to email your thoughts and comments to me at [john.kessel@usav.org](mailto:john.kessel@usav.org) regarding resiliency or anything you are thinking about that will help us grow the game.

#### Reading and the HP Clinic Redux: January 24, 2011



The last few days of the High Performance Clinic here at the Olympic Training Center brought back memories of a joke Craig Sherman, former Univ of Missouri head coach, pulled on me in the late 1970s at a USA National Development Camp. As head coach, I had spoken at length on the ways and importance of “reading” in our motor learning session for all players. This teaching of the science of sport is an important but overlooked part of many programs training, but I feel it is so important, it is part of the [Minivolley book](#) for helping even players 12 and under be aware of the science. So one summer morning I walked in and found during

warm up, all of Craig’s players on the court sitting and reading the newspaper. If you knew the creativity of Craig, the creator of the camp classic warm up dance “Rock Lobster,” you know how easy it was to have kids who learned to better love the game, from his ways of training.

So here, nearly 200 coaches listened in and asked questions of the presenters, with nearly 50 also coming in early an staying late to take CAP II and III training, and if they heard the word “reading” once, they heard it several hundred times. They also heard the words random, and gamelike, and trust, and player empowerment,

and some other great words I have covered in previous blogs. Still, it seems like a good time to note, not only how long we have been training not just techniques, but the most important skill in our sport – *reading the game* - both that of your opponents, and that of your teammates. For those wanting more, a grassroots article I wrote on the topic from several years ago can be downloaded by [CLICKING HERE](#).

There are many scientific articles on the topic, and one, called “*Perceptual Expertise in Sport: Some Myths and Realities*” - was presented several years back in that year’s USOC Training and Design Symposium. Great stuff, so I asked speaker Mark Williams of the Research Institute for Sport and Exercise Sciences in Liverpool, United Kingdom, for permission to include it in our IMPACT manual, where it has been for several years. Indeed, we have been teaching the importance and ways to enhance reading for over 20 years in this annually updated manual, yet we continue to find experienced coaches not putting this skill at the highest level it deserves. If you have not taken IMPACT ever, or for a few years, I strongly suggest getting the newest edition of the manual. Contact [cap@usav.org](mailto:cap@usav.org) and check the Events section for [IMPACT Webinars](#) or in person ones in your USAV Region.

Karch gets it. One of the things I loved hearing from him this past weekend while talking about this skill, was his term of his own “Visual Encyclopedia,” which he has built over time. When he, Carli Loyd and Hugh McCutcheon gave back to the sport doing a free player and coach clinic at the 10 courts of the Big House here in town ([CLICK HERE](#) to see the shots from that extravaganza) – his eyes would turn into “Olympic Eyes” -- as Bill Neville, also in attendance, Karch’s 1984 Olympic gold medal assistant coach called them, even though Karch was just playing 6 vs. 2 with Carli against 8-18 year old boys and girls.

Carl McGown and Steve Bain’s excellent Gold Medal Squared and AVCA article “Motor Learning Principles and the Superiority of Whole Training in Volleyball, includes this important quote –

*It is important to emphasize however that studies by Wulf [62] and Yan et al [63] have demonstrated that random training has even more profound learning effects in younger subjects than old....Moreover, limiting the use of block training to the earliest stages of practice is strongly supported by Schmidt [2], who advocates that optimal learning of a single movement class requires random variations from trial to trial. The neuronal explanation for these effects are perhaps best exemplified by our own observations (Bain and McGown), of inexperienced coaches training novice players where the instructor(s) become frustrated by the performance variability and lack of successful repetitions of new learners. As a consequence, these inexperienced coaches limit or abandon whole teaching methods for part, and random practice for blocked. Unfortunately, this course of action deprives the learner of the environmental variability and sensory inputs that are essential for the formation of motor maps and implicit behaviors, which are ultimately reflected in the acquisition of functional skills and expert performance [13, 18, 19, 29, 65]. In total, the evidence on this topic is clear; drawing distinctions between training methods based on age or ability is a coaching practice that has no foundation in either motor learning science or in the application of motor learning principles.*

Let me share a few examples of where well intentioned coaches fail to teach reading. Sorry for the repeat for those in the know from reading this blog, but I am finding so many don’t have time to read past blogs, so this will be new stuff to them....

- 1. Coaches tossing to the setter, or tossing to the hitter** – Gamelike reading and timing is gone from the player. When you toss to the setter, you not only do not randomize enough, you steal the key reading from a setter of the passer, and if you toss for the hitter, the same loss of real reading vanishes. The idea “drill” remains, as always, pass/dig – set- hit by the players, not the coaches, even though the game/drill gets “a bit squirrely” to quote Hugh.



2. **Coaches tossing balls for “serving”** – while at least it is coming over the net, no pre-contact/contact reading needed to be a great serve receiver is going on. You learn to read a toss, which NEVER happens in the game....Let the players serve, even if they miss often. They play, not you....
3. **Coaches tossing low and difficult balls from the net for “defense”** – I did this for a few years, teaching the way I was taught – and my players never got a tipped ball. They expected the tip to come over the net to about waist height and then...SHOOT out into the corners, even with a coach’s head fake at times.... But every tip in REALITY goes over and drops down to the floor vertically. Sure balls go off a block deep, even off the court, but that happens from ABOVE the top of the net and often shoot at high speed off the court. Reading if there was a touch or not is very important, but there I stood, flinging balls corner to corner. Quoth the Raven – Nevermore...
4. **Coaches slapping a ball (or Sarge’s bouncing it to the floor version) as the cue for blockers to move off the net for a free ball** – This simply teaches your players to be late, while slapping/bouncing never happens, and it steals reading of second contact to third contact (is it free, down, blockable, etc.?) which is when you really read what the third contact will be. You want to make your PLAYERS, not you, great at both sending over mean free/third balls and reading and receiving them as well.
5. **Coaches hitting the ball over the net to be then dug/pass-set-hit in repetitive rally scoring games or drills** -- See below on this topic...but it is important to understand that reading an adult skilled player hitting from the ground, when one’s opponents are jumping and moving all over the court – not standing of the court – and are either more skilled/powerful than the coach (in the national team case), or far less skilled (in the case of most USAV Junior Olympic Volleyball players), is not realistic training at all.
6. **Box hitting at players - Here is what Hugh said in the 2011 HP Clinic on this...Box hitting is not efficient or very transferable** – and even the national team “only” trains 3 hours! They are worried about time and squeezing drops out of every rep....efficiency in teaching reading is perhaps the premiere skill in practice. So, we want to get good at digging live hitters, not a coach on the box. Most our players are overseas playing professionally, so it is a lot of time each week but not a lot of time over the year.

I think the biggest change coaches can make for developing players is to stop doing #3-5. It is well conditioned however, so coaches find it hard to change, and players too, even when the new – much more *reading realistic* version – is done. So while you can find this change in more than one of the past blogs, this is a redux, so I will see if I explain it again will help coaches teach reading better...

The key change to make is for the coach to rarely be contact #3, but instead to become a creative contact #2, ranging all over the outside, and even sometimes onto the court. You pass or even “shank” low passes which the ATHLETES then put over the net as they are doing the all important THIRD CONTACT OVER THE NET – reality in every game they ever play. Not you the coach. The players need your teaching as to WHERE to put these third contacts – primarily zones 1 and 2, not the other four – and to be challenged to successfully hit the ball low – tho at times, they also need to know how to put a ball as high as the gym ceiling allows....which internationally can be 50 feet or more. Cuba is great at this rarely seen first ball to receive.... They need you to throw low, to pass over, throw a bit higher to overhead pass over, throw a bit higher to standing spike the ball over, and throw them higher to teach them how to jump and hit balls coming at them from every area of on and off the court....The coach can also yell “I’m Contact One!” and the players then send the ball over after working hard to better the ball from the errant contact one sent in by the coach.

There is hope. Marv Dunphy keeps telling coaches to “*Train in Reality*” - Many coaches know that “Gamelike” is hugely important as a principle, and I carry a banner to clinics with that single word in huge letters. Clearly the group of coaches at this just completed HP and CAP training received the message. Last week’s CAP group at the NERVA Hartford Winterfest heard it too, and I enjoyed reading this article on the topic by Wayne Holly, Director of CT Velocity who attended the course...

<http://ctvelocityvolleyball.typepad.com/ct-velocity-volleyball/2011/01/john-kessel-article-the-importance-of-preparation-reading-and-anticipation-over-the-actual-contact-can-perhaps-best-be.html>

You all can rest assured that if new science comes forth in learning the skill of reading, that USA Volleyball through IMPACT, CAP, HP and even this blog will receive this information. Then you can READ it the way Craig’s players teased me so long ago when I started emphasizing it, and transfer your ideas into your training....

Personally, I learned some new ideas and reconfirmed some core training ideas too – my top ten list to share here with all those growing the game would be....

1. **Get your players covering contact 1** (overpass) and contact 2 (setter dump), who cannot move back on the quick sets, to open their arm and hand contact surface to widest possible to give yourself just a little bit better chance to dig the ball UP – Thanks Hugh McCutcheon.
2. **That I need to enhance my “heaven and hell” idea wider**, not just in positive vs. negative over the net as I have covered (for setting – using swim noodles; serving – using the string gap, and hitting – raising the net 8-24 inches) but onto the floor. The purpose of creating these ranges in my athletes is so they don’t just hear that we need to make positive errors in setting (too high better than too low/too inside rather than past the antenna/too far off being far better than too tight) by keeping the ball off the net. They need to see it in a new way, so I will be putting down on the floor, with tape, a two foot area of “hell”, from the centerline to two feet off the net. Of course the remaining 28 feet, and even beyond the endline is “heaven” so again we have a positive focus for when we are performing. -- Thanks John Dunning.
3. **My old blue and white “Dog Obedience Trainer” clicker might even work with kids** – see [www.tagteach.com](http://www.tagteach.com). This is all part of simply “Catch them doing it Right” that allows animal trainers – using only positive reinforcement techniques – not modeling/showing the right technique, not telling these “athletes” in words – but by simple and positive reinforcement of desired techniques through shaping. So as shared in the past, put dry erase “dots” on beach or indoor players when you catch them doing it right, keep a chart on the cauldron white board where players get to put up a mark for every click or times caught doing the right or near right thing, give them glow in the dark stars, or beads for their team bags in honor of their little or big achievements, put on the gym floor writings honoring those successes or efforts or mastery moments with painters tape “Hollywood Stars”...remember your first grade “gold stars? There are no little things, these little clicks all add up to success. In talking with Nev about this today in the USAV office, he noted that Vic Lindal from Canada has been doing similar training in volleyball, and Vic refers to the dog training website [www.clickertraining.com](http://www.clickertraining.com) so clearly I need to look into this more. I often speak of how in a college course that I trained a rat to perform many “athletic skills” in a Skinner Box, from marble rolling to rod pulling (and setting the marble that almost gave me an “F” in the course. It was all without showing or telling, just shaping thru the positive reinforcement of food pellets. A clicker sound does not add any calories to the equation, so I like it. - Thanks Karin Thomsen (and Bill Neville)

4. **Cone of Ignorance vs. Cone of Control** – Hugh reiterated that it is not a coincidence that if you get stopped before hitter contact, that you dig more balls, and shared how, unlike the Simpson’s clip on the cone of ignorance ([CLICK HERE](#) to catch that 20 second clip), -that the cone of control is in front of you... Forward, forward, forward is said all day long in the gym. -- Thanks again Hugh McCutcheon.
  
5. **That my teaching of “Extend & Recovery”** is alive and well at all levels. It was so well shown by Paula Weishoff in the 1984 Olympics were she would fly low and long across the floor to pop the ball up, then just get to her feet. It is what I have taught for decades (and not shoulder or even “barrel” rolling ) and goes hand in hand with teaching the pancake, “j-pop” (giving very low balls extra height), Reverse pass (the national team called it “Tomahawk”), and “camel toe/” (the national team called it a “fistie”). These were all tools in your cone of control, along with practicing dry run sprawls every practice, which all players, National team or “14ers” need to have in their “toolbox.” – Thanks Karch Kiraly.
  
6. **A great reminder that feedback is the most important factor in teaching and changing behavior** – Brought up by Doug in an HP WestWing classroom discussion called “*Where We Have Been and Where We are Going.*” Being great at giving good feedback/feedforward has been a core part of IMPACT over the decades, and the one thing most coaches can improve will be in giving SPECIFIC feedback. It also made me reflect on how so many coaches talk about needing to “motivate” their players. While I believe that the players who have come to practice are motivated (it is the millions of kids not doing sports, but instead sitting and watching TV who are NOT motivated), I suggest you start with this section on [Motivation from Wikipedia.](#) -- Thanks Doug Beal.
  
7. **That kids taught from the start to make positive errors over traditional negative ones**, and through the joy of playing volleyball, can make the presenter of the HP Session called “*Take it Home – National Team to 14s*” have to keep saying, “*these are not like your usual 13 and 14s,*” as they jump serve, dig/pass/set off the net, and keep the ball in play for many long rallies. Same for a national team player who noted with chagrin, and to much attendee laughter, that her blocking skills even allowed her to be tooled by a little athlete. What a memory to be able to train WITH these new national team players for the young athletes. That those short but skilled kids were Rick Swan’s and my own “14ers” from Team Colorado, was special, even though I was having to work with my son Cody and Joe Harmon at the Big House for the Hugh (“Olympic Bald Guy”), Karch (“Mom Approved”), and Carli (AVCA 2010 Player of the Year) Give Back Clinic, noted previously. – Thanks Rob Browning.
  
8. **That the HP session called “*Transitions Through Volleyball*”** by the National team players hopefuls in attendance shared so many great mini-topics on discussing what in volleyball they should have known years ago and want coaches to start teaching now, was wonderful. My favorite statement by one of the players was... “*Teachers of the game, not raising their voice – just teaching – explaining things, don’t get angry or defensive if the player questions. Be more open-minded, be better teachers-coaches.*” - As I say in CAP and IMPACT – Defend, without being defensive; this is information, not criticism; facts, not opinions; simply we are sharing the science of the sport.... – Thanks former NCAA/new National Team Player Hopefuls.
  
9. **That the HP session – “*How to Make Serving Better*”** - confirmed all the ideas in my recent blog on “[Top Ten Serving Secrets](#)” My athletes, who have been trained with a Radar gun since I learned they cost less than \$100 back in 2009, have been getting that feedback and my “14ers” who have great bullet float serves, serve as hard and fast in our training as the National Team players did in the measurements

being shared during the session. -- Thanks Jim Stone.

**10. That teaching hitting lower sets from the 8 meter line**, to 6 meter, to 4 meter to 2 meters and not much closer (staying out of “hell” unless blocking or doing emergency net recoveries) works with national team players and 14 unders. It opens up the offense, and hitting lob 1, 2 and 3s both front and behind are something even the national team players are using, not just my 14ers. – Thanks Paula Weishoff.

Being proactive here....yes these sessions were recorded in HD and will be available at a clinic session comparable cost. They won't be readied until after the tryout period for the HP staff, so likely sometime this summer. If you want to put your name on the list for getting information on the sessions/costs/date etc, email [indoorhp@usav.org](mailto:indoorhp@usav.org) As always, thoughts/questions/ or information indigestion on this and the other blogs are welcome at [john.kessel@usav.org](mailto:john.kessel@usav.org) and thanks for your help in growing the game.

If you like this blog, like it on Facebook to help spread the word or Tweet using the buttons below.  
P.S. Some great news on new USAV grassroots programming and upcoming webinars soon to come!

**Primum Non Nocere:** November 8, 2010

Some of you may know the Hippocratic Oath, given to medical doctors. For those who do not know, it translates simply to First Do No Harm. This is a cornerstone in my philosophy of developing amazing leaders and growing the game. I believe this oath should be given to each coach, for in my decades of watching coaches teach, it is violated far, far, FAR too often.

Today I share some recent insights to email responses to my blog....Each one hurts to read, and I challenge those reading this blog, to do what you can to stop these coaches from staining our sport....

*I found your blog. So many great moments in there. I wish I could send some to my daughter's coaches. My heart is breaking for her. She is at the point of quitting because of them. She has had it with the yelling, punishing practices, endless sprinting (resulting in dead legs for the next match), and most of all the "you suck!"s. She said they have taken something she has loved for a long time and turned it into something she dreads....*

I also received this blind copy – again edited for generic use...

*Coach,*

*I have now played for you for two years and after much thought and searching I have decided the time has come to resign. I came into this school with my only love being volleyball. I lived, breathed and talked about volleyball since I was 11 years old. I feel as though you have tried to sabotage my success since I came to this college. I have had many different coaches in a wide range of sports over the years and you are the only coach I have been unable to connect with a positive way. For whatever reason this is, I do not know. I have maintained very high grades, I've never defied you or your directions, and I have given you all that I have. I am very sad to say I no longer love volleyball. To be perfectly honest I have no feelings what-so-ever. I am tired of fighting a losing battle with you. I have asked you why you hate me many times, and have yet to get a straight response. I am frustrated, depressed, and angry every day that goes by when considering our relationship, or in actuality*

*or lack of one. I have tried to tell myself it is going to get better, but it hasn't, and I have never seen you take one step in a direction to improve it.*

*You have constantly asked all the other players on my team if I have a bad attitude, what I do, and where I go. I have never given you any reason to think that I have not been a loyal and respectable person. I have never heard anything back but negative criticism from you, and I strongly believe that a player does not perform best under such circumstances. All I ever desired was encouragement and your confidence in my abilities. You might have been surprised at the results. You recruited me, and I have been a starter on your team for the last two years. I had the best season of my life my freshman year and earned many honors. I have no idea why you not believe in me as a player, because even now I still believe in myself. I had never been unsure of myself or my abilities until I played for you. It hurts me more than anything to give up the one thing that has made my life complete, but I feel I must for my mental and emotional health. I cannot continue to wake up every morning wondering if practice that night is going to be another session of me trying to impress you and to elicit a positive comment instead of negativity and disgust, coming from your direction. I cannot continue to give you everything I have because you have given me nothing to work for and I have no more to give. I am not motivated, I am not passionate, and I have no desire left in me. As a coach I believe that it was your job to give me encouragement and respect. I believe that coaches should have confidence that their players can achieve anything. I never got any of that from you. There is nothing I can do to win your approval, and I longer seek it.*

*I respectfully resign from your team. Thank you for the college experience that your coaching staff has given me and I wish you the best of luck this season and in the future.*

I shared these two emails with some club director colleagues and not only found each one to agree with this harmful conduct, but one said that of their graduating players from this year now playing in college, that six of them had quit the game at the next level, due to the coach's conduct. It hurt them to read these and it hurts our sport even more...

So how do we get to these coaches who fail to understand the science of sport and the principles of good teaching? I guess that is why I keep writing these blogs, to somehow guide coaches to not be fooled by randomness and to break the cycle of bad coaching. I sense however that most these coaches are so entrenched in their habits, including not seeking out new knowledge and changing, that we are not getting to them even with the facts are shown to them. Their main error may be that they think they are a "Volleyball Coach" and not coaching PEOPLE. They know how to teach a volleyball – but not players. So I first wish to apologize to these players on behalf of those who do really coach, not those who call themselves professional coaches just because they get paid....and then write to all coaches with a reminder checklist letter of our job as a mentor of athletes...First up, a note to players...

Dear Player –

I am sorry for those in our sport who have chosen to not become the best teacher they can be of this amazing lifetime sport, while you seek to be the best player you can be. There is perhaps no more important a job of the coach than that guiding your love of the game to the highest heights possible. This word love belongs in coaching...the best coaches lead with love and respect. Clearly the coach you currently have does not have those core values. In the end you see, the central theme of a coach is to teach and connect to values –

Those coaches who ignorantly, or even worse, blatantly chose to take you on their own selfish power trip of a my-way-or-the-highway journey, and do not let each player become empowered; we simply do not need in our

sport – or any other sport. This sport is in many ways the finest team sport ever created. Those coaches who fail to teach you as a person, and instead teach a sport, fail to miss the most important part of that sport – you, the player, a unique individual who deserves the best teacher possible.

I challenge you to not let these coaches drive you from volleyball...to be brave, be bold, be unique, be daring, be original, be random, be a risk taker, be athletic...and keep being yourself. Do not let them take away your love of the sport – focus on what you can control – so let's review those so we work together to keep you in our game for a lifetime...

– Your effort (despite their failures to see it or know how to really get it to increase)

-- Your mastery (as the winning and losing are out of one player's control, but working to increase your own mastery of the skills – both mental and physical – in the game are not)

– Your attitude (do not let them steal your love of playing this game)

– Your conditioning (so you know you did all you could to be in your best shape for practice)

– Your serve (make yourself invaluable to the team by being the best server they have...)

– Your communication (talk positively to yourself and your teammates, even if the coach cannot)

- Your “Right here, right now” focus of training and competition (not being worried about the things not in my control – as in the last point, or two points ahead –just this point is what matters)

I am going to close my note to you dear player, with a quote Christopher Robin told Pooh...***“Promise me you'll always remember you're braver than you believe, and stronger than you seem, and smarter than you think....”***

Dear Coach –

Get off your behind and start using your head to be a better teacher – You are supposed to be “a head” coach...not a “behind” coach....

So first and foremost, remember – you are NOT a VOLLEYBALL coach...you are a coach of PEOPLE. These athletes deserve your very best, and that starts with coach from a focus point of respect, and of trust.

You can't control the score – it is random and out of your control. Let me rephrase that – the SCORE OF THE GAME IS OUT OF YOUR CONTROL. What you can control is your way of TREATING your players – with respect, with support, with teamwork – and better done in practice, but who knows what will happen in a game. Plus, in the words of perhaps the best coach ever to help players in America, John Wooden, “You haven't taught them if they haven't learned...” So lets' review a short list of things which a good coach can commit to doing...

*I will first do no harm...*

*I will be consistent – not a Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde coach...so my players can rely on me...*

*I understand how not to be a child's last coach...*

*I will treat my players with the respect each one deserves...*

*I believe that players do not care how much you know, until they know how much you care...*

*I may not be great at math, but I do know that 50 percent is a big number and that fully 50 percent of the teams playing volleyball every day...lose...and will focus on the process, not the outcome...*

*I will teach the concepts of [Olympism](#), and help all my players daily embrace the pathway of [Citius, Altius, Fortius...](#)*

*I will not confuse being demanding with being demeaning, as sarcastic, demeaning behaviors have no place in our sport...*

*I will not mistake intensity with screaming and yelling – as a wise player named Cody Kessel once noted, watching a college coach rant and rave in a press conference....”Dad, how is a player supposed to learn self-control from a coach who has none?” – and know that that yelling at a player is simply a sign that MY teaching needs to improve, not my player’s learning...*

*I have read and understand the importance of ["Me-We-They"](#) and the article on ["How to Ruin a Volleyball Player."](#)*

*I know the answer to the question of “Do you want a brilliant collection of players or a collection of brilliant players” and will teach to empower my players over my own power....*

*I understand that I have chosen game that is very random, and will not be fooled by randomness, while staying calm and focused on the one point in our team’s control, this point...*

*I will simply smile wryly or even laugh, when the game’s randomness bites me with a 0-25 or so shellacking and not blame my team, but simply return to working on that which we can control – the next point...*

*I will never say a player is “uncoachable” as I know it is simply in the art of coaching, I need to find what motivates such a player to be in the gym with me, and how to trigger that player’s unique desires and needs that volleyball can deliver...*

*I will teach life’s lessons, while recognizing that our athletes are our teachers...*

*I realize I should use physical conditioning as either homework, so we can better skill develop during precious practice time, or as a REWARD for the winners, so my message about conditioning is consistent....*

*I believe Michael Jordan was right when he said that “talent wins games but teamwork and intelligence wins championships,” and will work hard to build that smart squad every day, on and off the court....*

*I will live my values in no small part by developing those of each team member, helping to unlock their potential and their abilities to learn faster...*

*I seek to create a culture of collaboration, play and of doing the extra...*

*Lets us work together to retain every player coming to your program, to grow in the love of volleyball, not lose it, starting with the conduct of the coach. As the pyramid narrows towards the top, not all will be able to*

compete at the higher levels, but EVERY player can continue to play this sport at a level they can love. Please, do your part to be a keeper of the flame, and not someone who extinguishes that flame.

If you have any ideas on how to help empower players, increase deliberate practice, and grow the love of the sport, share them in the comments below or email me at [john.kessel@usav.org](mailto:john.kessel@usav.org). On behalf of the players still to discover our sport, I thank you...

### **Ten Imprudent and Obtuse Things I Generally Avoided in Coaching Somehow:** October 6, 2010

While my grassroots article from over 20 years ago shows lots more of the things I have somehow either changed or even completely avoided ([CLICK HERE](#) to download “How to Ruin a Player”) – of late I have been hearing from the grassroots some variations and outright new versions of “Stupid Volleyball Trainer Tricks.” So here, in no particular order, are a 2010 Top Ten list of things I either avoided outright, by knowing the science of our sport, or started to do (by falling into the coaching the way I coached trap) and then changed as that science of motor learning guided me to adapt:

#### ***1. Cutting volleyball players from a team or tryouts based on an X min mile run...***

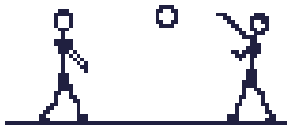
Amazingly, this dumb thing is still being done to date. I addressed it earlier this year in a blog, but it just seems to keep coming back. Coach – the ability to run an under whatever number of minutes mile has NOTHING to do with being able to be a GREAT volleyball player. If you have any clue to one of the top three principles in motor learning, you have heard of the term “specificity in training.” The aerobic ability and skill needed to run a mile under a certain time limit has no bearing on the abilities needed to be a top volleyball player. We are an anaerobic sport of dashes, jumps, starts and stops. The muscles needed to run a nice fast mile are not the ones we need to develop for volleyball. Why not say next, now you need to swim 1,000 meters in the pool in under X minutes and if that is done, you need to bike ride 10,000 meters in less than X time...It shows that coach or program really needs to learn the fundamental principles of motor learning. The astonishing thing is, there are coaches who make this mile run a pre-determinant to being able to even tryout! So kids come to tryouts, put their bags in the gym then head outside and run a mile, and...those not making the cut time, have to come in and in front of their classmates, pick up their bag and leave...I know a ton of GREAT high school, college and adult players, not good, GREAT, who could not run a mile in under, say, 8 minutes. Go coach the cross country team this fall, but please stop testing the fitness and heart of those wishing to play our lifetime sport by such a selection method.

#### ***2. Slapping a ball...then adding insult to injury by throwing a ball at a player or the team...***

OK, how many of your opponents slap a ball before they do any skill and, for that matter, how many of them THROW a ball to a teammate or opponent. Now, some of you might beg to differ, saying you have not seen our referees here yet John...but the key thing is, being great at volleyball starts by giving the players realistic things to READ while the ball nowhere near them. When a hitter is allowed to toss a ball to the setter, you are stealing from BOTH players – the hitter may be able to toss and hit, but cannot pass and hit (oh no, specificity in training is back again) AND the setter is learning to read a toss, which has zero value to the ability of getting a jump on a pass by reading the body positions of a passer. Yet I would estimate that 90 percent of our players, when they hear the wonderful words “Let’s hit!” will start by tossing a ball (often from outside the court even, even worse...) to the setter. Coaches who slap a ball then initiate a free ball, are actually training their players to be LATE on a real free ball.



### 3. *Doubles pepper in traditional form...*



“What? It teaches ‘Ball control’” shout the lemmings. Pardon me, but I do not want ANY player I coach to have the skill of digging a ball all the way back to a spiker. It just is the complete opposite of what “ball control” I would ever want a player to have... we think this must work as most balls are banged from zone four and go cross court, and if dug directly back to the hitter, they go in a line right to where the setter might be able to get the ball first as she/he releases from zones one or two. I am a lefty and hit my favorite angle shot from zone two, and love watching the setter screaming “Help me!” as the ball goes directly back towards me and nowhere near the setter. Stop learning to dig back to the spiker ever, and if you must do such a partner pepper, either have the digger dig to themselves (positive error first learning) or half way, and have the two players working hard to alternate being the “third” player who is not there.

A closely related drill to this is the traditional 4 min off the court warm up by controlling coaches – here we see the coach usually getting 12x the contacts in the final warm up moments before a match – as the coach REALLY needs those contacts for their next hour or two of sitting on the bench. We also see a huge, almost disguised version of doubles pepper, with the coach hitting and the players digging where? Yep, back to the hitter, aka coach. Please, please, please, if you still have the time and space to do such an off the court warm up – have the passers/diggers stand side by side in TWO lines, not one (so a decision is being made, as it soon will happen in the match); Have the players spike/serve at their out yonder teammates and; have the passers/diggers directing the ball about HALF WAY between themselves and the server/spiker, to a SETTER. Not back to the hitter/server. Coach, if you want to do something helpful as the players do this warm up, stand near the setter and raise your arms...and be a NET.

### 4. *Pulling down a player’s kneepads as a “teaching tool”...*

A brilliant example of not knowing the legal duties of coaching and the importance of building confident, aggressive defenders. With such logic, you would see football coaching telling players to remove their helmets or shoulder pads in practice for doing something the coach does not deem proper. I would be donuts to dollars if you watched a “kneepad-removal” coach’s practice, you would see HUGE gaps between the reality of the game, and the training being done. Who is punished for such non-gamelike waste of time training? The player of course, when they cannot read, anticipate or judge the actual game realities. Try this instead...put long socks on your defenders arms as they practice, so they can learn to extend and recover and play the ball UP (not over or back to the hitter, remember the positive focus on training, not negative skill error development). To pull a player’s kneepads down must mean that coach wants to protect a player’s ankles some odd way. More seriously though, you simply do not want – based on the legal duty of a coach to provide a safe environment – be sitting on the witness stand and say to the opponent’s lawyer question of “Where were her personal, self bought kneepads when she bonked her knee(s)?” -- “Well I told her to pull them down to her ankles...” Leave them be and teach them to move while the ball is on the other side of the net by TRAINING over the net, NOT in front of it, and thus being able to move to the ball earlier and likely be in better position, not needing to go to one’s knees and use the kneepads...

### 5. *Running lines...doing pushups...as forms of punishment, while in the gym with a net...*

I watched an amazing hour show recently on the training of the Marine Corp Sniper. They trained completely “gamelike/motor learning principle based” changing shooting ranges from 300 to 1,000 yards, running with their guns while wearing their Gillies camo suits into scum filled ponds and while crawling thru hundreds of

yards of brushy fields to get into shooting range –all the while with already accomplished sniper instructors using binoculars to spot them and eliminate them from competition, etc. So what did they do at the end when they hit all their targets? They did extra slant pushups to celebrate their achieving that step of the course. If you did not hit the required number of targets, you packed your gun and went back to practice again. On a team that knows the value of contacting the ball, the time in the gym should be completely spent on getting better at playing volleyball, leaving any conditioning as out of the gym time, and the winners stay on and losers battle to get back on the court and win.

This is a touchy subject for many, as they think punishment with running is OK, for you have to get into shape, and gosh, I see other coaches who win do that too... I don't disagree with getting in shape, for that is a principle – Citius, Altius, Fortius (CAF) and beyond. What I am saying here is that it does not take any coaching skill to tell players to run lines if they err or lose, and while the net is up and the team is there, such physical training is wasting learning AND teaching time. “Conditioning is homework,” to quote the fairly successful Anson Dorrance, winner of his 700<sup>th</sup> Division 1 college women's soccer match recently. The key point is here that being in shape is the REWARD, not the punishment, and following such a principle of CAF, your programming should reflect that, as the Marines did.

#### **6. *Benching a player after a short series of errors...***

Oh, how we are [Predictably Irrational](#), but I am really working here to help us all stop being so [Fooled by Randomness](#) to not understand the theory and science behind [The Drunkards Walk](#). For those new to this blog, those are three pretty important books to read so you are simply not tricked by the things that happen in our wonderful but random sport. The art of coaching in part is being able to know the success levels of your players and let them play through those streaks if they are errors. You don't yank them after they do a streak of successes do you? They should not have a constant fear of being yanked, which so many coaches are skilled at. We teachers need to understand better that mistakes are simply opportunities to learn and part of the learning process. Streaks of errors will happen at all levels, and the more unskilled your players are at reading the real game and performing those skills at game speed, the more streaky our players will be. Our job is help the players understand that streaks happen, and that we are a team, and on their side and will not yank them for errors in skill. Now if a player is not paying attention, or giving full effort, then subbing them out to talk about those things a player can control is a good idea, but given the random sport we have chosen, when stuff happens, hang in there and believe in your team not just in words but in action. See them make a service error? They won't serve for 11 more rotations so let them play. I think some coaches might find value in this example of a great three word coaching philosophy – (remember that blog awhile back?) and to make sure that you “PLAY THE PLAYERS” For more on randomness impacting our game, see my [“Stuff Happens” blog](#) for more on this reality of our game.

#### **7. *Forgetting the uniqueness of volleyball....***

There is a whole article on this that is a very important one to share and teach all your parents which you can [DOWNLOAD HERE](#), but our game has so many poorly understood uniquenesses that we must teach them to our new coaches and parents. The fact that at the lowest level the worst team wins. That unlike most sports, we must rotate (imagine the point guard becoming a forward, or a pitcher rotating to be catcher then outfielder) and thus need all around skills. We jump maximum effort and then while up there at the top of our jump, unsupported, we then are expected to do another maximum effort movement. We are the most crowded team sport going, yet we are a non-contact game. We put up something right between the teams and then say you cannot touch this item we know as the net. We are the only people in the gym who know where the lost badminton birdies and prom balloons are – for we spend our time not looking down – able to see the lines - but

way up in the air. Perhaps the most important thing is we are a rare “rebound” sport – where the others like tennis have been evolving in technology annually, we have to use our body to rebound, which evolves a bit slower... So teach these wonderful but potentially exasperating uniquenesses to your players, parents and new coaches, and you will be better off for it.

### **8. Teaching about the “importance of the forearm pass”...**

This one is serious, yet so misunderstood. Most coaches I know ramble on and on about the importance of the “forearm pass” and how much they “teach passing.” They say “can’t pass, can’t hit,” and go so far as coming into a clinic or school/youth sports organization and make the point of teaching the “forearm pass” first. The kids pair up, passing dozens or hundreds of volleyballs back and forth, and the coach leaves – while the kids go home and get ice for their forearms and talk about the sadomasochist that just visited their program. I made this mistake as a younger coach, along with the related error of doing “digging drills.”

Now, please understand that perhaps the number one thing a team MUST get good at is in “WINNING THE SERVE-SERVE RECEPTION WAR.” This is so important it is a chapter by itself in my free Minivolley book mentioned a couple of blogs ago on youth volleyball - [CLICK HERE](#) to simply jump to that overview of how to do good youth volleyball...

[http://www.teamusa.org/~media/USA\\_Volleyball/Documents/Start%20a%20new%20club%20forms/1%20Minivolley%20%20ver%20100112.pdf](http://www.teamusa.org/~media/USA_Volleyball/Documents/Start%20a%20new%20club%20forms/1%20Minivolley%20%20ver%20100112.pdf)

At the international level the men’s teams that #1 serve best and #2 serve receive best – win the gold medals. On the women’s side at the top level, the teams what #1 serve receive best and #2 serve best, bring home the hardware. At the youth and junior level for both genders, the teams that #1 serve best and #2 serve receive best, win the vast majority of the matches. You have to get good at these two skills, doing speed ball, monarch of the court, four ball serve reception, 8 serves and passes over and over in training, so you have a ton contacts per hour in these two mission critical areas.

That said, the key point I am really wanting all to understand is that you do not want to spend much time getting good at passing – especially if it is pairs – you want to get GREAT at serve reception, and that is usually not taught enough. I can know how to forearm pass and be good at passing by ripping off tens of thousands of partner passes and wall passes, and athletes who love the game will do these things away from the gym. What we have to do in our precious 120 minutes together with the team and having a net, is to spend a large percentage of our time serving AND SERVE RECEIVING THOSE SERVES. There is little value at being good at passing as it currently is being taught – in pairs, back to where it came from, not over the net, not off a live serve. There is HUGE value in receiving serves, using the skill of forearm passing perhaps – or overhead passing – but reading and anticipating as many live serves as you can.

I mentioned this in my blog [“Around the League in 80 Days”](#) but I will say it again here – WE WASTE MILLIONS OF VALUABLE, READING-RICH SERVES every day around the world, by simply going back and serving – for 1 minute or sadly for more like 10 minutes in a row. I think the value of training more gamelike and randomly has been made already, but I have not seen coaches grasp this in this important battle between server and “passer.” We go back and serve and maybe let the libero pass those hundreds of live serves, but we do not have anyone passing those serves usually. The solution? Serve receive those serves. If you and your assistant cannot be the setter area target, which is the best option for these group serving periods, then have the players pass the serve to themselves – learning the positive error – and then catch it and go back to serve. Yes, the server should sprint into their area of defense after striking the serve, and then they simply read all the other side servers and receive the next one that comes nearest them, then return to do their serve.

Now I know at the younger levels that the closed motor program of serving develops faster than that of the open motor program of serve reception. Part of the reason is that we teach passing – even to the point of a closed motor program against a wall – then expect our players to serve receive – which is simply a much harder and open motor program. The more we train this vital first contact OVER the net, off of OVERHEAD tosses perhaps first but quickly moving to serves – perhaps not full endline at the start (as in the short courts used in MiniVolley) – but knowing that the reality will be full endline serves when they play, the simple fact is, the more contacts we have doing real, over the net serve receiving of serves, the better we get at serve receiving. OK, you can go back to saying “passing” but I hope you really work on reality training by serve receiving much more when you say that term.

### ***9. Being Negative...***

This one opens a can of worms. The negativity tradition comes in words and actions. Have someone videotape you, and only you, during a match. Is your body language empowering and encouraging, or are you a classic case of constant exasperation with the “ineptitude” of your players, even slamming a clipboard or two down onto the floor to make your point not just seen but heard. When you call them into a timeout, do you rant about things they have no control over (the past) or speak positively about what they can control (the next point, and only this next point). Do you say “Don’t\_\_\_\_\_” even though you can’t really teach a negative – so that when you say “Don’t serve into the net” you are helping them focus on serving into the net? Ask the players what they are thinking about when you “coach” and say “Don’t serve into the net!” --- they will tell you, and it ain’t serving over the net and in... Do you turn on your “coaching radar” as you walk into the gym (done by of course crossing your arms, a very positive body posture...not) and then ignore the motor learning concept of summary feedback, by instead watching them do 5-10 excellent skill performances, but then jump in there to “coach” when a single mistake is made by giving your words and attention to only the error? It is yet another way many coach the way they were coached, rather than understanding how real learning takes place, and our role simply catching them doing it right, or close to right.

### ***10. Getting trapped in the technical perfection while not understanding the errors in judgment and reading or teaching the game between contacts...***

This one is related to not understanding the importance of teaching serve receiving vs. passing mentioned earlier. While the technical skill of “passing” is simple to teach, the REAL skill of serve receiving requires READING a server. When I have asked our Olympic team liberos what percent of their success in serve reception is happening BEFORE the ball breaks the plane of the net, their answers since 1996 have all been basically the same – 80 percent on floaters and 90 percent on jump serves (95 percent in the men’s game). Yet we fail to give our players enough time to learn that 80 plus percent, and instead teach “passing” in front of the net, in pairs and all the non-reality, non-reading possible ways. This “drill” teaching of “techniques” vs. “game” teaching of volleyball reading and skills is done in each skill we teach. Throwing balls to the setter rather than passing them. Hitting coach tosses rather than real sets. Digging a player standing on the ground rather than having time to read the approach and body actions of a real spiker. The list is too long to share here, but I would argue that over 95 percent of the comments made on technique by coaches who comment on the moment of contact – are really just miss-read and errors in judgment, often coming from doing things at below game speed so the players look good there, but those same players thus cannot handle game speeds. We toss to them to pass and then expect them to magically serve receive the bullet serves of a 13 year old. Please, TEACH THE GAME BETWEEN CONTACTS BETTER and see what happened BEFORE contact that led to the improper technique. Stop telling them about the poor technique and start guiding them better on how to be in the right place and time, so they can perform the technique they do know well, they just have to learn how to get to that sweet spot in time Citius, Altius and Fortius...

11. *Specializing too early...* Like making a Top Ten list which at the end you realize needs to be a top eleven. We have to hear our top National team coaches when they say – “We want players who are good at ALL skills and GREAT at one or two...” We need to follow Brazil’s lead and play more 6 vs. 6 games using a 6-6 offense and defense, where EVERY player learns to set and hit and do all six skills while younger. To follow the Dutch Federation modification of our “4 vs. 4 Exchange” game and make all games for kids 12 and under be three or four person teams max, and rotate the whole team, even the subs coming in, whenever the ball crosses the net in the rally. DEVELOP players and figure out how to win that way, rather than specialize them so you can win at this lower level. “To systematize is to



sterilize” a famous Brazilian soccer coach once said. Anyone knowing the amazing talents of the Brazilian players, and their development thru the game of futsal, understands why they turn out more elite skilled players than any other nation. My blog on coaching high school boys last spring showed how we need to let everyone set and spike, not just pick setters right away. Instead of letting everyone hit then chase their ball- have them spike, then set the next teammate, then go chase their spiker’s hit. We need to play more doubles and triples and let them all learn to dig and pass and set and spike from all over the court- not pick one setter to set at younger levels.

Whew, that was a long list. Feel free to email me at [john.kessel@usav.org](mailto:john.kessel@usav.org). Thanks for growing the game with USA Volleyball and we hope to catch you online for an upcoming free USAV webinar, or in person at a coaching course near you.

**USAV Youth & Mini Volleyball:** September 27, 2010

One of the things we find at USA Volleyball is that given the size of our nation and the number of things we do in our sport (Paralympic, Olympic, Beach, Youth, Seniors, Coaching, Officiating, Diversity Inclusion – like boys, Starlings USA and Special Olympics etc.), many leaders in our sport still do not know about key areas we are working in to grow and lead the game.

Those good coaches with a “growth mindset” know that no matter how much you know there is always more to learn, and from around the world, you are reading this blog as a part of that lifetime learning. You know we have worked for decades at USAV

to share the science of the sport, to overcome the beliefs and traditions which are less effective, especially at the youth and grassroots level. Yet after 40 years of helping develop youth/minivolleyball around the world, many American coaches think we have done very little for youth – while around the world, USAV is recognized as one of the top three volleyball programs in world from the minivolley programming to Olympic and Paralympic programming.... So, by titling this blog directly to this

area, and making sure you are better aware of the decades of development we have done, we hope to educate all those interested in growing the game at the youth level.



## Grassroots Button Ideas and Articles

First, make sure to head over to the [grassroots buttons](#), if you have not done so lately, on coaching, playing, officiating, posters, sport quotes, history, parents and especially best practices. Look at the [videos button](#) on the site as well for other neat ideas. This fall dozens more posters, a children’s volleyball coloring book and animated drills will be coming up online, all free of charge for we want everyone to be able to afford growing the games at all levels.

## Minivolley Book

Second, download and share as often as you wish, the book [MiniVolley](#), 10 great youth volleyball specific material and ideas from over 35 years of teaching the game to kids. The book includes equipment, minivolley rules (including the spirit of the rule section per rule), and hundreds of scoring variations, games and activities for kids ages 3-12. It has a wealth of information, such as team building ideas and warm up/cool down games which can be used with older athletes as well as in other sports. While there are lots of ways to spend money on youth volleyball, this book is full of no-cost ways to train and compete, including no or low cost training stations and devices for all ages, especially those in pre-school and kindergarten.

The book is a free PDF download, in English and in Spanish as USAV wants all nations to have a great start to volleyball, starting with our zone, NORCECA. This helps our Jr. Olympic Volleyball and Jr. Olympic Beach Volleyball programs have even better international opportunities in the world of volleyball. (email me directly at [john.kessel@usav.org](mailto:john.kessel@usav.org) for a copy in Spanish and I can transfer a copy – large 7mb file, or mail you a CD version). The English version is found under the coaches information section of the grassroots button, and linked directly at: [http://www.teamusa.org/~media/USA\\_Volleyball/Documents/Start%20a%20new%20club%20forms/1%20Minivolley%20%20ver%20100112.pdf](http://www.teamusa.org/~media/USA_Volleyball/Documents/Start%20a%20new%20club%20forms/1%20Minivolley%20%20ver%20100112.pdf)

## Mini-Volleyballs Creation

What else? Well the [Minivolley](#) book has a quick start chapter, and information on making fun “Balloon Volleyballs” for youth. I created a balloon ball 10 years ago when the Nike VolleyVan grassroots program finished, and the giveaway youth beach volleyballs were no longer available. How to make it is in the last pages of the MiniVolley book – and Dig Pink makes hundreds of pink versions to sell for contributions at their cancer awareness events. Colleges, high schools and JOV Clubs make youth volleyballs in their program colors to create custom connection from youth to older levels of play. Molten has taken it one step better and made bladder versions with valves – known as the “First Touch” series. I prefer the 140g above all options. The 70g is good for around the house play and the 210 just is too close to a lite ball to be worth getting IMHO. These balls are listed in the equipment section of the MiniVolley book and can be reviewed at this link:

[http://www.moltenusa.com/volleyball/product/camp\\_recreation/index.html](http://www.moltenusa.com/volleyball/product/camp_recreation/index.html)

Molten also offers a more durable synthetic leather covered “Light Touch” ball 12 and under, weighing 240 gm – that is ideal for starting playing small court outdoor and beach volleyball for youth that can be purchased at special USAV pricing at this link:

[http://estores.infront.com/usavolleyball/item\\_listing.asp?scid=1](http://estores.infront.com/usavolleyball/item_listing.asp?scid=1)

## Learning Volleyball Through Games Youth VB Video

Third, take time to watch the youth video “*Learning Volleyball Through Games*” which I produced in 1998 with Pulposores del Sport. It was given to the PE teachers of every school, elementary to high school and you might have seen the recent success of the Puerto Rico Volleyball Federation. It is streamed – only in Spanish, but a picture is worth a thousand words - on the USA Volleyball website at

[http://videos.teamusa.org/index.jsp?fr\\_story=f1ead6cdb3b05c01b616090660f0401528836128](http://videos.teamusa.org/index.jsp?fr_story=f1ead6cdb3b05c01b616090660f0401528836128)

## Using Low Cost USAV Youth Memberships

Fourth, use USA Volleyball Regions and membership for children to create super low cost youth volleyball programs within your Jr. Olympic Volleyball Club or as an outreach to other Youth Sports Organizations. *Many in volleyball overall do not realize that our USAV Regions have the option to select use of a special membership for boys and girls 11 and under. The maximum annual fee, which includes full liability and secondary sport accident insurance, is \$15, and some youth volleyball focused RVAs could be charging even less – as low as \$6, for a membership that starts September 1 and lasts for all USAV youth competition (not older Jr. Olympic Volleyball) programming until August 31<sup>st</sup> of the following year.* Check with your RVA to see what low cost youth volleyball options they have. As you can get the Molten balls online in bulk for \$10 and less, two parts of your youth programming – giving each participant their own volleyball and a membership to USAV for youth, can total under \$25 per child.

## Youth Uniforms, Coaches and Gym Rental

Now what about the other costs....

*Uniforms?* We recommend simple one color tshirts with your program logo, getting various colors to form team or age groups, so that cost should be about \$5 or less per child.

*Coaches?* Here is where, by already having all your kids part of USA Volleyball, you can simply follow the concept shared in previous blogs of “You will be a better player if you coach” and use your USAV JOV players from ages 12-18, to be the kids’ coaches and even playing teammates (best when all JOV players serve as setters). If you do what the Minivolley book explains in much more detail, dividing a regular court into 4-8 minivolley courts, and thus 8-10 two to four kid teams, your JOV team of 10 or so players can have their own team or officiate and train two teams. Kids coaching kids while you as head coach watch, listen, learn and mentor.

*Gym rental?* Again, take advantage of low or no cost training with several options you can pick from. First is no cost, by having your two hour practice court be turned into a 1 hour youth volleyball multicourt system, as noted above. The second option is to stage this program after school, again USAV sanctioned, by offering an after school homework hour and volleyball play n’ practice competition, or even a date-nite Friday evening league (see best practice section of USAV grassroots for this long established successful way to do youth and JOV local programming). Another variation is to bring your JOV team to a Youth Sports Organization (YSO) such as a YMCA, Boys and Girls Club or a Park and Rec program, for training first for their own team – and either coming early to train, or adapting one of their training hours into a youth session. This can be done by having your JOV older kids become monthly members of the YSO or by offering your program to train and run the YSO program in exchange for gym time. Remember, youth courts can be made from racquetball courts, or by sharing just half a regular gym, not taking control of the whole place. You should have seen this idea in the youth chapter of IMPACT.

Does it work? Well when I coached my daughter’s 13 and under USAV JOV team not that long ago, we did a variation of this idea, having two teams share the coaching of these 11 and under kids. Every other weeknite at a regular two hour practice, a team would turn their training court into four youth courts for an hour. Both teams doing this qualified for US Jr. Nationals and my daughter’s team even won a bronze medal. Yeah, that which you teach, you learn, and the JOV players as coaches for part of their training is a huge win-win for your pipeline.

### Key Blog Articles for Youth Coaches

Fifth, as some of you will be wise enough to share this blog/link with area PE teachers and youth sports directors seeking guidance with developing a better volleyball program for kids, I have linked a baker’s dozen of the best Growing the Game Together blogs from the over 75 published in the last two years:

[We Coach the Way We Were Coached](#)

[Fact vs Fiction](#)

[No More Drills Feedback or Technical Training](#)

[ITAD Michael Jackson and the CAVB](#)

[IMPACTing Learning](#)



## [The Player Who Knows WHY Beats the Player Who Knows How](#)

## [Contacts Per Hour](#)

## [Tryouts and Our Deepest Fear](#)

## [The Talent Code Deep Practice Ignition and Master Coaching](#)

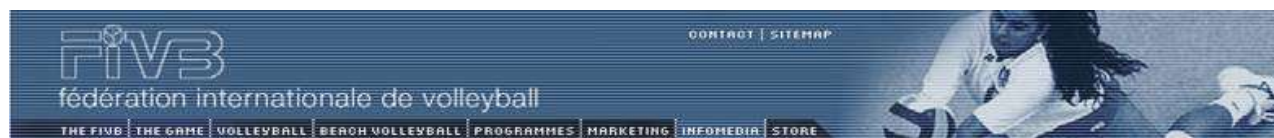
## [Appropriate Coaching](#)

## [Stuff Happens](#)

## [HP Clinic Lessons Shared](#)

## **Other Grassroots Thoughts...**

Here is what the FIVB had to say about all this grassroots work we have shared ....kinda cool to see and we get hundreds of international hits monthly.



### F I V B . FEDERATION INTERNATIONALE DE VOLLEYBALL

PRESS RELEASE 28.08.2009

[Back](#) >>

### **USA Volleyball leads by example with grassroots site**



A screenshot of the new USA Volleyball grassroots site

Lausanne, August 28, 2009 — The FIVB is pleased to draw attention to the excellent work recently undertaken by USA Volleyball in setting up a website dedicated to Volleyball at the grassroots level.

The site is intended to help grow the game by teaching the ABCs of the sports to young players, coaches and parents alike.

In addition to sections on the history of the sport and the rules of the game, there is practical information on nutrition and ways to establish Volleyball tournaments from the ground up.

The material found on the site is free for all to use and the FIVB applauds USA Volleyball for their proactive endeavors.

To see the site, click: <http://www.usavolleyball.org/content/index/6591>

This blog continues to link to valuable articles available online. This one, from the New York Times entitled ***“Recipe for Soccer Success- Let Young Talent Blossom,”*** is one of those great youth volleyball related reads. What a great line from the story....*“He used the phrase “to systematize is to sterilize” in imploring coaches not to overload kids with theories, not to spoil their joy in letting imagination guide them with the ball...”* and that author said it many decades ago....simply a great read...

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/28/sports/soccer/28iht-SOCCER.html>

Please let us know below your best practices in growing youth volleyball by emailing me at [john.kessel@usav.org](mailto:john.kessel@usav.org) and best to all on the path of Citius, Altius, Fortius.

## **IMPACTing Learning**

September 10, 2010

*Over 22 years ago, I sat down with Bill Neville and Mike Flemming, at Bill's house in Colorado Springs, and began the writing of new book on the fundamental levels of coaching. This week, I helped out doing IMPACT Instructor refresher courses by webinar, from the comfort of our own homes, as we shared the newest research, best practices, and ideas in making the course Citius, Altius, Fortius, as it has been done each and every year since 1988.*

*After watching my son and daughter play in the 38<sup>th</sup> annual Motherlode over the Labor day holiday (they took 5<sup>th</sup> each time out of 40-80 teams in Coed, and men's BB/women's B, thanks in part to Grassroots Commission member Denise Sheldon partnering with them in two of the divisions), and a long staff retreat covering our strategic plans for 2011-16, it was nice to get back to teaching teachers. The webinar also made me realize how long we have been teaching coaches to be better at their role, just like they teach their athletes to be better, we do our part to help them be better.*

*When the fantastic New York Times article "[Forget What You Know About Good Study Habits](#)" came out we were while up in Aspen, I marveled at how the principles we have been teaching for decades in IMPACT for athlete development, are equally appropriate to student development. I also could only laugh at how the same challenge of "We coach the way we were coached" impacts teacher education.*

Here is an excerpt from the article...

*The findings can help anyone, from a fourth grader doing long division to a retiree taking on a new language. But they directly contradict much of the common wisdom about good study habits, and they have not caught on. For instance, instead of sticking to one study location, simply alternating the room where a person studies improves retention. So does studying distinct but related skills or concepts in one sitting, rather than focusing intensely on a single thing.*

*"We have known these principles for some time, and it's intriguing that schools don't pick them up, or that people don't learn them by trial and error," said Robert A. Bjork, a psychologist at the University of California, Los Angeles. "Instead, we walk around with all sorts of unexamined beliefs about what works that are mistaken."*

So take time to read the article, as I am certain it will help you be a better teacher, parent and coach...

*Principles and best practices are the core of the IMPACT course, yet many do not know the history of how USA Volleyball began to help all coaches teaching our youth. I had run the US Jr. Olympic Volleyball*

*Championships in Albuquerque in 1987, and we had coaches buying their kids beer, other coaches buying and setting off fireworks down the dorm hallways, and several other actions which were not doing the right thing. The thing was though, USAV, while having had coaching education classes since the mid-1970s, only had a small percentage of coaches learning from the courses. No one was telling the Jr. Olympic Volleyball coaches the code of conduct we expected to be followed, nor was there any sharing of the new ideas we were gathering from winning medals in the Olympics. Instead, as Nev put it, we were letting coaches use our kids as guinea pigs as they learned how to coach by trial and error.*

*So the leadership at USAV and the Junior Olympic Volleyball Advisory Committee realized we needed to create a low cost, core principles founded, mandatory (at some level) coaching education program to bring a coach up to speed. My wife then, Laurel, was training with the US National team a second time (after being a member of the 1980 Olympic team that did not go to Moscow due to the US government boycott), getting ready for the 1988 Seoul Olympics, so I had the time to research and write the first edition and even run the entire operation. We wrestled with the title, bouncing around words that would capture the intent of the program, using a thing called a thesaurus, as the Internet was still a few years off. The word hit home was IMPACT...and then the three of us sat for over two hours, crafting the words to fit the term. Mastery.... research... science based... professional.... theory.... effort.... motor learning... ethics... not all the ideas or words could be found to fit, but they could be put into the chapters which would focus on three key areas:*

The opportunities and responsibilities of coaching

The resources of the volleyball world and region.

Motor learning theory and science of sport.

*So it became:*

Increased

Mastery and

Professional

Application of

Coaching

Theory

*With the help of Dr. Carl McGown, part three was finished first. Now, readers of this blog know the huge impact Carl has made on our sport, from the 1970s National teams to the most recent gold medal in Beijing. So you must read this article he and Dr. Steven Bain just wrote called [“Motor Learning Principles and the Superiority of Whole Training in Volleyball.”](#) Read it, print it off and take it to work and read it again. Put a copy in your bathroom and read it again and again.*

*The double edge sword – opportunities yet responsibilities - of teaching principles and philosophy became the next chapters, and included the risk management materials from our insurance company at the time. With no*

*Google or Internet, digging up the resources was the hardest task, including information on youth programming, beach volleyball, and parental support. Dr. Dave Epperson had already begun his great work in parent education and helped greatly in that one area.*

*In the end, the first IMPACT manual was 66 pages in all. A hard copy of a master was sent to each RVA, so they could print as affordably as possible. Indeed, affordability was also a design of this program, with each region setting their own costs. Even today, some RVAs teach IMPACT for no cost and others for \$20 including the 100 page book. It is the kind of value USA Volleyball provides for our sport, for boys, girls, beach and indoor programming as it is the right thing to do.*

*The intent was and remains that at the base level, the course would not teach volleyball skill, but teaches how to teach better. So that if a coach wanted to teach serve reception with a forehead pass, as I oft saw my Italian players do when I was coaching while playing professionally in Italy, then fine, as long as they did it efficiently by motor learning principles and the kids continued to love the game. We wanted to be proactive in risk management too, so new coaches learned not to put clipboards on the floor, and the code of conduct they were expected to follow – which came much later as a standalone document for coaches and now even all club personnel. The regions were asked to identify their best teaching coaches, those who would represent USAV best, and who were good at public speaking. Dozens of leaders arrived at the Olympic Training Center to be taught how to be IMPACT instructors, spending three days in the process.*

*Bill Neville taught the first IMPACT at the US Jr. Olympic Volleyball Championships in Fort Collins in 1988. ALL National Championship competing coaches, who did not already have USAV, FIVB, ASEP, or Canadian Coaching Education certificates, or a degree in coaching, were to attend. It was a fascinating group of coaches – with experience from one to over 30 years. The number of coaches who felt they did not need to learn of risk management, motor learning theory, and other IMPACT topics, was amazing. They felt their experience meant they did not need to be there. My favorite moment was when a long time coach asked Bill “What is the proper footwork to get outside on the block?” The coach went apoplectic when Bill responded “Either get there, or get on the bench.” Even then, the number of coaches who only knew how, rather than the why, was substantial. We got a USOC grant to add the skills and systems to the project a few years later. This became the PLUS section where an RVA could do one to six hours of extra training in a gym, and teach those areas many new coaches would need. There again, we made sure not to just focus on the highest level of teams, but to help coaches be aware of the 6-3 and 6-6 offensive options, and the zero and one blocker defensive options you might be best with. Each skill is covered with the main cue words, images and best games or drill to teach the skill.*

To date, tens of thousands of volleyball coaches have taken 240 minutes out of their lives to be given the latest core research ideas and thoughts. Researchers grant permission for USAV to excerpt and share key passages, and entire articles on core principles. The Coaches Code of Conduct was included starting in 1995 and background screening for all coaches began in 2006. USA Volleyball has a Code of Conduct for all Junior Club personnel working with athletes 18 and under. This includes club directors and officials. I wonder if other volleyball organizations have or require such education, reflection and paperwork. Extra work and expense? Sure, but like IMPACT, these things are simply the right thing to do for quality Jr. Olympic Volleyball programming and athlete protection.

The latest 2010 background screening information shows 73 coaches were disqualified from coaching USAV Jr. Olympic Volleyball and USA Jr. Olympic Beach Volleyball, up from 53 in 2009. With club coaches being in contact with far more than the 9-12 players they are coaching, I would guesstimate last year over 7,000 of our athletes were protected from these background check failing coaches. I wonder how many “coaches” chose in advance, knowing what USAV policies are, to join another sport or volleyball organization where mandatory background checks are not performed, if 73 knew they were getting checked and still tried. It cannot be tracked, but I am sure it is far more than 73 – for each of those coaches not passing the screening, are free to go coach volleyball in non-USAV sanctioned events.

I also have found it fascinating that the National Basketball Association and NCAA find it necessary to spend millions of dollars to form a program called “iHoops.” – To quote from a May 2010 NCAA press release - *“Jointly established by the NCAA and NBA in 2009, iHoops is committed to providing a structure and creating programs to improve the quality of youth basketball in the United States to enhance the athletic, educational and social experience for millions of boys and girls, parents, coaches and officials. As the popularity of basketball continues to rise -- it is currently the number one U.S. participatory team sport with 23 million boys and girls playing the game -- iHoops provides a renewed emphasis on the fundamentals of the game and safety and support of its participants. iHoops’ extensive online community and network of events and programs will play a vital role in the game’s long-term growth. Elmore (iHoops CEO) will oversee the expansion of original content and special offerings on iHoops.com, which currently provides supporting services and resources for players, parents, coaches, officials, teams and event organizers including skills training, educational programming, events registration, instructional videos, highlights, blogs, social media, and eventually online education courses for coaches and officials.”*

Well, there is no need for the NCAA to worry about volleyball, men or women. USA Volleyball has been doing the right thing in all those areas. Indeed, sounds like they are ramping up at iHoops to do what USAV had been doing for decades. We win record setting numbers of Olympic and Paralympic medals, while growing the game on all levels. We work closely with our 40 Regional Volleyball Associations and over 30 Affiliated Organizations – like the National High School Federation and the NCAA, and also must partner with our National Olympic Committee (NOC) – the US Olympic Committee (USOC) and with our International Federation (IF) – the International Volleyball Federation (FIVB). That is what a National Governing Body does, by law we must do those important things. We can’t just pick out an area of our sport that makes money, and ignore the other areas like Paralympics or the disadvantaged areas of our sport. In every state of the USA, we train officials, players, and we teach coaches too. USA Volleyball has been around since 1928, and now is preparing for the London Olympics and Paralympics in 2012 and for Rio de Janeiro in 2016.

From the past, present and future, there are always new things to learn, improve upon and dream, so if you have not taken IMPACT in the last few years, I would urge you to attend an RVA training, or sign up for the webinars and get all the latest information. In the meantime, thanks for all your help in growing the game, and let us know if you have any ideas on how to do it even better.

## **Contacts Per Hour**

August 26, 2010

One of the four banners I travel with for clinics no matter where in the world I go, is a banner with the title of this blog. It is a way to summarize the motor learning principle of increasing opportunities to respond. As we

learn by doing, not watching, one of the core ways to get better faster than your opponents is to train in gamelike ways which also increase the number of touches each of your players are getting in that precious deliberate practice time. I am always amazed at how coaches somehow fail to maximize this principle, so a few thoughts on how to do such are what I am going to share...

## Teams of Three

Every time we trained in FIVB or CAP clinics, I arrive in the gym and look for ways to get my yellow rope up down the middle of the normal training court. We use referee stands, basketball backboard raising cables, and anything we can make happen, so that the team can do its warm ups and up to half the practice on the shorter, but “double net” single court available. Now if you are our USA National team at the Anaheim Sport Center, you have some 18 guys training each morning, and some 20 full courts available. So they do not put a rope down the middle to get to small team competition courts, having so many to choose from. Then they too play 2v2 and 3v3 games for more than a little of practice, perhaps upwards of a third of practice even, they compete 3v3. Why? You are doubling or more your contacts per hour in a gamelike way.

## Running

This one both saves time and wastes time. For teams that have players who sprint in to each roundup call of the coach, those that run, save time compared to those who walk in. You get a lil’ conditioning sprint too, and depending on the amount of time you call your players in to talk, you save time and get in shape all in one gym tradition of value – sprinting into the coach. The other place that bears mention that is worth running, is AFTER you serve, even in 1 min (or God forbid, 10 minutes long) serving sessions. The powerful tradition is to serve and watch, rather than what you do in every game you play, serve and sprint to your defensive spot. Get your players to serve and sprint, and skip the running of lines, as noted below.

The wastes of time with running come from three other general traditions which are quite vast in their application.

- 1. Running the mile in under X minutes** – This tradition just has no value in developing volleyball players. As I have said before, conditioning is homework, not something to do with the team when you could be playing over a net. That you might be in shape enough to run a mile or more fast does not significantly make you a better volleyball player. It does not help you jump better either, that comes from jumping, not running. Specificity in training cannot be ignored, but many do. If running a mile really mattered to being a good volleyball player, runners like Alberto Salazar would have been on the Olympic volleyball team for sure. Indeed, you can watch an adult match where in great shape 20 year olds take on out of shape skilled 40 year olds, and just about every time, the experienced, better reading, hardly jumping old players whump the youngsters. In our game on the skill to fitness scale, skill is more important than fitness at virtually every level of the sport.
- 2. Running lines** – Another old tradition that wastes contacting the volleyball time. Especially when it is done as a punishment for losing in any form. At this developmental level, you are sending the clear message that getting in shape is a punishment, rather than a desired training objective. They don’t need to get better at running; they need to get better at volleyball.

3. **Running for “warm up”** – For years, teaching the way I was taught, I would have my players jog for several minutes, then sit and stretch, sometimes up to 20 minutes or more each session while the net sat there, “ignored.” While getting the body temperature up is important, the best way to do this is to play small sided, short court games over the net. This vastly increasing your contacts per hour while teaching your players the ball control and reading that so many athletes do not have NEAR the net. Play 1 vs. 1 competitively, and in five minutes you are plenty warmed up. Again, they know how to run; they don’t know how to play volleyball as well. The team can talk, chat and bond, as they work on setting new ball control records by scoring “cooperatively.” Then, having seen how many three contacts/net crossing combinations they can do in a row, they can even go to competitive scoring.

I think the urge to teach running rather than volleyball also comes from being frustrated as a teacher, in not seeing the level of play expected and desired, and, rather than continue teaching or creating new ways to get the reading and ideas across you expect, coaches stop teaching and tell players to run. What a waste of contact learning time...

### Losers Watch

This is another too common error that coaches make, by having losers watch the winners. Now, growing up, I would put my name on the paper list put on the beach court 12x12 post, and watch. Then when my name finally came up, I would challenge, and lose like 2-11, as the games were short but still sideout scored and they wanted turn over. Then I would sit down and watch, learning the lesson that “Winners Stay on” and not the tradition so many coaches err with of, losers run/sprint/do push-ups, etc. In my case however there was no other place to play. What we see happen too often in grassroots and school trainings, is that the losers, who could be playing the other



losers or someone else, or even taking their losing team and splitting them into two and play on the other court or half court, rather than watch. This means you double the amount of learning. Sure there are a few times to watch and cheer the “championship” match, but the key thing is that you do not waste a chance to increase your contacts per hour rate.

### Coaches Tossing

They lose the chance to read, and the players may get good at reading the variances of the toss of each individual coach, but such a “skill” has ZERO value to their ability to read. Indeed, as a young coach, coaching the way I was coached, I recall how I would stand at the net and fling balls for players to run down and pursue,

heaving them underhanded from corner to corner as the players weaved and flopped around pursuing the balls I was tossing.

## **Coaches Hitting**

There have to be some coach initiated drills, but there is a HUGE, and I mean HUGE loss of learning going by the coach being the one who gets good at putting the third ball over, not the players. Not to mention the fact that by the end of the practice, the coach often has amassed many hundreds of contacts, by starting every round of a drill, while the players have 1/10<sup>th</sup> the total number of contacts on an average. It is important to understand that, as a teacher first, you can't teach the essential "game between contacts" when you are hitting the ball. You have to focus on your toss/hit and can't see the things happening before you make contact. You simply can't teach well if you are a hitting/tossing machine.

Let me say this again – when you hit to a player, who digs/passes it to the setter and then the ball is attacked, you - the COACH - is getting to be good at hitting the "third" ball over. Who needs to be great at this all important 3<sup>rd</sup> ball over contact? The PLAYERS, not you ever. They need your wisdom and guidance into being crafty, slimy, un-readable, creative third-contact-over-the-net-to-zones-one-and-two players. You will NEVER hit a third ball over in a match, you will sit and watch them do it, so increase their numbers of contacts by entering, from all over the outside, and even running inside, of the court the SECOND contact and let them get great at the third one. Throw it low and get them to forearm pass mean balls to the "gold medal" court areas we know as one and two. Throw it higher and have them overhead shoot pass mean balls to the same court area (not areas three, four, five or six, those are much easier for the setter and all sorts of other not-good-for-the-team things happen). Throw it even higher and teach them to effectively standing spike a nice accurate shot to the gold zone. Throw it even higher still and teach them to jump and spike hard into the court. The tradition we MUST change here is that the players need to get these contacts per hour, rather than the coaching staff.

## **Too Much "Explaining"**

As the coaches' coach, I would present a drill example or skill to acquire in camp, then watch and see how long it took until the last court was contacting volleyballs. Some new coaches would take 3-5 times longer re-explaining the game to play, than our demonstration took for the whole camp. Remember --- I hear and I forget, I see and I remember, I DO and I understand. Let them show you what they think they saw, and correct/explain things one on one, as the game continues. Say the same thing to four different groups of three, rather than stop everyone and explain things to all. It's about time on task, not about time listening to you. Remember also – The more you know, the more you try to tell them, the more you confuse them. Help them through questions in guided discovery as they play, rather than traditionally telling them the answers.

## **Use Stations More**

The concept of creating "stations" so that your groups can train in smaller sizes – especially when teaching 40 kids on one court as PE teachers may be faced with – is an important way to get more contacts, rather than standing around watching. Remember, these contacts per hour need to be gamelike, and thus contacts one and three really need to be moving over the net as often as possible. So a station of passing/setting/spiking a ball repetitively against the wall, while traditional, is a pretty non-gamelike read. While the read is not too gamelike, if you do create "wall" stations, remember to teach positive errors first, not the negative ones traditional wall passing develops. So "serve" the ball at the wall over the 7'4 1/4 " net line, then "serve receive" the first contact ball UP to yourself, then set yourself, then spike the third contact over the net line, not at the floor as in "under the net." These are reaction habits we want to make be positive in the reaction, not the traditional negative ones



so many teach still.

## **Enter the Ball Faster**

This is what wash scoring has done to traditional scrimmaging, giving 20-25 percent more contacts per hour over a regular scrimmage. There are just so many other areas in training we can get better at getting the ball back to flying over the court(s). In the great game of “monarch of the court” the tradition is for the challenging team to watch and wait for the winning team to run under the net, or get ready on the other side. NO! If you are playing double or triples games, have the next server simply yell out loud “ONE ONE THOUSAND TWO...then serve, even if the other team is not ready. They will learn to hustle faster under and get ready in short order. If you are playing four person games, the server can serve immediately after the ball goes dead, so that the setter nearest the net of the new monarch of the court, has to turn, watch/read the server while backpeddling to where the ball goes and while their teammates are still coming under the net. The intensity of the game will go up about 50 percent and the number of contacts per hour...gosh, it shoots up too. Divide the court in two as noted at the start, and you can have four teams playing on the two courts, with the losers in of the monarch side running to the other court, and vice versa. Gosh, running with a purpose and to increase contacts per hour, not just for the sake of running, what a concept...lol. The game of Speed Ball, where there is not running under the net, just the losing side waiting serving over the same side losing team leaving the court, essentially keeps the ball in the air the entire time. You can do that with Monarch of the court, once the players really start hustling, but it is automatic in Speed Ball.

Hope these ideas help you grow the game faster in your area. Feel free to comment below with more ideas to share with all, or email me at [john.kessel@usav.org](mailto:john.kessel@usav.org). As always, thanks for coaching and giving back to our sport.

## **From Orphans to Club Olympic**

August 24, 2010

A US State Department Sports United program has me taking a week of my vacation time, to head to Bolivia – to work with Club Olympic, Paralympic and Special Olympic coaches, hundreds of teachers and even more players from all over the nation. Basing out of Cochabamba and Santa Cruz – my co-coach in this program was Barbara Chillcoat from the Richmond Volleyball Club’s boy’s program.

The training began when my connection in Houston to Panama was a whopping 23 minutes, and my sprint through that airport changing from Terminal B to C in the process (of course the gate would not be nearby, as this is a domestic to international flight adventure), but I made it. My briefcase bag, on the other hand, took a beating bouncing along loaded with computer, laptop, camera, lenses, headphones and an Optoma projector. Those projectors are small, but not that small. I landed in Santa Cruz just after 3 a.m., and was glad to see my control officer Ben Hess sleepily waiting for me.

Day one included another flight across the mountains so prevalent here, to the town of Cochabamba, nestled in a large valley above 8,000 feet. They housed us at the quirkiest hotel, the Aranjuez, next door to the tin baron’s Simon Somebodyorother’s mansion, which is now a Cultural Museum. There is a huge statue of Christ, very much like the one overlooking Rio de Janeiro in Brazil, on a hill above the center of the city. The Bolivians take pride that their statue is taller than the one in Brazil – both at 33 meters, a meter for each year of his life, but the one here is a bit taller than 33 meters as Christ lived a little bit more than 33 years. Clever, and an insight into

the people. The rest of the day was with the kids, mostly orphans, and staff at the [Villa Amistad](#).

There, I brought out the yellow rope, strung it at an angle across the gym, and let lose some balls and balloons and watched the chaos of play unfold. We left behind half a dozen balls, including a Molten First Touch 140 gram, which was the most popular of course, after the balloons which over a dozen kids successfully coaxed out of my briefcase and into the air. A lot of great soccer kicks and head shots were seen keeping the ball in the air, but there was a group of kids who were playing right, and Barb wants to return to start coaching them into a team. Some pretty darn cute kids to say the least, and I left behind a CD with the videos and copy of my Minivolley translated into Spanish too, so hopefully the team Barb felt she seeded the start of, will germinate. There were a LOT of fires making the skies a bit hazy and the air smoky. One fire was just a few miles from the gym, and when we left at night, you could see the big flames easily. The tradition, as it has been for centuries, is to burn the fields in advance of spring planting. This year, however, the fires have gotten out of control, and they declared a national emergency while we were there. Basically all the airports in the nation were closed but a couple, and the [reports said 25,000 fires burning 3.7 million acres...](#) that is a lot of smoke.

Each day was a whirlwind of “charlas” – motivational and healthy lifestyle/leadership development talks, coaching clinics and player clinics. The Club Olympic group was the most developed of all I would see in Bolivia, with 6 volleyball only training courts – and four more outdoor beach courts. We based there one long day, and they are doing some very good work in outreach, as they are working right now with 33 different schools to develop volleyball. They bought 8,000 club balls from China and have grown the sport greatly around Cochabamba. Bernado, who runs the club, and his family are all volleyball players at a high level, and are giving back to the sport in very profound ways. Our clinics were in no small part about helping guide these coaches to the principals they do not know, and letting them understand the whys of the changes that can make training and the game better. They simply do too much six on six with the younger players, and not enough

2/3/4 person training groups.

The State Department staff was great, they handed out biography autograph cards on both of us, so when the clinic started, the crowd had read something about us, in Spanish of course, and the introductions, which usually take too long, were not even needed. On top of that, besides just giving away volleyballs at each stop, they gave away bullhorns at the outdoor training sites. Tuesday we were at a covered concrete court – like most the school courts are – and a small one court/three school coed tournament was going on at which, during the break, we taught spiking and serving. We then went to a school under construction, where the bull horn was a big hit with the teaching staff, not just the PE teacher.

One afternoon we also trained a group of some 24 Special Olympians and their coaches. They all got the sidarm torque serve down well and were pretty pleased to finally have all their players serve over the net. They were good athletes, and loved to play, and the challenge of creating a unified team was thrown down. I spent \$100 Bolivian Dollars and bought a 25 meter roll of 2 inch wide elastic. My yellow rope that has traveled with me to many nations is good, but I like the width of the elastic, same size as the top of the net band. The cost by current exchange rate was \$7, so I am liking this new option – you can't make it nearly as tight, but it is a great option for having a wider “net.” After each training session, I would take down the rope and have the players sign the band with sharpies, something both the players and coaches enjoyed.

The kids, as always, were spirited and having a blast. Barb asked some of them as they were training if they were learning and enjoying and they were no less than ecstatic in every reply. Many of them did not know monarch of the court or speed ball, so that of course was a huge hit. Amazingly, just the concept of lowering and dividing the net for youth into two courts was new, then when we brought out my yellow rope, they were

stunned at how much learning and ball contacting is going on in the same space. Their best news was that they were “getting it,” though the players’ heads often nod in agreement with the learning volleyball through games ideas, more than the coaches. I would expect to see quite a few hits to the website from Bolivia to the video we made 11 years ago in Puerto Rico, as that is still the core of what we are teaching now to the school teachers at least.

The second city we flew to, Santa Cruz, is the second largest city, after La Paz, but not as strong in volleyball. The Asociación Departamental de Voleibol for this city was founded on Aug 27<sup>th</sup>, 1960, so their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary was going on this month. They have won recent championships in youth and juniors, in no small part thanks to the leadership of Lydia, who is the vice president of the whole Bolivian Federation. She and her husband Auturo, who is CEO of the [Centro Boliviano Americano \(CBA\)](#)—teaching English and culture all throughout the nation, make an important power couple for sure. One night we got stuck leaving as the Festival procession of Urkupina, done on Monday in Cochabamba, took place in the street outside our gym. That was quite a traffic jam. We shared a group lunch at Casa de Campo in Urubo, with the State Director of Sport, many CBA staffers and more. We shared a mixed group meal from land, sea and air, including alligator and duck. Some training sessions were with the university teams in “smaller” groups of 36 players/3 teams. They were not used to the player empowered, game like training, but they caught on super fast and loved it.

Dang they know how to eat meat here – one day I had llama, being told it is a meat with no cholesterol. Beyond delicious as the [Swiss Chalet](#). I got a kick out of their payphone booths here, which are 10 foot tall fiberglass birds – herons, parrots, etc - sheltering the phone. You seem like you are being hatched or protected by the mother hen, very interesting. Another car ride brought up the fact that 2 years ago the national government stopped cars which are over four years old, from being imported. Prices have gone up about 100 percent, and even 15 year old cars sell for \$6,000. The trips to the training sites allowed us to see the homes of one city dweller who simply loves castles, as all family members have a home that is not too much different than Disney’s Magic Castle, just a bit smaller. Unlike Egypt, there are lane markers, but a normal two lane road is somehow converted into three or even four cars abreast. Nonetheless, I did not see a single accident or car. The pedestrians are fair game, and play their own form of “chicken” with the passing cars. The most amazing vehicle related thing I repeatedly saw was the bus “stop” which is really a rolling drop off or jump on, often at about 10 mph or more.



Our evening of Paralympic sitting volleyball was a big hit with the coaches and teachers, but only a handful of athletes showed up as, in a strange bit of timing, USA Tennis was doing some sort of Paralympic wheelchair tennis training the same evening. Still had 20 coaches and teacher laughing and smiling after learning the simple rule differences and how to set things up. The biggest smiles came while they played double balloon

ball, working hard to not let both balloons fall on their side at the same time. The training of the university level players went great each day – the eternal question remains as to whether they will be able to change to these ideas which are new to them, or revert back to their traditional ways of training.

The last day was very humbling, as we journeyed for almost an hour to a poorer part of the city where the “New Men” Foundation has taken on the challenge to improve life in the Ciudad de la Alegria – the city of happiness. Three of the area school teams showed up, along with a passel of teachers and coaches. In the classroom session, one of the coaches stood up to explain how they only have an hour of training a week they can do, and so their skill level was therefore quite low. Little did he know he had opened the door to learn a bit about deliberate practice and the value of MiniVolley....

“Senor, I have heard some wonderful musicians here in Bolivia – they likely only had an hour of school training a week, so how did they get so good? I have also seen some wonderful dancers here in your country, but they only get an hour or two a week in school to train, so how did they get so good? Then if you want your volleyball players to get good too, you need to do a couple of things.

1. Give them “homework” to do, just like musicians, dancers and any student, to increase your deliberate practice time. Things they can do alone, in pairs, or with two to three other friends who want to learn the game. No more than three others are needed, plus a ball and a rope.
2. I see a couple of soccer goals here, and some baskets up, but no net. For the kids during recess and lunch hour to get even better, you need to give them the same chance as those who love football and basketball. Just a rope and a ball, and a space to play is all they need.

I then told the story of the fourth grader who lived outside the “Diciembre 7” gym in Guatemala, as her mom owned the guacamole and tortilla stand right in front. This little gal was a gym rat and one evening we took on the Jr. National team 2 vs 6, and won. She was so thrilled, and we kept in touch...she has been the national team setter now for many years. A great example of starting young and playing games to learn the game.

The journey ended with one last talk to over 400 kids, this time in English, who attend the CBA in Santa Cruz. They are building a city block sized center, called the "Big Apple" as in manzana, which means both apple and block. We spoke of families, choosing work that you love, Citius, Altius, Fortius; making good choices, leadership and volleyball. The CBA team was founded 17 years ago and has won their regional tournament 15 years in a row - it is a special part of their center, as they do not do any other sports, and has their own gym on complex. It was a good way to close the teaching sessions. We then dashed to a visit to the city's center plaza, shopping at the local craft zone to get gifts for the gang back home, and a closing dinner with the staff, before heading to the airport at 12:45am to catch the 4:30am flight to Panama. I just love the time it takes for clearing immigration and all needed to fly overseas....not.

The best practices I have shared with Ben and the US State Department group. In addition to the bullhorn/volleyball gifts, my list would include – for those of you who might reach out to grow our game beyond our national borders - the following:

1. Bring lots of balloons - younger kids love having such “balls” for themselves and you can give them three or so unused ones, so they can replace them.
2. The gym is a coaches “classroom” and needs a whiteboard at every session, so “your practice objectives are not a secret” and, so you can show and explain things better in a list or diagram for all. This is not

the norm currently for most gyms, so you may need to get an easel and flip chart paper – and get this bought in advance of course. Every teacher agreed that their classroom of course would have a chalk/white board, and thus they should have one handy for their PE classes and team practices.

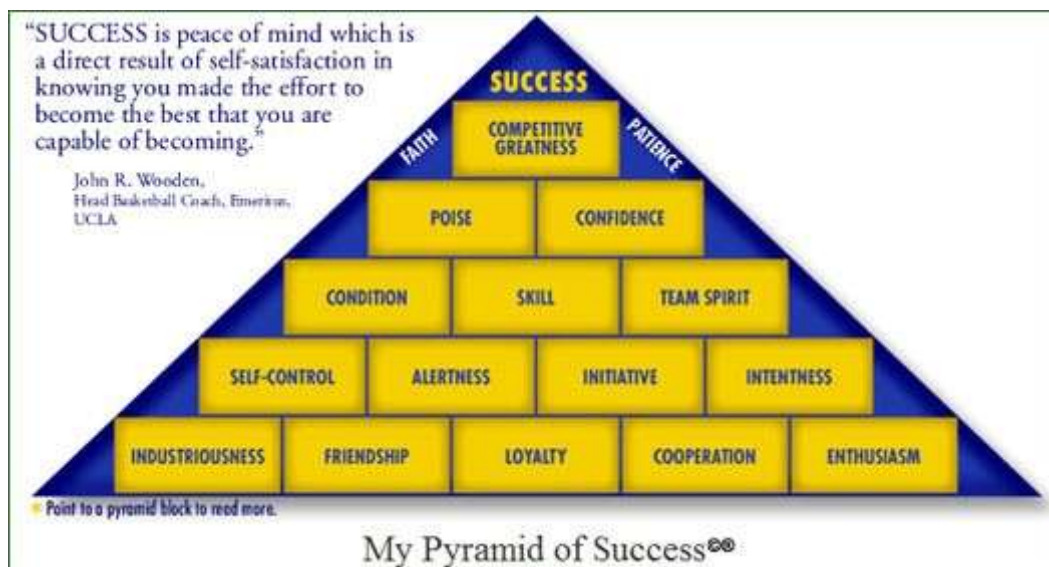
3. If you come to a country to help, and don't have a business card, make some in advance with the information you are willing to give out to all meeting you. The Avery biz card printing paper is affordable and you can save a lot of time and inaccuracies by creating your own card just for the trip.
4. Having the main idea book in Spanish allows you to get through more, letting them know the games and ideas they are getting, are all in the book.
5. Having the videos, posters, articles, disciplines of vball – beach, indoor, mini, Paralympic etc. all on an easy to copy CD, gets even more ideas to them. In the last two cases, the pipeline of information is just not getting to these grassroots levels, in the USA and in Bolivia, but these coaches and teachers will be sharing the information well.
6. Gifts for each player – no matter how small are a huge hit. – You can buy temporary tattoos with a logo very cheap, or decals etc. I brought peanut M&Ms for the “steal the coconut” scoring game, while Barb brought about 500 peppermints for low cost.
7. Bring half a dozen sharpies and dry erase board markers, as you will use them.
8. Bring sidewalk chalk to welcome them in ways likely not done. Write on the sidewalk entering the gym, draw court lines on cement courts, etc.
9. You can't bring too many of your cleanest but little-used sport t-shirts and polos to give away.

So there you have it, a long week in Bolivia, but it is good to be home. My daughter made varsity on her team which has won the last two state titles. My son is now volunteer interning here at USAV, after a great experience with the Junior National Team at the training camp in Ohio. Ahead are the Parents As Partner's Initiative in Washington, DC, the Motherlode in Aspen, LTAD symposium in Toronto Canada, and a lot of HS volleyball, as my son is coaching the C team at my daughter's school. Soonki, my intern from the Korean Volleyball Federation is also coaching high school, and each day comes in with a list of words in Korean which he then describes what he is wanting to explain, and we make it into English. I hope your summer ends well, on and off the court!

## Pyramids of Success

August 13, 2010

Another girls' high school season is soon upon us, and I have been thinking



about pyramids, thanks to seeing them when doing the 38 nation clinic in Egypt this past spring. How so much of our work we do at the grassroots level to grow the game, is done to help make the top of our own pyramid the best those can be. Indeed, unlike school itself where the intent is to get everyone to graduate, scholastic sport is different, with elementary schools funnel up volleyball players into fewer junior highs and those middle school programs pyramid up into fewer high schools...on to college and beyond --- as things just keep getting narrower in playing rosters, while the talent level follows the Olympic Citius, Altius and Fortius path.

In part my pyramid reflections are due to observing my daughter McKenzie as she coaches this at the elementary school camp, then the junior high camp – as that which you teach, you learn – and seeing the pyramid of interest and skill at the bottom level for my home town. I have also been talking to my son Cody each night as he decompresses from another full day of training with the Junior National Team group in Ohio this past week. The first night he was quiet, reflecting on how much faster this next level serves the ball in, and how quicker the plays went, and the range of the attack, all making digging, passing and blocking that much more difficult. The second night he was more animated, even though he is playing hurt from an Ultimate Frisbee foot tweak that is not getting any recovery as he trains 3-a-days, and was starting to adapt to the higher speed and faster decision making that is needed as you climb the pyramid. That he is playing against older, college experienced players who are the best in the USA is a huge learning opportunity, and he is doing his best to take in all he can learn, while being coach Tino Reyes' favorite target. The thing that coaches don't know, nor can we come up with a test yet that can predict, is who will mature, as they become the best they can be, into the next level of talent – especially at the highest level of the pyramid climbed. We see so many players from college give the national team level a go, and so few make it. Most are simply not able to compete at this fastest level, where time to respond gets less as the ball moves faster. This speed of ball flight, and ability to deal with it, is what separates the college player from the international level. We are limiting the top of our pyramid by saying from the bench "For gosh sakes just GET IT IN!" and never letting our youth develop the fastest arm they can as an individual. Remember from past blogs on the myths, that over 80 percent of your power to hit the hardest spike you can, comes from first, your arm speed (closely followed by your torque of shoulder rotation. Most coaches tell me it is their core, which in reality is less than 20% of the power. Don't get me started on the myth of "wrist snap," other than to say, it is less than 2.5% of the power as it only is in contact with the ball for about .01 second. Recently I was exploring the fastest skill performers in anything, and was fascinated to see the YouTube clips on the quickest gun draw shooter in the world in slow motion. [CLICK HERE](#) to get started, but there are lots of other clips which will pop up which you can explore the amazing speed at which some people can perform their skill. Cuba knew how players have to hit the ball with the fastest arm possible, and from all over their island nation, picked the fastest arms and highest jumps of the players they could find. Then what did they do? Trained several of them to become setters, and ran a 6-2 offense. The result? That small country 90 miles from the USA have won THREE Olympic Golds in womens indoor volleyball – and we are working harder than ever to win our first in 2012.

How do you learn to read "sooner" or "faster"? The best way is by doing it against the faster level player. This is why I encourage more clubs to play against adults all they can, and why we did this for State Games at the start of this month. One of the "downfalls" of the US Jr. Club system is that kids only learn to process and read age level opponents. When I played professionally in Italy, our club's own pyramid of younger players was playing alongside and with the top adult team. My son's club team played men's volleyball all fall, a giving back to our sport that the older guys were doing for these high school kids. We need to do more of this, and if I ran a club, I would be sponsoring and supporting USAV adult teams, to scrimmage against, and even train against, my older players. Same goes for playing up in age groups – the athletes develop faster in key skills like reading and anticipating, even if they will be losing on the scoreboard. I watched my son's team play #1 seed

Outrigger Canoe Club from Hawaii. There not only do you see the “Ohana” factor, where nephews and nieces are peppering and playing against their aunts and uncles and extended family, you also see the role model learning from their doubles courts set up. Alongside the adult courts is a smaller kids court, including a lowered net. The youth learn and watch, and when the adults do not have enough players to fill their game, the kids get invited to play with the adults. No wonder OCC has a disproportionate number of players making the Olympic team – just like Cuba.

Another way to move up the pyramid faster is to not only to play as much as you can OVER the net, but to LOOK THROUGH the net. Too many players start “looking” when the ball appears above the “top” of the net. While this is still before it has crossed the net, given the short time we have to read and react, it is too late. I have to again say that our Olympic liberos, including Erik Sullivan who I had the pleasure to work with last month while doing the Special Olympic National Games in Lincoln, NE, all say that 80-90% of their success in serve reception is happening BEFORE the ball crosses the net. For spiking, that pretty much moves up to 100% - for digger, and to long before contact for the blockers. There just is not enough reaction/reading time in the short space between hitter and blockers, let alone the limited air time you have before your block starts to have to come down to earth. So start guiding your players to look through the natural “barrier” of the net, to get that between contact information they so importantly need.

This weekend my daughter played 2 days vs. other high school clubs in a play-the-game camp. The number of times the senior setters could dump on the underclassmen players they were facing was quite high – and yet I know it will not be nearly so high come November. Not from drills, but from the defenders getting better at anticipating when an opposing setter will dump the ball. Again, it is one of our most important jobs as a coach/teacher, to give clues and guide each player’s discovery of the game between contact, and to stop yammering so much about the technique seen at contact.

Can you break it down? Sure coaches do all the time, but I don’t believe you can with any value, and motor skill learning theory would say the same. It is all part of the flow and reading of the game. What we need to do, so our players can climb the pyramid faster, is to increase the number of contacts they are learning. Maxi scoring does this in youth volleyball ([CLICK HERE to get the Minivolley book](#) in English ... it is in Spanish too), and doubles volleyball does it the best of all at any age. Couple that with playing against adults as a junior and you are really helping them climb the pyramid of success faster. To again make my point about deliberate practice and the number of “contacts” – of *doing*, and not watching, I am going to share a couple of quotes from a July 1, 2010 *USA Today* article called “Online Play Preps Whiz Kids” – where it is noted that the World Series of Poker’s Texas Hold’em Main Event, is seeing champions who are as young as 21. ESPN’s commentator Norman Chad said “It’s a combination of quantity and quality... You have to give them credit for doing their homework. They use the technology of the Internet to learn the game more, play the game more, be more intelligent about it and take it to levels that it hasn’t been taken before.” Joe Cada, 2009 Champion and just 22 years old says **“Online is a huge learning tool. That’s all I did over the last four years. You’re able to double or triple the amount of hands you see at a card table. The amount of hands you see and the experience you get translates to live poker. It’s the most vital thing there is.”**

So think of what you know, and how you know it, and why you knew it, and work harder to guide your players

to discover this same experience through the net. Not that the randomness of this game, where every point is not like any other point ever played in the history of volleyball, is not going to surprise you at times. It will. It will be interesting to see how the new “dimpled” balls limit the randomness of the ball flight. Take a look at this clip comparing the traditional ball to the new Molten Flistatec ball – [CLICK HERE](#) - You can see in the clip the randomness of the ball flight with the balls almost every one of you reading this blog, will play with this year, compared to the “Flight Stability Technology” using a hexagon shaped dimpling surface. This change in ball flight happens on the other side of the net with time to react to, but also happens in the last 3 meters of ball flight, which you cannot react to. Thus I promise your best passer will shank a few this season. It is not the player’s technique, it is simply because our game is random, including the flight of the served ball. Relax coach, and just focus on the one you can control – the next point. Please do not waste everyone’s time and tell your player “WATCH THE BALL!” for I promise you, they are watching. Maybe not enough through the net, but even if they were, some serves will float big in that last few meters and good passers will shank. It is why so many are going to the float jump serve – it still is pretty random, while the higher and closer contact of the ball to the opponent’s side, makes for just a little bit less reaction and reading time.

So the pyramid of success has a lot of random stops along the way. Injuries which change your team plans. Weather when playing outdoors which makes coming back indoors that much easier to do compared to those challenges outside, and countless other variations of the game which will thrill and exasperate you. Chill coach. Be the calm in the middle of the game storm, no need to roil the waters more with your frustrations in dealing with the unpredictable nature of this wonderful game. Speaking of games, I wanted to close with a game my kids have been playing which I think would be a great team builder for road trips or even local tournaments. It is called QUELF: <http://www.amazon.com/Spin-Master-Games-Quelf-Board/dp/B00421AGGG>. A VERY unpredictable board game for teams. Obey the rules....and gives random a new name – my kids get a lot of laughs out of playing, regardless of the winner, and that is a great thing to see happen while playing anything, on or off the court.

Off to Bolivia for a week of clinics with their national teams, Paralympic, Special Olympic, scholastic and club programs. Half the time we will be at 7,000 feet in Cochabamba, and it looks like there might be fly fishing streams nearby...oh I sure hope so... gives me time to [reflect on ceasing of operations of the AVP](#) and what the best next steps will be for the sport that really started me playing back in 1962 at Emerald Bay. Jason Hodell and the staff did all they could in these challenging times, and now there are new challenges to focus on for the other Olympic discipline. I’ll be back....

## **Fact vs. Fiction**

July 16, 2010

At the 2010 Sitting World Championships, doing all sorts of things, from court set up to photography. Starting today, I move to the role of coaching the coaches again – in this case in the Wounded Warrior project we will be “training the trainers.” Ten military leaders will watch the rest of these World Championships, and participate in classroom and on the court training, while we have also extended the training to some of the new teams from around the world in this event to share. I sit in the stands, in the dining hall, and just in the lobby, and find myself over and over again having coaches from the 26 nations come up to talk about the facts of coaching as I know them, and am amazed at how many don’t know the science behind our sport.

When I ask them how long a player’s hand is on the ball when it is spiked, I hear back .5 seconds (in reality as



previously covered, it is .01) or that the wrist snap provides 25 percent of the power (in reality 2.5 percent). So I keep wondering...how do we get people to understand the base they need to build their coaching on – this stabilizing anchor point for us all found in facts, not beliefs. I have been lucky to work with some of the best thinkers of teaching and the science in sport over the decades – Carl McGown, Doug Beal, Jim Thompson, Dave Epperson, Bill Neville, who have helped mentor and brainstorm. The art of coaching needs a touch of your own style, heart and passion, but it needs to be based on what is fact, not fiction.

I keep thinking of this section of the IMPACT, where the USOC determined the top 10 traits of highly successful coaches, those being:

- Committed to individual integrity, values and personal growth.
- Profound thinkers who see themselves as educators, not just coaches Well-educated (formally and informally) in a liberal arts tradition.
- Long-run commitment to their athletes and their institution.
- Willing to experiment with new ideas.
  
- Value the coach-player relationship, winning aside.
  
- Understand and appreciate human nature
- Love their sport and work.
- Honest and strong in character.
- Human and therefore imperfect

The thing that comes to mind watching the coaches here and all over the world in the over 40 countries I have taught in (next stop...Bolivia in August), is how so many coaches are stuck in what they think they know and not willing to use trait #5, or spend time working to be great at traits #1 and 2. These passionate coaches have learned mostly by trial and error – either learning it on their own, or from copying the coaching they received, or watching a program better than them and mimicking what they saw, without knowing the why. What is so often lacking is the science behind the game, coupled with letting players become great by teaching the game between contacts, the reading and anticipation that comes in training over the net in reality. The science is clear about the core importance of specificity in training, yet drill after drill seen is teaching something far from the real actions needed in our sport. The other thing missing is the reality of scoring – every rally of every game ends in a point, but most drills lack that simple fact – and are missing the facts found in statistics and keeping score. Coaches should build from core concepts which are based on the facts of the sport, found in science and scoring...but sadly most don't...

I am a pretty voracious reader, and always have been, reading all genres I feel of interest, and my interests are quite varied as part of my continual education. I read history – where you get someone's version of how life happened in the past - always interesting from the varied points of view. I read science fiction, marveling at the creativity and imagination of other thinkers – including the great Hugo Award winning author, John Kessel. His [Pride and Prometheus](#) won the Nebula Award in 2008 for best novelette and I think is well worth the read, even

though I am quite biased. To view my alter ego's home page at North Carolina State where he teaches, and to download a free copy of his winning story (just go down his home page a bit) click this... <http://www4.ncsu.edu/~tenshi/index2.html>. I read horror - and marvel at the sheer volume of words that Stephen King can create and weave into stories – my favorite being [The Stand](#), as it is about where I coached long ago in Boulder Colorado. I read science – psychology, physiology, biology, mathematics and more. There you can find some of the answers you might be seeking in core concepts which to anchor your teaching on. When a book like [Fooled by Randomness](#) gets a backcover quote from *Fortune* magazine, that it is one of the five smartest books of all time, you sorta feel like there is something in there worth chewing on and understanding, as there also is in Taleb's newest book [The Black Swan](#). Rather than elaborate more on Taleb's work, I will just let you peruse his home page by [CLICKING HERE](#)

In closing, I want to share this clip of an owl too...a wise bird and a great predator that I have always admired, as biology was part of my college major. Please take three minutes more and [CLICK HERE](#) to watch an amazing transformation based on the opposing possible threat. I think of how some teams here play against a smaller opponent, or a larger one, and admire the calm spirit of Bosnia, and Iran – the top two sitting men's teams in the world, and the same demeanor on so many levels seen in China and our USA team, the top two women's teams in our sport right now. I will not be able to see the gold medal matches, having to leave on the last day of this great event (huge kudos again to UCO on all levels, over 1,000 volunteers helping this happen) at dawn for Lincoln, NE in time to get there for the Special Olympics Nationals opening ceremonies, joining Tom Hoff, the wise captain of our team in Beijing, in growing the game there. I will ask our coaches for a copy of the matches, for win or lose, they will be great studies in effort and the passion of our game.

## 100 Years of Volleyball Research Secret

July 13, 2010

This week finds me in Edmond, Oklahoma, somewhere on Tornado Alley (noted in part by the bright green “Severe Weather Shelter” signs in the gyms we are working, for the 2010 World Sitting Volleyball Championships. We have made it through days of set up, and an inspiring opening ceremonies and of course the teams came in several days early for advance training and getting used to our time zone. Like working the Paralympics, being around hundreds of disabled and talented athletes is simply humbling and inspiring all at the same time. You can go to [www.wovd.info](http://www.wovd.info) and click on events for 2014 World Championships as the 2010 website has been closed down. Additional competition information can be found on the WOVD Competition Calendar:<http://www.wovd.info/Docs/Calendar/Model%20Calendar%202011-2020.pdf>

My son, Cody, is with me, along with an intern, Soonki Jin working with our department from the Korean Volleyball Federation. We drove my trusty Yukon “Columbus” with just shy of 200,000 miles on it, the 12 hours from Colorado to Austin, where Cody was playing in the 18 Open division. There I did some CAP clinics with Sean Byron of Ohio State, took lots of pictures, and cheered – rejoicing that after every day of intense competition, my body was not sort at all...lol. We all have to be pleased at how packed the finals were for the championship flights for the boys, standing room only when Outrigger lost its first match ever on the court – 13-15 in the 18 Open finals to the strong Manhattan Beach Surf team. I brought Soonki along as he could not comprehend that we can put from 30-100 courts in one place, or the concept of a wave format with two tournaments held on one court, so best for him to experience it all. His biggest surprise? How all the players at

the end of their competition do a jersey swap, as hundreds of boys exchange their collections of uniforms and t-shirts. Every college program was there too, looking at players of all ages, and Bill Kauffman did a great job of capturing their presence in the article you can see by [CLICKING HERE](#). I took a time lapse one morning from an office window, capturing over an hour of getting ready to play from the moment the doors open, that came out pretty cool. My favorite part is the national anthem, look for it about ¾ of the way thru the 1 minute clip that can be found in the [video section](#) of our website. There are lots of match play clips and photos in the video and photo galleries of the USAV website, check them out.

So with thousands of matches played in Austin for the boys, and concurrently for over 800 girls teams in Reno – this same fact found in the FIVB study came true again – so I will share it now. When I was on the Technical and Coaches Commission for the FIVB, in the Centennial year of our sport, 1995, we gathered knowledge of all the matches played from the start of the creation of our sport. 100 years of playing, 200 nations playing from National team level to youth, totaling over a billion matches. In this data, one thing came out with a high percentage. That is, in every match played, at a .99999998 percent rate, FIFTY (50) PERCENT OF THE TEAMS LOST. I mean, that is a BIG percentage, not some measly 10 percent which is not so often – it is fully HALF of every match played, that one of the teams goes home a LOSER. From the way many coaches and parents were acting along the sidelines, you would think they all would expect their success level to be in the over 90 percent range.

Nonetheless, as the late, great John Wooden understood, your success really is defined by playing the your hardest and best in a competition, regardless of the outcome – for the outcome takes care of itself. It is far more troublesome to play poorly and win, than to play your best and lose. Good teachers, and coaches, focus on performance day in and day out (a value of the competitive cauldron tool), by helping their players see this performance improvement. One very strong suggestion to all reading is to video tape the team/individuals at the start of your season. Then half way thru, do it again, and show your players their performance improvement – even if they are not winning. That will come. Close the season down with yet another clip series of the players at their new level of playing, for we don't see this improvement, and a good teacher helps us see it clearly as the training winds down.

My son competed just four years ago in his first Junior Olympic Volleyball Championships with a very young 14's team, and did not win a match. This year, on a team of mostly 17 and unders, he competed at a level so much higher it was a joy to see. They ended up losing many times in three, and winning but one match. Yet this performance improvement was clearly seen by many, including the men who Cody and Mitch Beal beat along the way to the semifinals of the men's BB in the 38<sup>th</sup> annual King of the Mountain in Vail. I was played in the first event, and played nearly 40 years later on Sunday, Father's day, with my daughter McKenzie – losing in the semifinals, do to my poor wearied performance, not hers. My favorite division was the Father and Son for 12 and unders, where the tall dads worked together to encourage both young partners to pass, set, spike and serve hard and over. That Cody and Mitch went last September to the finals of the Motherlode Men's B, to losing only twice, both times to the King of the Mountain BB men's champions in pool then the semis, is a great way to show this skill performance improvement we need to show. That clubs encouraged their players to play a weekend of doubles less than two weeks before the Junior National Championships they might be playing in, also shows great hope – and we responded by allowing the juniors to receive serve and digs overhead, letting them understand this is not how they might play in the same event against adults, but for giving them an extra tune up – passing in the wind, sun and whole court coverage demands found in playing doubles. Another place to see the impact of role modeling, improved training, and younger start up was seen with this year's 14 team from Colorado, which took third in the 14 Open. Well done by all at Front Range.

So we came in direct from Austin and have been working operations since arrival. Sharing an apartment with TJ, Paralympic archer, and laying down courts, cutting lines, paying per diems and other fees, taking lots of pictures, and just helping out where needed operationally. The UCO Staff, behind the work of Katrina Shaklee, Mark Herrin, and Elliot Blake, have done a tremendous job in preparing and making this fly. The biggest challenge for all, USAV's amazing Carla Hall included, has been getting visas for national teams like Iran and even Egypt. Each delegation member paying well over \$100, and having to travel hours, even out of the country, appearing in person, to get a visa to come to compete here. In the end, only Kenya, Iraq and Cuba who were expected, did not show. Competition and practice goes on from 8am to 10pm, the battle currently in pools and then half the teams will play up in the A flight and the bottom half in the B flight. In a fast getaway from the workload here, Cody twice drove up a carload of interested players the two hours it takes to get to Wichita, Kansas, and watched the USA team, behind a large kill level performance of Reid Priddy, split in their last World League weekend match sets. The second nite he brought all the gear down from the event, buzzer, hydrometer and other items.

The play here is the best in the world for this discipline. Iran and Bosnia are tops in the men – professional leagues help them be at the pinnacle. China and the USA are the best in the women, with China taking the last two Paralympic Golds to the USA's bronze and silver. There are some powerful stories on the USA teams, with wounded warriors and more – and two new USA women are joining the team, 13 year old Kaleo Kanahale and Monique, a former top softball player who lost her leg in a forklift accident working her summer job after her high school graduation – and now on the team as a developing fast outside hitter. The night before play began at about 10pm, Bill Hamiter and Edgar Miraku brought the team into the main gym and delivered his version of the Hoosier speech, and I spoke about controlling what you can control and Citius, Altius, Fortius. The women are undefeated after four matches, keeping seed, while the men won tonite over Libya 3-0 to hold to their seed so far as well. I urge you to pass along the [www.wovd.info](http://www.wovd.info) link, to obtain updated information on future competitions.

Internationally speaking still, I would like to give a shout out to Dorian Rabotti, who writes a great blog in Italian on "Pallavolo" called "[Oltre la Rete.](#)" He shares some neat insights into the game in Italy on all levels, and with the helpful click of Google Translator, you can get the gist of each writing by the click of a button. So click on [HERE](#) and start learning from overseas the fun way from a guy who knows the game well.

Back to courts here, but remember, you can get lesson plans, images, pictures and ideas on how to coach in the minivolleyball book and from the poster section and more – or just email me at [john.kessel@usav.org](mailto:john.kessel@usav.org) if you have questions on bringing the sitting game to your club, school or program to grow the game in a new way.



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### **Around a League in 80 Days: June 16, 2010**

This past February 23<sup>rd</sup>, some twenty boys gathered in Palmer’s main gym, to start playing volleyball for their high school. Just ten weeks later, the two teams formed from the sweat and hard work of these young men, would end their season at Regionals, and not advance to the final eight teams of State. This blog explores what can be accomplished in such a short time.

My son Cody has found his sports passion in volleyball. He played high school varsity tennis and lacrosse, and was captain for each in his last year. He is a great skier, a pro “Call of Duty” gamer, and just graduated from four years of International Baccalaureate (IB) with a 4.8 gpa, taking some pretty heavy loads – including Mandarin Chinese (talk about a class you can’t give a child any help in homework with...). Yet he always makes time for volleyball. So when he wanted to form a volleyball team at his school, I thought it would be a great chance to get back into the gym and spend more time with him in his senior year. I was not disappointed. From a Grow the Game perspective, several things come to mind...

The boys would rather play Speedball than any other game, even King of the Court. The intensity and focus they put into this one game, made it be one played nearly every practice.

As winning the serve pass war is the most important thing, the additional serving/passing training – and how we did it with these beginners was perhaps the most important thing we did. Getting up three nets to train the 16-18 novices who stuck with it, again gave them very important over and near the net experience and training.

Teaching defense in groups of three, not pairs, and focusing on digging up always pays off.

Teaching only back row attacking from the start – in speedball, king of the court and offense training, also works.

Powderpuff football and RuffnTuff Volleyball as fundraisers are a hoot.

Given the training amounts, and travel time for Jr. Olympic programming, it was great to be able to practice after school every day of the week. We also had some nice days where we went outside and played doubles or games in the spring sun. There is something about being able to play for your school that adds to the focus for the players. The half the group who came out to play were classmates of my son, and none had played before. The other half were underclassmen, and several had played some before. We split into a team for the future and a team of seniors and I ran practices for both teams. When tournaments and league play took place, coach “O” - aka Olajuwon Williams, took the younger team into competition and I coached the new players – plus one who knew how to play. We ran a 6-3 for about half the season, until one of the other new players learning how to set became too good, and he joined my son in setting a 6-2. We passed with 3 players, sometimes 4, and everyone gave a go at blocking and hitting...and we had a blast. We had a GREAT team advocate in Kerstin Fracassin-Rieff, the parent of one of our freshman players (and also a USAV staffer), who did all the non-gym-coaching stuff so we could coach. That made it even easier, and the boys really helped out when we hosted home matches.

Oh, and remember, we taught hitting first to hook them, tied into overhead passing, and did not get to forearm passing until they really were hooked by the great skill for boys in our sport - attacking. Sure you can't pass, can't spike it true, but you must first teach spiking when introducing our sport to boys - and let them realize the importance of passing, so they can hit, on their own.

## **Winning the Serve Pass War**

To elaborate on the serving changes I am suggesting to all, given in part to the short season and lack of experience, the tradition is to just have the athletes serve – and serve for long “blocked” periods. When I ask in coaching clinics about how many rotations there are after a player loses their serve, the usual answer is six. The fact is, it will be 11 further rotations before you get your chance again. With each server averaging 2-3 serves, that means “gamelike” training is not 5 minutes of serving in a row, but 1-3 VERY focused, deliberate, mindful practice serves...and then you do other skills for about ten minutes. That means we served 10 times a practice for a minute or so each time. Each time, due to the shortness of the skill set, they had to be mindful, not doing what you see in the traditional long serving periods of just serving where there is no focus. Then there is what you do “gamelike” after striking the serve – tradition is to stand back and watch, then get another ball. We did not do that, as in every game they were to play, the serve must sprint in to their area of defense, so we sprinted, and stopped just watching. Gosh, look the boys not only served about 100 times a practice, they did 100 short sprints too.

Finally the KEY change to serving we did was that the guys, after sprinting in, were to put their hands on their

knees and SERVE RECEIVE a ball that their teammates on the other side were serving. There were two ways to pass it – if a coach was off the net 2 meters as a setter target, they passed these serves to the coach who flicked it back to the passer. If there was no setter target, these beginners were to pass the ball up to themselves. The thing I am asking coaches to understand is that serve reception is ONLY learned by passing live serves, never by partner passing. Tradition is to just serve and let that ball hit the floor. It is my hope that you have never less than your liberos passing all these live, over the net, serves, and really everyone passing all these valuable learning lessons of real serves.

### **Positive to Perfection Training**

The second core thing we trained was to do everything positive in error form, as they learned what was expected of them. This is seen in the article in grassroots called “From Positive to Perfection,” and was done in teaching every skill. Serve all had to err over the net if not in, spikes the same. Passing first went up, then towards the net – and always no closer than a meter, and the same for digging. Nothing was played back to a partner. The hitters/setters first learned the 3 meter line sets of the national team – including lower sets (but still off the net) like a “Pipe.” We did not have a single injury all season, despite their lack of experience spiking and blocking with a net right in the way. The other team would often be celebrating thinking their attack had fallen, but the Palmer defense would pursue and get it back over the net. They defeated Cody’s team from last year, where Mitch Beal plays, a team full of experienced boys, and lost twice in the deciding game with this year’s state champion. More importantly, we fielded two teams, one of seniors learning the game, and a second of underclassmen who should all come back next year to keep the program going. The two teams were but 3 games (not matches) from both qualifying for state. All of Cody’s teammates were asking their intended colleges if they had a college club team too!

### **Pepper in Threes or Dig to Yourself**

As noted above, the habit I did not want them to “know” was how to dig a ball back to the attacker – so we focused on training in groups of three – weaving from attacker to setter/target to digger while running under the rope nets. When we only had our half the court for pre-match warm up, we again only trained in threes, just on the same side of the net, using the setter/target as the net to clear. When we were off the court, sometimes even outside on nice days, the players, never me, served long to a pair of side by side passers (so a decision had to be made, not “Yours!” hopefully), who passed to the setter who was half way between the serving teammate and the passers. We would start with everyone setting – so all the beginners had experience in setting, then at the end of the season, just the setters set the passed balls, to a teammate who then went to serve that ball. Note that in hitting, we again let them hit, then set, THEN chase after a spike. It is amazing how long this new habit took, but created all players who could set if needed. What they wanted to do was...hit and sprint, under the net, to their own spiked ball. Nope. Not allowed. Hit, now set, then chase. if we ever just had two for the final pepper group, each player dug the ball to themselves, set it, then hit to their partner – never digging the ball back to the attacker. It is changing culture, but it pays off, as you learn the right dig, not the wrong dig.

### **Volleyball Fundraiser**

Another by product of this training was that a key school fundraiser, for student council, had a level of play that was remarkable. The school in the fall has the boys’ coach the junior vs. senior girls in flag football. Then in the spring, the tables are turned and the girls coach the junior vs. senior boys in volleyball. Customarily this is a jungle game, but this year, after about two months of practice and competition, the match was a great battle. Add in that the student council even allowed the juniors to have boys team underclass players bought and put

onto the court – and even the coach – and you had some great fundraising going on. The seniors won of course, but not easily, and the future looks good for next year’s ruffntuff too. Consider adding such an event to your player’s schools, in a fun way to grow the game. You know, the men have won all three indoor volleyball gold medals the USA has ever won. I just noticed something interesting in our last World League match, two wins over an improved Finland team. What I noted was this list – captain (not present due to family emergency), (Phoenix, Ariz.), starters - (Wheaton, Ill.), (West Seneca, N.Y.), (Alpine, Utah), (League City, Texas), and (Alpine, Calif.)... These medals came in part because of those who helped make sure boys were given a chance to make volleyball their lifetime sport. If starting a boys program is of interest, as all Junior Girls clubs benefit on many levels from having a boys team or teams connected, get in touch with Jeff Mosher at [andy.pai@usav.org](mailto:andy.pai@usav.org) and check out this part of our USAV website on Boys development by [CLICKING HERE](#) and watching the webinar: [Developing Viable Boys Volleyball](#) On a closing personal note, my son is planning on taking a gap year, and working as an unpaid intern for US Paralympics and USA Volleyball. He was accepted to some great volleyball schools like UCLA, UC Berkley and UC Santa Cruz, but waiting a year is the decision. He just worked the Native American Volleyball

Academy in New Mexico, and will work the Sitting World Volleyball Championships in Oklahoma, and the US Special Olympic Nationals in Nebraska, and play men’s BB in Vail and the 18 Open in Austin for Jr. Nationals

this summer. Maybe we will see you on the road, but if not, let us know how we can help you grow the game in your area.



**The Science of Motivation:** May 26, 2010

There have only been a few books which I have bought multiple copies of to share with others impacting my life. One happens each May/June, when I give “[A Man’s Search for Meaning](#)” by Viktor Frankl to high school and college graduates, about the freedom to choose your attitude in every situation. A second is [Oh the Places You Will Go](#), by Dr. Suess, for younger kids deserving of effort reward in a wonderfully

motivational book. Randy Pausch’s [The Last Lecture](#) has been a third one, as it came from one of the finest lectures ever delivered about living life – which you can view by [CLICKING HERE](#). Last year I bought a dozen copies of [The Talent Code](#), and have enjoyed getting to share ideas since then with the book’s author Dan Coyle. His work on the development of talent is important to understand by all coaches working with kids of any age, and I highly recommend you bookmark his blog and read what he is sharing at -- <http://www.thetalentcode.com/>

The book which I have most recently purchased and given to folks like Hugh McCutcheon, Carl McGown, Karch and others, is Daniel Pink’s book on motivation, titled [Drive](#). It belongs in every Junior Olympic Volleyball Club program’s library, for the insights the coaches of our sport can gain into helping every child being taught to increase their mastery through their professional application of coaching theory. Gosh, that sounds like something IMPACT-ual for all. A key principle to understand is to focus on mastery over outcome, and to grow your player’s talents through creative, gamelike challenges. Coaches oft ask me, how do I motivate this or that kid? It is my contention that they are already motivated, for they are in the gym with you, unlike tens



of millions of other kids who could be, but are not. What you need to do more of, is find out how to challenge each individual, by caring enough to know more about each of them, and learning what they want to get out of volleyball, and of life. Do you know each player's favorite number, book, movie, candy or place they have visited? You should learn these things and more – not to be their friend, but to be the best teacher you can be of each of them.

If I may, and you can skip this paragraph, but I have to crow about one of the kids I have been coaching, teaching and parenting over the last 18 years. I have had the joy over the last week to watch my son Cody put in great effort to finish his International Baccalaruate Diploma. His tests are graded in the next two months against thousands of other IB students from over 125 nations He pulled down a 4.80 GPA en route.. He received high honors in Foreign Language, Science and Social Studies, and interestingly he did not get honors in PE, but his peers selected him the most athletic in his senior class. He was honored by the Marine Corp for his leadership ability, in part as Cody in the just the past year was captain of his school tennis, lacrosse and volleyball teams. Three years of Chinese, means three years of his sister and I not being able to help one tiny bit on homework or reading, since the first day of that class. Thank gosh he also took Spanish, where we could at least guess at the meaning of a word or do at least a bit of editing. Those of you who HAVE read this paragraph get a surprise you might find of value in growing the game – [CLICK HERE for a copy of my 100 page Minivolley book](#) completely in Spanish. Today, before flying to Phoenix for our USAV Annual Meetings, I got to sit through 2 hours of name reading, followed by pockets of raucous joyful cheering, as over 400 Palmer HS seniors were given diplomas and got to flip their tassels to the right. It was 40 years ago that I flipped my tassel too, as a Camarillo Scorpion, and began a journey of learning and coaching that continues to this day. Cody is not following the normal path as he is not going to college this year, but is going to intern at USA Volleyball and US Paralympics, while seeking to develop his volleyball game as well. If my body allows, we will play one last Father's Day Sunday in the Father Son tournament in Vail next month and will also play with his sister in the adult coed division on Friday. He will then join me after Junior Nationals in Austin, to work the World Sitting Volleyball Championships in Edmond, then the US Nationals for Special Olympics. So look for some contributions from him in growing the game over the next months. Motivation is such a huge part of being a good parent, and coach. I have found two great clips that will allow me to make this blog a bit shorter than usual, and let you experience great teaching from two very different, yet similar, speakers on motivation. The first is the chance to hear Daniel Pink himself speak about his research and findings. It is always best to hear directly from the expert, so [CLICK HERE to listen to him speak in aTED.com 20 minute presentation](#). The second is also about the science of motivation, but it is also a brilliant example of pattern interruption used in teaching. [CLICK HERE to see the research and ideas](#) brought to light in a marvelous fashion, and consider using both these presentations to teach other coaches how to be better at what we do. (Thanks Ravi)

From success to significance is something that I have been chewing on as my kids get ready to fly the next. To have a purpose and a passion that motivates by being the right fit for who you are and what you seek to accomplish in life. I feel lucky to be working in growing the game, as I get to meet so many others who share this passion for our sport. This fall, at the Olympic Training Center in September (final dates being determined by the USOC), we will be simply sharing those best practices with those Junior Clubs and Facility owners who want to also make a difference. Passionate leaders from other Olympic sports who are growing the game for their discipline, will be in attendance as well. With 60 million kids, and some 10 million doing sport, we should NEVER consider another sport that is giving the life lessons which come from being active, as an opponent. They are our partners – and we need to work together to get the other 50 million kids more involved in a passion for play and sport, not worry about how a player was “taken” by some other sport. As Becky Howard, past USAV President once said “Give us a chance to be your sport...” that is all we seek as we reach out to our Regions – some 40 strong, Affiliated Organizations – like the YMCA, Armed Forces, National HS Federation,

Starlings USA and Special Olympics – and just share ideas on how to get our youth to love sport – including this great lifetime one.



In closing, as I have also been a long time lacrosse coach – my daughter has risen well beyond her being coached by dad and just lost at States to a great team from Denver East –the University of Virginia tragedy has been weighing heavy on my mind. This blog by USA Volleyball Affiliated Organization - Positive Coaching Alliance - is the best writing I have seen on the topic, and I urge all of you to also take

the time to browse through the website by [CLICKING HERE](#).

As always, thanks for your help in growing the game together and let us know how we can help - email me at [john.kessel@usav.org](mailto:john.kessel@usav.org)

### **Three Word Coaching Philosophies:** May 6, 2010

In my last blog I noted how the US Paralympic Symposium was named the same as my own simple coaching philosophy – “Develop Amazing Leaders.” In IMPACT and CAP courses this topic of building a coaching philosophy is covered, for it is important to be able to share your reason for coaching, with parents, fellow staff and players. In the last week, a couple of coaches have emailed me asking for some guidance in developing their own philosophy, so there have to be others pondering the same question. Chapter Four of your IMPACT manual covers this process in much detail, so I urge you to revisit that section as part of this process.

Over the last couple of years for IMPACT webinars, I have been asking for participants to type in their own coaching philosophies, in three words or less, to share with the other course attendees. The three word limit is intended to get to the core principle(s) of your reason for coaching, while speeding up the process online.

So to help your thinking on this topic, here is my short collection of favorite philosophies shared. In many cases, you can see the math wizardry shining forward. It reminds me of an old sports joke....A coach had a key starter failing the math course, and thus they would not be able to play in the key upcoming match. Coach spoke with the professor who finally relented and said...”If your player can answer this one math question, I will give him a passing grade.” The teacher then asked....”What is 2 plus 2?” and the athlete responded confidently...”Four”...then the coach jumped in screaming, “Give him another chance, PLEASE give him

another chance...” Now, on to my collection of “three” word coaching philosophies...

- *Lead with Desire Practice Success Winners in Life Never Stop Teaching*
- *Recognize, Develop, Lead Develop Young Adults Inspire Dedication*
- *Teach and Inspire Build Youth Character Train in Reality*
- *Play the Players*
- *Keep it Positive*
- *Citius, Altius, Fortius*
- *Carpe Diem, Carpe Noctum*
- *Fac Diem Meam*
- *Provide Meaningful Learning*
- *Trust, Respect, Attitude Make Improvement Fun Bring the Positive Climate Innovative not Imitative*
- *Encourage Women of Integrity*
- *Teach a Game I Love*
- *Self-confidence Through Success Help them be Better People A Culture of Excellence Develop Character and Ability Be Honest and Inspirational Practice Like You Play*
- *It's Volleyball, Not Life or Death Better the Person, Better the Ball You Work for Me, I'll Work for You*
- *Play Hard, Play Together, Play Smart*

If you have a good one, please share it below, so we all can be better. Twenty two years ago, writing the the very first IMPACT manual, I included a quote from a John Wooden interview in *American Coach Magazine* where he said “*When I was coaching I always considered myself a teacher. Teachers tend to follow the laws of learning better than coaches who don't have any teaching background. A coach is nothing more than a teacher. I used to encourage anyone who wanted to coach to get a degree in teaching so they could apply those principles to athletics.*”

To tie into John Wooden's statement I first starting asking CAP coaches and now include IMPACT coaches to tell the number of GREAT teachers they have had in their school life, from kindergarten to college (teachers only, no coaches),. The average number? About three great ones....out of some 30 overall. So the next question is to share the words that come to mind when they think of those great teachers – and the list will grow to some 15-20 words/phrases – including fun, cared about me, knew their stuff, consistent, challenging and more. If you think that those teachers were that significant to you for those traits then it is likely that those traits are very important to you also as a coach.

So we are getting down to the end of the season for many of you. I hope your program is going to evaluate you in writing, as you deserve this feedback to use for your own feedforward. This also gives me the chance to remind directors and programs to make sure to include the evaluation form they will be using to gather the information on each coach, in your coaching material/booklet at the START of the season. If you did not do it, still evaluate, but it is much more valuable to give this to each coach at the beginning of the season, so they can be in synch with that which matters to the club or school program to which they belong. Thus my feedforward to those programs who did not share this information until now, is simply to make sure next year, this core information is determined in advance and given out at the season's start. I also urge you to have your mission statement shared more publically, putting it on the first page of your handbook, website and coaches educational material you share. Program members need to know this statement by heart, so everyone understands those words of principle that guide the organization.

I would love for you to add your philosophy below if not already noted, even if you go beyond three words....there is no time crunch in blog-land... Thanks for helping USA Volleyball grow the game.  
[John.kessel@usav.org](mailto:John.kessel@usav.org)

### **Developing Amazing Leaders Too: May 3, 2010**

Some of you who have taken an IMPACT course from me, by webinar or in person, know that when we get to Chapter Four and start talking about developing a coaching philosophy, that I share mine in three words – “Develop Amazing Leaders.” From that, you should understand, following the principle of being consistent in your coaching, why I do not signal to players from the bench, fingers behind a clipboard, where the serve must go. I want the players to make that determination, not me. This game is played by the players and so we need to empower them better than we traditionally do.

For the last four great days, US Paralympics has put on a symposium, bringing around 250 leaders in the disabled sports movement together, to share best practices on a wide variety of topics – all under the same title as my coaching philosophy – “Developing Amazing Leaders Symposium.”

That this follows less than a week after the USOC Training and Design Symposium, means that I have been in hog heaven, interacting with some of our best thinkers in sports, and have a backlog of ideas to share with everyone helping us grow the game. I would ask you to go to [Daniel Coyle's blog](#) to get a heads up on last week's gathering – for I have been lucky to be sharing ideas with him and he is a far superior writer on the topic of Talent Development - [www.thetalentcode.com](http://www.thetalentcode.com) Thanks Dan, for sharing with us all. Readers of my blog got a heads up on both these events, and they will happen again, about the same time and place next year, so start making plans.

It is also boys HS Volleyball season, and I have been coaching my son's team at Palmer HS, where we have two "varsity" teams – one comprised of senior classmates. Districts are tomorrow evening and the latest challenge is, so is the Rotary Club Champions Award dinner – where three members of the volleyball team are getting honored for their success and leadership in varsity sports – Tucker for track, Cody for tennis and Gavin for soccer. Right now, it looks like we will play a match at 5pm, change in the car to get to the ceremonies, dinner and all that, then, change back in the car en route back to the gym for the final 8pm match. With all the International Baccalaureate stuff going on with testing against the rest of the world, it is amazing how good these young men have gotten at playing volleyball over the last 10 weeks. From never having played, they have been challenging and even defeating teams with boys who have been playing club volleyball for years. Success really



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has been the journey – and with the other team basically all underclassmen, and doing well also, there

will be a team next year to keep the tradition going at Palmer, thanks in no small part to our Team advocate, Kerstin Fracassini-Rieff.

It is also spring, which in Colorado means this symposium has experienced, under the main tent set up on campus, sun, rain, snow, thunder, and wind – and the chance to see the aspen trees on the OTC campus renewing their bright green leaves. The biologist I was trained to be, before moving into sport, has always loved this amazing tree (*Populus tremuloides*) and it seems symbolic of what we are doing with Olympism and this Paralympic movement, as we grow the game. Hang with me on this... you see, some think that the largest living organism is the Blue whale, which is pretty big at half a million pounds. Others, thinking out

of the box might say, the giant Sequoia, which weighs in at 4.5 million pounds. The thing is, the largest (in terms of mass) single living organism is an aspen "tree" – named "Pando" (Latin for "I Spread") – made up of some 47,000 tree trunks, but all sharing the same root system and singular set of unique genes. Pando, a nickname for Paralympics perhaps, weighs in conservatively at over 13 million pounds. The growth of the Paralympic movement and awareness, under the leadership of Charlie Huebner and the US Paralympic staff, is seen in the partnerships and cooperation found in this symposium.

So enough of the biological science, other than to say, if you want to learn more, read this article called [The Trembling Giant, from Discover Magazine](#) back in 1993... So what else can I share that was new to me?

Here is a smattering of thoughts taken straight from my notes:

## **SEEK INSPIRATION**

April Heinrichs, who is working now with our US Paralympic program, including the USA Sitting men and women's teams, shared this nugget phrase that I liked – It is why we have posters, quotes, stories and more on the grassroots section, and in our Volleyball USA magazine. The point is, you need to actively seek it and not expect it to come to you. The proactive coach side of me liked that a lot...

## **THE POWER OF HALF**

A dad and his daughter, Kevin and Hannah Salwen (Hannah happens to be a high school volleyball player) from Atlanta, GA, shared their story about the power of giving. A chance moment led their family to selling their large 1912 Southern mansion, and taking half the profits to give to a chosen charity as determined by a one family member, one vote system. They chose a Hunger Project in Ghana, as It is about leadership, empowering the people on the ground, with all work done is done by villagers – where they are not donors, but investors, and the people are not recipients but partners. They noted how the people know what to do, they just are short on the resources, and also that “the man” also should be “a woman,” in many of the leadership roles. The power of half is simply finding something in your life you can do with only half of, and giving the other half to a deserving cause. The book by the same name is online all over, worth a look for sure.

## **WE BUILD DREAMS**

We build these dreams for elite athletes seeking to medal and kids in backyards just beginning their journey. Charlie Huebner CEO of US Paralympics said this phrase repeatedly, for it is true for all of us who coach. Tim Wood from UCO also shared a quote I had not heard, so I get to include it here.

*“All men dream: but not equally. Those who dream by night in the dusty recesses of their minds wake in the day to find that it was vanity: but the dreamers of the day are dangerous men, for they may act their dreams with open eyes, to make it possible.”* T.E Lawrence, aka Lawrence of Arabia 1888-1935

## **THERE IS NO FINISH LINE FOR BEING A GREAT COMMUNICATOR**

April Heinrichs, US Women's Soccer great, shared how she learned over time the need to keep communicating, and to find out new and better ways to communicate – she even attended the social networking presentation on Twitter and Facebook, but don't be looking for any tweets from her, or me, soon.

## **COME OUT JUST ONE TIME AND IF YOU ARE NOT COMPLETELY WOWED BY YOUR EXPERIENCE, WE WILL REFUND YOUR MISERY....**

This line is said to many military personnel as part of the process to get them to come out for the sports in any part of the Wounded Warrior program. Next week Andy Pai from CAP will help me run the Sitting Volleyball portion of the Warrior Games here at the OTC – with four Army, and an Air Force, Navy, Coast Guard and Marine Corps team in competition over 3 days. Some 200 athletes will be competing so make sure to drop by if you are in the area. [CLICK HERE](#) for more information on the event.

## DON'T CUT THE LITTLE GUYS

Cathy Sellers with USA Paralympic Track and Field showed a great picture of three 14 year old gymnasts, each one about 6 inches taller than the other. I think we should carry this concept forward and take pictures of our USA Select National team and super impose them over those making the Junior National Team. Development rates vary so much for humans, we need to do a better job keeping our younger players in roles and playing volleyball for the love of the game. Now the biologist in me might want to start talking about the differences of growth rates of plants, including some bamboo which will sit dormant for years, then shoot up by a foot a day or more, but we have had our fill of that side of science.



## HAITI'S FIVE A'S

Jean Chevalier Sanon, President of the Haiti Paralympic and Special Olympic Committees, was just there to learn and connect. Yet early on in a session, he stood up and shared his "Five 'A's" that he has learned about that which his nation needs to do to recover from the earthquake...

1. Acceptance of self
2. Affirmation – have to take action
3. Autonomy – do things on your own
4. Accessibility – things to permit all to be involved
5. Accomplishment – take both small and big steps to return to normalcy.

He said the whole nation is disabled and sleeping and we need to wake up the nation so people can feel alive again. Life is a gift, and they need help in advocacy programming, to get back to life again. Byron Shewman Director of Starlings USA, just returned last week from his second trip to Haiti and continues his efforts to build a disabled sports center in the capital, with sitting volleyball as a main focus for rehabilitation, inclusion and

fun. Go to [www.starlings.org](http://www.starlings.org) to find out more on how you might be able to assist him.

## INCLUSION

Over and over again, stories were shared about how athletes just want to belong, to be included, even if they are disabled in some way. FYI, the numbers shared were that 54 million Americans are disabled in some way, with 21 million being physically disabled, some 3 million of those 21 and under.

USA Water Polo coach Terry Schroder had a guy come to speak with the team who had no arms or legs and after the talk, it was, "Let's get in the pool," and he played with them....

Two time Paralympic gold medalist swimmer Kelly Crowley was in tears looking at a picture of herself standing poolside in the FINA World Championships, in her Team USA swimsuit, after bantering with Michael

Phelps and others, and just getting a chance to compete with the team.

Attendees spoke of how they could get able bodied tennis players to compete against wheelchair tennis players as part of training, and of course, everyone can play sitting volleyball, as getting on the floor to sit and play the game that way is a great leveler – so many programs use it, with or without a gym.

## **CARRY ON**

Monday's closing general session was perhaps the most powerful of all, as ESPN's OTL producer, the coaches and two wrestlers of the great story "CARRY ON" joined us to speak about their journey. Leroy Sutton and Dartanyon Crockett were high school seniors last year, and disabled but varsity competitive wrestlers. The story is too good to even attempt to tell here, just go watch it at ESPN by [CLICKING HERE](#).

After watching it, and sharing with your teams – as I will again tonight as part of our possible last practice, know that Leroy is now in college in Arizona and part of the USA Paralympic Powerlifting program on his way to US Nationals, while Dartanyon moved last month to the Olympic Training Center here in our hometown of Colorado Springs. He began training in Paralympic Judo, won Nationals and is preparing for the Paralympic Pan Ams in Orlando Florida later this year....including an extra day to go to Disneyworld for the first time in his life.

Thanks for your help in growing the game and let us know how to help you, or share some best practices below, or by emailing me at [john.kessel@usav.org](mailto:john.kessel@usav.org)

## **LTAD, Michael Jackson and CAVB: April 5, 2010**

Symbolically I start this blog as I am flying over Olympia, Greece, one of my favorite places to visit and be inspired in the world. We are about 90 minutes into our 11.5 hour flight home from an [African Volleyball Confederation \(CAVB\)](#) Symposium just finished yesterday in Cairo, Egypt. I am across the row from Carl McGown and we both are intently watching the late Michael Jackson – "The Man" as they all call him, rehearsing and performing in the movie "This is It." The complexity of the choreography, from sets to lighting and musical, even sounds arrangements, and shooting the background films which would have played in the 3-D version of "Thriller" is just astounding – and it is all expert performers learning motor programs. Even in props the staff talks about talking with scientists from all over the world about pushing the boundaries of building props around the human body.

The director talks so specifically it is wonderful, from a motor learning point of view. The number of hours of deliberate practice learning his craft showing, as he sings Jackson 5 songs like "I'll Be There" with film of him performing the same song over 40 years before. It is not just the famous 10,000 hours to be an expert as shared by Ericsson's research, I bet it is more like 100,000 hours for "The Man." The staff talks to each other with feedforward, about that which needs to be done, rarely about the mistakes. Watching the hundreds of best dancers from all over the world, get narrowed to the top twenty women and men, is like a high speed national team tryout and final selection process all in one.

MJ says to the musical director, "I want it the way I wrote it" and the director responds back "I love to have Michael Jackson here, he knows his songs, his tempos, his keys," then he hears "You gotta let it simmer, just bathe in the moonlight...." and they both know what simmer means, just like we know what tempo means or the options of a "Bic" are on the national team. "Michael is a perfectionist, you can't fool Michael as he knows his records so well"....and when errors happen, MJ responds, "That's why we have rehearsal...."



The lead guitarist performs in lighted steam vents and while running and gets told by MJ, “hit that high note as it is your time to shine” or MJ sings from a cherry picker, challenging these experts to a new level of success. At this “Church of rock and roll” as they call it, MJ asks the performers to “Give me your endurance and patience and this is an adventure – give your all, and I thank you for your cooperation....”

Carl is “The Man” for USA Volleyball when it comes to learning motor skills faster. Lucky were the 115 coaches from over 30 nations, from Poland or Austria (no less than Franz Klammer’s former coach) and India, to all over the African continent to get to spend four days learning from him. Doug Beal did his usual great teaching of how we have won gold medals in three Olympics and what the future of the sport is likely to be. Bill Neville, Rob Browning and I shared other insights on all levels from drill creation, scoring, and design, to beach, youth and Paralympic options.

We visited this cradle of civilization at the request of Dr. El Wani, FIVB Vice President, who along with his [CAVB](#) staff staged an excellent event. The Heliopolis Sports Club we trained at is larger than my college alma mater’s entire campus. I pulled my kids out of school for 6 days, so they could join me in our non-clinic time, seeing the amazing pyramids, Suez Canal, and National Museum, floating the Nile River, riding camels, browsing 1,200 year old shops visiting another nation’s school and training with another nation’s volleyball program and watching the Egypt Cup semifinals in the same gym just five days before the USA Sitting Women’s team won the gold in the World Cup. We also did not go hungry on these sojourns, as they really know how to eat too.

Personally, three things stood out –

1. The vast number of satellite dishes on top of every building.
2. The green lights of thousands of mosques in just one city.
3. The expert skill every driver had in driving with no lanes, inches away from a pack of fellow speeding cars or trucks, flying in a formation tighter than the US Navy’s Blue Angels or US Air Force Thunderbirds, with only a horn honk to signal intentions. In a car full of coaches who know motor learning, the Egyptian driver’s skill, and lack of anger, was marveled at and discussed on every ride.

One of those things we shared at this Symposium was information on Long Term Athlete Development (LTAD) which our neighbors to the north in Canada have done a great job in building. Fred Sturm, 1992 and 96 Olympic Men’s coach, could not join us but shared his summary of LTAD first presented at the Peak Performers Symposium in Europe. I will share my notes and thoughts on some of the pertinent points for all growing the game here: First, it is about “Opportunities to Respond” getting the thousands of hours to practice (and we had a USAV Banner in the Sports Club court which said “Contacts per Hour”) and secondly, we must know that motor learning and talent development research has found that “Initial Ability has nothing to do with final ability.” It’s not only about the hours, it is about effort, focused and deliberate, sport specific practice, designed specifically to improve performance. This at times may not be much fun, but you must be mindful in your training, and Fred quoted Mathan Milleiem, who stated “*If you only practice with your body, no amount of time is enough.*”

It is also important to note that an EXPERT coach is the difference. A coach who is using best teaching and learning methods and who can apply the concepts of deliberate play and deliberate practice in the optimal, appropriate context. An expert coach uses training activities that produce the most amount of transfer. These coaches, just like athletes, need deliberate practice hours to establish a deep domain of specific knowledge.

From a National team success point of view, and related High Performance program, It is about having a large group of aspiring champions and keeping them in your system as long as possible....I think it is important to say again, that research shows initial ability has nothing to do with final ability. For every MJ, there are millions of performers around the world who have not reached a high level. At the end of this month I get to spend time with Dan Coyle author of [The Talent Code](#). He has written regarding talent that even being a prodigy, a “talented” youth, does not have any correlation to being a talent in much later years. For every Tiger Woods, and several hundred PGA golfers, you have TENS of millions of golfers who are part of that “large group.”

Fred also quoted the great music teacher Hans Jenson, who said “*I give everyone my best, what happens after that, who can know.*” MJ, and Tiger Woods, were early starters who also achieved later success, but even in the same gene pool, can you name the others in the Jackson 5? Your USAV youth and Junior Volleyball programming needs to have a place for slow developing players, later developing players, and both early AND late starters. We just need to give them all a love of the game, through deliberate play and deliberate practice, and then “who can know...”

“This is It” ends with the song “Man in the Mirror.” *“I’m starting with the man in the mirror, I’m asking him to change his ways....it you want to make the world a better place, take a look at yourself then make that change...”* I hope you all continue to grow and change based on the newest science and information we share, and also reach out to grow the sport – as we challenged the coaches of CAVB to return with their new found knowledge to their respective nations, and not just use it, but teach it and share it, for that which you teach, you learn. We ask that each of you take time to share things you have learned from USA Volleyball programming, with parents, players and fellow coaches. We are all lucky that people like Carl, Doug, Bill and Rob do the same as much as they can, to make this world a better place...

Meanwhile, life returns to normal, as we land in Denver at midnite, drive the 90 miles home to the Springs and have boys open gym at 7:30 am, and a match that night...and the joys of travel, with it's roots in travail....

### **Establishing a Culture of Play: March 16, 2010**

One of the more important principles to focus on in youth sports, especially volleyball, is to create an environment which encourages play. The value of play, from "street soccer" as best seen in Brazil but really found worldwide, to "pond hockey" in Canada and "driveway or playground hoops" or backyard baseball" in America - where tens of thousands of scholarship to pro level athletes developed their core skill sets, is well known. The Van Zwieten's in Florida heeded this concept, promoted also in the article "*Gifts for a Volleyball Player*" which you can [download HERE](#), and built a backyard sand court. This is where Olympic Gold medalist Phil Dalhausser got his doubles start, after discovering the game and playing college club volleyball. These days, backyard and street sports have diminished greatly - in part due to video game options, an ever increasing concern for child safety, as well from an almost maniacal focus on coach centered play starting at the very young level. In the talent rich pipeline of Brazil, you do not see parent controlled, coach centered youth soccer programming, but instead you see kid determined free-for-all games, like we used to see in America. At the same time, we do see this chance to learn by playing/doing in skateboarding and BMX bike riding, in skate parks where kids watch and learn from each other, and the streets and fields being used for learning through play - and no parents or "coaches" are found.

So in many sports it becomes highly important to create more opportunities for this chance to let the kids have the immense values found by simply playing. One of those ways is

to simply schedule more "Open Gym" time, which is really open gym, not just another chance to coach control and practice. Set up a court or two on a Friday night, or before school starts some mornings, have just one adult there for supervision, and let the kids pick the teams and determine what they want to PLAY. My son's volleyball team has come in on Tuesdays before school, a day where school starts a bit later due to teacher training day generally, and they set up a rope net, and just play speed ball or monarch of the court for almost two hours. You just need a court, 3 other friends or more, and ONE adult there to supervise, not a coaching staff. Let the kids figure things out and simply play. You might want to encourage the older kids to spend some time mentoring by playing with the younger kids for a certain time - but don't force it the whole time, let the kids determine what they wish to do and how to form up teams too.

One of the most important times to create this culture of play, is before practice. Kids come early to a gym for whatever reason, and rather than play, they wait until the coach says "warm up!" That this warm up fails to follow a culture of play, has already been discussed, resulting in the first balls going OVER a net in some game/play-like way taking as long as 30 minutes in some gym cultures. What we need to change right away is this habit of waiting until the adult says "get a ball" to actually get a ball and start playing. It is part of creating more deliberate practice, but it goes deeper than this. We need to create a culture that encourages activity and play - by teaching and/or allowing every kid who comes into the gym to start playing right away.

So when one kid comes early, they hustle to get their court shoes on, and then grab a ball. Since the net is not up yet, and no other teammate is there - they go "partner" with the wall - and like the "homework" items so well covered in the MiniVolley book, they become great at hitting over the "net" stripe on the wall, and pass/dig the first ball off the wall to themselves, then setting themselves before again hitting the third contact over the "net" stripe on the wall. That our traditions currently teach bad skills - by wall spiking down to the floor and repetitively passing each ball coming off the wall right back to the wall (aka straight back to the opponent) has been covered but bears mention again. If you can change your gym wall playing traditions to 1. Hitting every ball OVER a 7'4 1/4 " net/stripe on the wall and 2. Passing/digging every first ball off the wall to YOURSELF, you create a skill set habit that is positive in value. This skill set is not perfect, but it is VASTLY superior to the current tradition of spiking down to the floor and passing each ball off the wall back off the wall immediately. For those who have not read this concept of positive training towards perfection, rather than negative training, [CLICK HERE](#) for more. When one other teammate comes, you play either cooperative or transition to competitive games 1 vs. 1 on the wall, until the net is up. Once the net is up, the culture should be to dash to the net, and start to play 1 vs. 1, OVER the net. A third teammate still can play 1 vs. 1 vs. 1 if only the wall is available, but if the net is up, play 1 on 1 PLUS one. There, the 3<sup>rd</sup> teammate simply is the setter for BOTH players. These are seen in action on the "Learning Volleyball Through Games" film found on the USAV Video section of our website. You can also do three person "pepper" with the middle person being the "net" and setter - using both rotation after each "net crossing" or staying in place versions. This is an ideal same-side-of-the-net warm up option that is much, much better than traditional pepper in the habits which are being learned.



Remember also to not do what is easiest and/or already known, and to make sure in all the above cases to:

1. Use the non-dominant hand for 1-2 minutes of "serve" and "spiking" options.
2. Not hit the way you are facing but to learn "line" and "cut" shots by turning your body right or left and still hitting the ball over the wall stripe, or the net to a partner, to keep the ball flying.

We want the kids to talk and bond, while PLAYING so that they increase their opportunities to learn whatever challenging game they have chosen. They should enter your court and become players, not sit there and basically spectate, waiting for you to tell them they can play. Your gym should be a place where the players get to PLAY, starting the minute they enter, until someone or something else - like another group of kids chomping at the bit to get the court space -- kick the first set of players off. By using small sided games to warm up, you get plenty warmed up, while increasing the ever valuable deliberate practice time at a time where minutes of training are precious. Most importantly, you create a culture of play, which pays off when it comes time to keep score in a match - by creating better players, rather than spectators.

What other ideas do you have for creating a culture of play? Let me know at [john.kessel@usav.org](mailto:john.kessel@usav.org) or share as a comment below. As always, thanks for working with USA Volleyball to grow the game....

## Stuff Happens

March 1, 2010

Flying back from a great clinic in the "Hittin Mitten" I did with Hugh McCutcheon and Gary Sato. Signed all sorts of USAV Logo banners for the kids in our clinic - "Citius, Altius, Fortius," as these are all USAV Jr. Olympic Volleyball players -- hopefuls to be future Olympians....and they need to know those key three words right? Watched the Gold medal hockey match with Lakeshore leadership, and then the closing ceremonies. These Winter Olympics brought me back to an Olympics I attended over 20 years ago, the 1988 Summer games in Seoul. The USA men went on to win the gold, while the USA women needed to win in three and not let Peru get 33 points (or about that) in the Peru hopeful loss. Peru got about 11 in the first game loss, and about the same in the next loss, so when Peru got to their 33<sup>rd</sup> point, and mathematically eliminated the USA team from advancing....they celebrated. The USA just needed about 5 more points than Peru to advance, points scored over the whole period of pool play, but fell short. Peru went on to the Silver medal, and the USA women took 7<sup>th</sup> as I recall.

So a couple of days later, I went to watch the semifinals for the women. The top four in the world now at that point, and one match in particular really impacted me. Russia was to play China in this first Olympic semifinal. Now, China had been the #1 team in the world almost all that decade, winning the gold in the major FIVB event of the year in 1981, 82, 83....Olympic Gold in 1984 over our USA women and led by Lang Ping who 25 years later would be coaching that USA team in China of all places, and beyond...they had dominated Russia, and most other nations, over those years. The event was played in the evening, televised live to both nations who were on the same basic time zone, so billions watched. What was the score of this match in a rivalry that really goes by thousands of years, predating even the Great Wall? Did it go 3, 4, 5? ....most coaches guess it went five, with China winning 15-10 in the 5<sup>th</sup>. Randomness in sport is the why we play the game. On any given Sunday, they say an NFL team can beat another. USA wins over Russia in Ice hockey in the Miracle on Ice in 1980. Canada defeats the USA in Ice hockey, both men and women, in their own Miracle on ice in 2010. In volleyball, this same randomness of sport hits home as Russia defeated China in 3, 15-0, 15-9, 15-2. That is

ZERO and TWO in an OLYMPIC semifinal coaches. Stuff happens. Randomness is certain to happen, and will surprise you at times - both positively (for Russia) and negatively (for China).

I so often hear from coaches the following "explanations..." for their own USAV Jr. Olympic Volleyball teams play....Do you think that...

1. "We just did not practice hard enough..." - Well the Chinese may practice more than anyone in the world....
2. "We just did not care enough..." This was being televised to a billion countrymen live, as they played to defend their gold medal.
3. "We just were not ready for this level" - They had over half a returning Olympic Gold medalists squad.
4. "We s@#k..." ? - Yeah the best team in the decade clearly deserves that title.
5. "We just did not get enough rest..." - The village was not the quietest place by the near end of an Olympics, as most competitors are done and beginning their unwinding phase, but all the volleyball teams were still in it - playing for places, Russia included, and the Chinese are some of the most skilled nappers and catnappers I have seen.

Nope. Stuff happens. When it does, stop chewing out your kids for what is the randomness of sport. Be their biggest supporter - not their biggest critic - and teach them to love and embrace the chaos and funny bounces of the game.

I reflect on the times I drove in my Region Eight while developing my game, to my "local" tournaments - which were over 12 hours away -- as back then my RVA was 6 states. I would leave work at 5pm, drive my VW Squareback alone to the gym, and on arrival sleep in the back, on an angle for maybe 1 hour. Then I would unfold, get up and play all day in the Men's Open tourney. Sometimes I would be play great, and sometimes I would not. Or we would stay out and celebrate to 3 am on the overnight of a 2 day tournament and Sunday morning sometimes we would play great and sometimes not. The game is random. It is OK, in my humble opinion, that your athletes might stay up and be kids, talking about life and learning from each other well beyond the VB court. They should be in their room, and know that they need to get enough rest, as it is not about overtraining, it is about getting enough rest. Just remember, we chose a random game....and randomness occurs, and they will not play poorly just because they shared life lessons with their roommates.

I have been to many USAV Qualifiers and watched teams play with a coach who have taken CAP from me, and proudly watched the coach win game one 25-0. Then watched that coach's team in the second game lose 0-25. I know I see it more at 13s and 12s, than older, but it happens at all levels. That same year of 1988, I was in the stands watching the NCAA Final Four for women. Texas lost to Stanford in the first game....15-0. NCAA Final Four level....15-0. If you go to look at the big qualifiers where lots of matches are played, you will see these 0-25 games and cousins 1-25 etc. happening on a nice bell curve. Our game is random, and when bad stuff and streaks occurs is just as random.

You can win 25-0, 25-0 and lose 23-25-23-25 13-15, so that you score 115 to their 62, and yet lose the match. The randomness of our game, and helping kids be comfortable with playing one point at a time is an important lesson and skill to teach, part of the mental side of the game we need to teach better. The outcome of a volleyball game is out of one player's control. What is in your athlete's control is simply this point, then this

point... something we can do something about, as we develop that right now, right here focus.

The recent blog on Cumulative effect has elicited some fun email discussions, and one from grassroots member Michelle Goodall noting the concept of "212 degrees" was a good reminding example that sometimes it is just one little degree that matters. In this concept, the story to share with your athletes is that at 211 degrees, water is simply hot and does not much else, but at 212, the power of a steam engine and the water is huge. Just one degree, just one tenth of a second, just one more repetition in practice...

We must win by two, but in the end, every point matters. The USA men beat Cuba 15-13 in the fifth to qualify for 2004, which built the team for 2008 gold. Had that win not happened...I don't think you would have seen our success in Beijing, for we went on to play in the medal round in Athens that year, and built from that team, our gold medal success. Cuba in 2004 on the other hand, by just two points, failed to go for yet another quad - not unlike our teams in the 1970s - where in 1972 and 1976 and 1980, the USA teams failed to qualify, not being able to get past...Cuba...(except in 1980, with Cuba already World qualified, the USA women got in thru NORCECA win, only to have the USA Government boycott those Olympics...what a waste...). So just TWO points meant 4th in 2004 and several times in the 2008 Olympics for the men, we won by the minimum two points....as every point matters, amidst all this random play...

This randomness is seen in sport with the crashes at the gate, after four years of training. The 1-2-3 finish of the short track Korean athletes, clipping one another and whammo, it is Korea and the USA in silver and bronze...random weather makes for delays allowing healing, or reruns less successful than hoped...the Dutch Coach looking at his clipboard and then looking back up, signaling his gold medal bound, on a record setting course skater into the wrong lane and disqualification.... these Vancouver games again showed why we PLAY sport - and don't just let the experts, or fans, tell us who is the best - all the while knowing that if these Olympics were re-run, the results would be very different no doubt. The best book on understanding this is The Drunkards Walk - a physicist term for what happens randomly with molecules released in a room - how the movement and everything else, even though following the laws of physics, remains completely random.

In closing, though stuff happens, you do need to teach the kids the incredible value and importance of mindful learning, and deliberate practice, and of not making excuses. How real teams better the ball rather than blame teammates, and how all communication, both verbally and non-verbally, needs to be feedforward and about things to improve and help one another. They say excuses are like bellybuttons, everybody has one....but just in case your players need a chance to discuss the wasted time making them, download my handy dandy "Excuse List" by [CLICKING HERE](#).

Let us know how else we can grow the game together.

## Specificity and Simplicity

February 9, 2010

To grow the game, and importantly your skills as a teacher/coach of sport, it is best to seek the effective practices of those who have gone before, and those smarter than you, so that you can stand on their shoulders and see even farther. With the advent of the Internet, there is a lot of chaff to sort through to find the wheat we need to nourish our growth, but if you keep these two words in mind - simplicity and specificity, you will do well. Indeed, let them be the two wings which will help you fly, and soar to heights not reached by those who

have gone before you.

These quotes come to mind as we seek to simplify our coaching. David Hockney said it well I think, stating that "anything simple always interests me." So I have gathered some quotes spanning a couple thousand years, from people far, far wiser than most - from Plato to Churchill -- to reflect on for growing your coaching skills.

*"Think simple' as my old master used to say - meaning reduce the whole of its parts into the simplest terms, getting back to first principles."* -- Frank Lloyd Wright

*"Three Rules of Work: Out of clutter find simplicity; From discord find harmony; In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity."* - Albert Einstein

*"Simply the thing that I am shall make me live."* - William Shakespeare

*"Beauty of style and harmony and grace and good rhythm depend on simplicity."* – Plato

*"Nothing is true, but that which is simple."* - Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

*"In character, in manner, in style, in all things, the supreme excellence is simplicity."* -- Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

*"A vocabulary of truth and simplicity will be of service throughout your life."* - Winston Churchill

So as we teach our sport skills to athletes, this same principle holds - to simplify. In IMPACT and CAP for 20 years we have quoted the research of Berlin who stated "words have little meaning to beginners in motor skill learning." However, had you been at the last two HP Coaching Symposiums, or in the USA team gym over the years, you would see this same simplicity principle being applied - in no small part to increase the chances of repeatability, and to reduce risk.

There will always be those who seek to dazzle with verbosity and complexity. As our game evolves, the need for creating confusion and misreads by the opponents, and the growth of options from simple to a far more talented skill sets, will create an organized chaos with which we attack and defend. It should always be simply founded on principles, not blather, on solid technique, not one skill wonder, where our players are very good at ALL skills, and great at a couple, as Hugh McCutcheon has said so well.

Carl McGown, one of the world's best coaches of coaches, involved with our Olympic team success no less than eight Olympiads in a row, has written a wonderful article on this topic which is more than worth the read. You can read "Simplicity is the Ultimate Sophistication" by [CLICKING HERE](#).

The other wing that will help us fly as coaches, is that of specificity in training. Recently I watched a couple of videos posted by well intentioned coaches, which gave me cause to pause. I wondered if it is that easy to say "this is gamelike" or "this is very volleyball specific" when in simple truth, the actions, learning and reading of the game being taught, are out by Pluto in the system of true specificity and learning things to help one play better volleyball in a match. Here are the actual words used as the coach teaches these two drills.

*"This next drill is called bounce. It's a warm up game we like to play. It's a fun game that the kids really like. Basically it's volleyball specific, very volleyball specific...we're all focusing on a pass-set-hit, a pass-set-hit with*

*each team, we're just making sure the ball is contacted underneath the net....so it's a pass, a set, uh, and a hit, making sure we're digging, making sure we're getting back to block...over the net, that's out....the coach just enters the ball and controls the pace...the two girls if you notice they' are blocking the ball with their backsides or their legs and it's just a fun game the kids like to play."*

*"This next drill is another fun warm up game that we like to use here at school. It's called "Bloody Knuckles" um, it's a fun sounding name, basically it's volleyball specific again - it's three contacts - and we are trying to keep the ball underneath the net...we are trying to go ahead and terminate the ball, it's a fun drill. If the ball stops rolling, it's done. It's basic queen of the court threes. Once the team loses, they go to the queen side the winning side. If the winning side wins, they stay on. And a new team's on. If it bounces, if it doesn't hit the court*



*before it goes out of bounds it doesn't count. And if it, If the ball comes out of the sideline in front of the 10 foot line it is also out of bounds. You gotta come behind the ten foot line, outbounds they're out. You can block with your body, just make sure to hide your face so that you don't get hit." So we have "attackers" learning to spike balls either bounced or rolled under the net, while the "blockers" either stand or lay on the ground, facing away from the net - and we are told this is "very volleyball specific." I would agree that it is fun, but there is no learning going on that will help you play better volleyball. These examples are where I would apply the "Olympic Gold Medalist" concept, which is where you ask yourself, "if they become the best in the world at this drill...what happens in an actual match with their motor program they are so great at?" In drills like this, if your team became the world's best at "Bloody Knuckles", how good would you be at legally doing all the skills in an actual match?*

Sidebar - remember to name your games something fun, clever, easy to remember, but "safe. You don't want to be on the witness stand, being cross examined by the opposition lawyer, in a suit filed from an injury that happened in your drill - and when it is asked "What is the name of the drill my client was permanently injured in? - you have to respond with something like "Bloody Knuckles."

Specificity in training is a phrase you will hear hundreds of times in the next two important gatherings upcoming at the US Olympic Training Center, once the Vancouver 2010 Games are done. From IMPACT thru CAP and Gold Medal Squared clinics and throughout these Grow the Game blogs, the importance and examples of specificity is shared. I invite you to join us at one of these next two gatherings to learn even more.

The Training and Design Symposium will take place in our hometown April 22-24, and features a keynote by Dan Coyle, author of [The Talent Code](#), and even our own Hugh McCutcheon.

By the way, Dan's blog is one of my favorites - and the last two recent posts on the "3 Rules of High Velocity



Training" and "Being Smarter with the Ipad" are must reads - so [CLICK HERE](#) and check them out.

A week later, April 30-May 3<sup>rd</sup>, again here at the Olympic Training Center, the US Paralympic "Developing Amazing Leaders" symposium takes place. Bill Hamiter, our National Sitting Team coach will be there, and I get to deliver a session on "From Belief-based to Evidence-based Coaching." To access the US Paralympic website and view more on the event, or sign up, [CLICK HERE](#).

Finally, Terry Pettit, former Nebraska head volleyball coach - an NCAA Champion no less - has been kind enough to allow me to speak at his Excellence in Coaching Symposium over the years. Terry's writings are important for all in our sport, from his book [Talent and the Secret Life of Teams](#), to his articles in AVCA and on his own website. [CLICK HERE](#) to visit it.

This year in the USA Volleyball "Best Practices" section of the "Grassroots" button, I will share some of the other speaker's effective ideas, so that you who could not be there, can also be a part of those wonderful gatherings. In the meantime, go to [www.BigThink.com](http://www.BigThink.com) and sit in while these fascinating thinkers with a vast variety of expertise share their responses to questions we all might want to ask them.

So lots of new ideas to learn from ahead, online and in person. Hopefully these will be the kernels of sustenance we all need to grow from. I am leaving the kids to run the house and trust them to finish their school work as South Carolina (Southern AAHPERD Convention), Dominican Republic (joining Carl McGown for our NORCECA Coaches and Technical Commission meetings and Coaches Clinic), and Michigan (Lakeshore USAV RVA Coaching training with Hugh McCutcheon and Gary Sato) are on this month's travel itinerary. Add in that my son's HS Volleyball team starts training February 22nd, and there is lots going on in the gym!

As always, thanks for growing the game with USA Volleyball and let us know your thoughts by email to [john.kessel@usav.org](mailto:john.kessel@usav.org) or in the comment section below.

## **Your Practice Objectives Should Not be a Secret**

February 2, 2010

One of the things about being here at the Olympic Training Center is the chance to watch so many other teachers of elite sport and athletes do their thing. As I watch other coaches teach, one thing stands out to me, in that they all are very good at communicating, storytelling, and player empowerment. Starting back in 1995, I put in a study done by Gary Walton from the US Olympic Coaching Development Office, that has remained part of the IMPACT manual for 15 years. Gary summarized it noting these "Ten Characteristics of Highly Successful Coaches...."

Committed to individual integrity, values and personal growth

Profound thinkers who see themselves as educators, not just coaches

Well-educated (formally and informally) in a liberal arts tradition

Long-run commitment to their athletes and their institution

Willing to experiment with new ideas

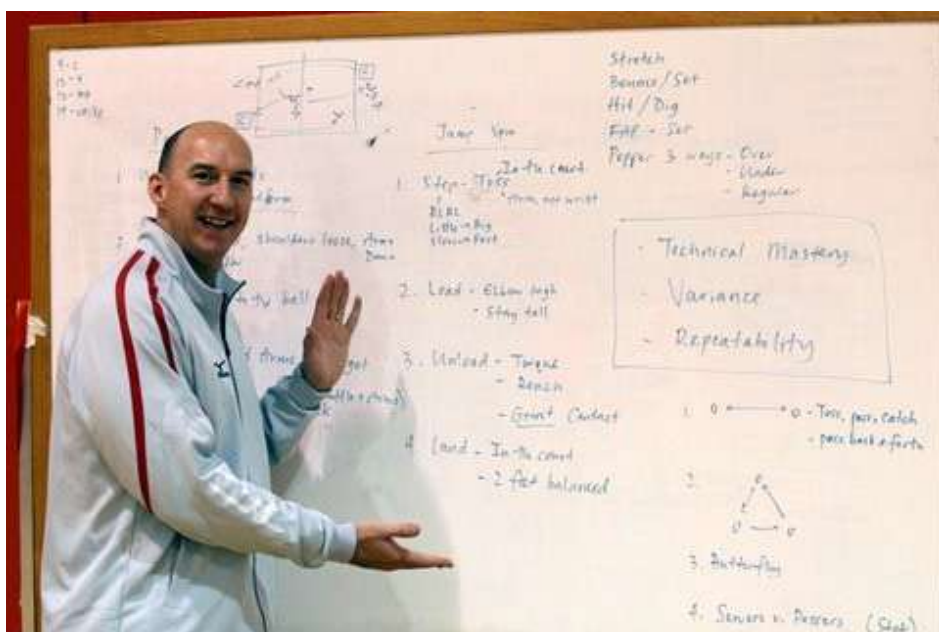
Value the coach-player relationship, winning aside

Understand and appreciate human nature

Love their sport and work

Honest and strong in character

Human and therefore imperfect



I would now like to add some more to the list which revolve around the use of a whiteboard and maximizing your effectiveness in practice. It is so important to get everyone to row the same direction in the precious few minutes we are together for practice. To communicate this clearly - what we want to get out of this practice - shared as SPECIFICALLY as possible - is vital to having a successful training period.

There may be no more important task of a coach to be effective in training, than to go back in time to grade school, and remember what good teachers did - they wrote what was

expected on the chalkboard, and then creatively empowered you to figure out your path to the learning objectives. They treated every one of you fairly, but not equally, and they taught so that YOU knew it and remembered it, not them. These great teachers always taught far more students per class (team) for often less lengthy class periods (practice) than we deal with as a volleyball coach. Then, when it all was said and done, the test (competition) determined how well you learned. The US Teams each use multiple white boards to share their practice objectives with the whole team, for it leads to a more effective practice and more learning.

It really is about learning, not coaching/teaching. A favorite quote of mine by the famous science fiction writer Robert Heinlein, reminds us to "Never try to teach a pig to sing; it wastes your time and it annoys the pig." Too often coaches think that just because they teach, learning happens, but for sure, the pig is not learning. Remember, we are doing all we can in practice to be good at performance. As Dr. Richard Schmidt had to repeatedly query back to all the elite coaches asking him questions in our USOC seminar on acquiring expert performance in Nov 2008 - "Are you practicing for practice, or practicing for performance?" This is where so many coaches miss the boat, in thinking that practice has to look good, and thus train too much in blocked form, rather than the random form which promotes superior remembering and performance at a later time. Brush up

on your motor skill learning theory by taking an IMPACT, CAP or Gold Medal Squared course sometime, as this stuff is important to your coaching success.

Since we want to maximize the amount of deliberate practice - that time our athletes are really thinking about "Citius, Altius, Fortius" as they develop each skill - we need to increase the number of contacts being performed by each athlete in gamelike ways and situations. We also need to help them more mentally, in being increasingly mindful for those very contacts.

One of the "Volleyball Canyons to Bridge" I have written about ([CLICK HERE](#) for the entire article) is the canyon found between the amount of a game coaches think the game is mentally (average response over the years is 80-90 percent) and the amount of time coaches spend teaching the mental aspects of the game (averaging 10 percent). The thing we forget too often is that the body only does what the mind tells it to do. This is in no small part why I feel our sport's most important skill is reading, not the contact skills we teach. It is of anticipating and developing the amazing game sense, or VB IQ, that every level of volleyball player must learn. It is also vital, however, to reward and guide your players to work hard on each and every contact in practice, whether you are watching them or not.

In just a couple of weeks, the winter game coaches will be tested on how well they taught in practice, how well they empowered their athletes to perform without them, and what the level of mastery each competitor has reached while testing this mastery against a world of other Olympians on the snow and ice of Vancouver. It will be a joy to watch these performances and hear the stories of just taking part, not just the triumphs, for the triumphs take care of themselves...

## **The Power of Story and Serving**

January 15, 2010

This is a special weekend for me, as I am working with the best, Carl McGown, as part of his staff at the first Gold Medal Squared Coaching Clinic here at Arizona State University. If you get a chance to attend one of their multi-day sessions - you will come away a better coach, and since the best coaches have a growth mindset, I urge you to find the time to take a clinic from Carl and his GM2 coach/teachers. What I keep smiling about, is how great a teacher and story teller Carl is. He is working hard to guide the 80 some odd coaches here, some attending for their SIXTH time, from places as far away as Brazil, Michigan and Washington. The self depreciation and successes, the simplification, and the great stories are why these coaches keep coming back. It is an eclectic group of passionate coaches here seeking to learn. At breakfast with the staff I was pleased to hear that Carl will be attending later this month, the FIVB Coaches Commission meetings for USAV in Switzerland, and then will join me next month in the Dominican Republic for our Technical and Coaches Commission meetings. His contributions to making coaches and players around the world are unsurpassed.

Carl's ability to teach and to simplify coaching - to get these coaches to understand principles, allow the coaches to follow those principles, and not feel it important to follow fads, is wonderful. Biomechanically efficient movement, following the laws of motor learning, motivating through quality training and competition, and understanding the cumulative effect - that there are no little things and everything adds up and matters - he does a superb job of getting coaches to change, and stop teaching the way they were taught - and to understand WHY they should change....

His story telling brings to mind how important the power of storytelling is. I can't emphasize to those reading this how much better of a teacher, coach and parent you will be if you improve your storytelling skills. It is how we are wired to better remember. Rather than spend lots of writing giving you reasons and tips, I am simply going to ask you to get Jim Loehrer's [The Power of Story](#) - it is a great read on how to be a better story teller. There you can better improve the most important story - your story - as so many things compete with you and your athletes for the most valuable real estate in the world - the neurological space between your ears. Remember, the body only does what the mind says to do, so we need to be better teachers of the mental game, and storytelling is a core part of that teaching.

While I was learning by teaching, I also had the chance to hear stories and dialogue with the rest of the coaching staff at meals - Jason Watson took our staff to a great lunch at the ASU Golf Course, and Mike Wall had us over to his home for a wonderful fajita dinner. Each of the coaches had their own stories to tell, and of course Ron Larsen and Rob Browning's weavings of tales from the Beijing gold medal run to collegiate coaching were insightful as always. My "kids" of around 20 coaches especially wanted to focus on the principles as they applied to 14 and unders, and we shared a lot of grubroot stories and best practices, especially when Tom Melton came over to help us out.

I also learned and confirmed - and will share one of those with you on serving. If you have picked up and read the new [USA V Minivolley book](#) released on Christmas day as a present to our volleyball family, you should have seen the chapter on "Winning the Serve/Pass War" - and how to employ maxiscoring to speed up the teaching of the game to younger players. What was fun to see is how this same fact is no less important at the highest level. For the men, serving is most important and passing second, while for women it is simply flipped, so that passing is most important and serving second. Having coached a few hundred summer camps over the years, I spoke about how I used my twin bed sheets to create the very important FLAT targets that too many coaches do not use. Instead coaches reward hitting a vertical target like a chair, and thus are teaching their players to serve right at the passer. Carl recommends gym mats over the sheets, as the players get a reward from hearing the "Thump!" as the mat is



hit. Tis true, but gym mats are not nearly as easy to transport from camp to camp in a car or airplane, but if you train one main place get mats for the higher "thump" factor. Another reason I have used sheets, is so the players can write on them, thoughts on serving tough, successfully and in - and record their top serving speed. I have been sent the "team serving sheets" from past programs with special thanks for helping them be far better servers, an interesting wall hanging to be sure.

The best "thump factor" that when presented as a flat target that will increase the focus and mindful serving we seek? You. Yep, YOU laying face down (or be a *real* head coach and delegate it to an assistant or even a parent who wants to get in shape) - and still coaching as you talk to the servers or players on your side - for we always need to be teaching. They hit you, and you get to turn over and do sit ups, or stay face down and do pushups - 2-5 per whump - as you do need to get into shape too right?

So the recording of the top error free streaks and fastest server per player on the serve mat/sheet, is another form of "Hollywood Star" (see the Minivolley book for more on that). The skill of serving is a closed motor program - all in your control - and you can be a tough server and still serve IN a ton. Some stats from as far back as 1984 to prove my point - Craig Buck and Karch Kiraly combined for 14 of the USA Men's Team's service aces - of a team total of 26. They each served about 140 serves for the entire Olympic game run to winning the gold medal. How many errors did they each make? One. Uno. You have to have a ROUTINE, that includes a relaxing deep breath, survey of flat space target (but not giving it away by looking at it), ready position with the hitting hand already back (for standing float serves), and PLACE (not toss) the ball to the same sweet spot in time (low, with no real falling from the apex, which is the most consistent and why we say "place" the ball. Then a rigid and consistent contact point and follow through to your defensive area. Most players stand and watch in serving practice...how often do you do get to do that in a match?...You should serve and sprint to base, then get another ball and serve again.

Why record speed? You want to teach your players how to hit with maximum velocity and still keep it in. You can get a second generation Bushnell Radar gun right now online for right at \$100. Chris McGown (Carl's son) said he got his for \$75, and it was within 1 mph of the \$1,000 expensive models that other sports like softball use. The recording of increasing speed on the serve chart/mat/sheet is an important *Citius, Altius, Fortius* ceremony - and you need to know the facts by measuring. Remember, that which is valued, measured, and recorded...improves.

I will close with one of the things I learned. I have never bothered to make sure every practice ball in the cart is at the same and proper pressure. Sure I felt them and set aside ones that are too low or not holding air. I did not however put a pressure gauge into each one and make them be the 3.15 kg/cm<sup>3</sup> (4.5 psi for non-metric coaches) that a ball officially should be. So my servers have been learning to serve with a widely varying regulatory stimuli (the ball) they should not have been learning from - balls which will react differently to an identical arm speed/contact. If you have taken IMPACT, CAP or Gold Medal Squared training, you know the importance of random vs. blocked learning - but having a bucket of random pressured volleyballs is not going to best teach your players this vital skill of being a consistent, tough, accurate server. The ball should not be random. Indeed, at the Olympics the balls are precisely inflated and measured and checked for each game to be the same.

So now I have a ball pressure gauge in my briefcase and will start checking and making my servers - and other skills, just a bit better. Thanks Carl and company for teaching me new things. It was a great way to spend three days in a gym in Arizona in 70 degree weather, while my home state was basking in highs of 15 and lows of - 10.

To find out more about Gold Medal Squared clinics and training, [CLICK HERE](#). To see where the next USAV CAP course is, or online IMPACT Webinar [CLICK HERE](#) and look at the left side options.

And here is a shout out to Richelle Heacock - one of Bill Neville's Dawgs (aka staff coach), and a new member of the all-world lefthanded volleyball team. Her story of life is coming online daily with new unexpected chapters as she just had a big bump in the road of life that involved a car and her back. To quote Nev "*She is a terrific kid who has trained with us and now works with us as a staff coach, while preparing for her last two years of college ball. She is a tough unit and comes from hard stock: Her mom grew up on a two-by-twice, hard scrabble Montana ranch and her dad is a sheriff out in the hinterlands around Mount Rainier. Fabulous people. She was one of the demonstrators at last year's CAP course held here. She also was with us when we filmed for the Dartfish Project.*" For details of her situation you can look at <http://www.caringbridge.org/visit/richelleheacock/journal> - Go get 'em lefty.

And for all of us, count our blessings that we have Carl McGown still teaching coaches how to be better teachers.

## StarKidz and Starlings USA Developments

December 16, 2009

Back from a rainy weekend in San Diego filled with warmth and the powerful passionate stories of our Starlings



USA National Directors Convention. Over a decade ago former USA National team member Byron Shewman was challenged to do something for the young girls who found themselves by fate to be growing up in the economically disadvantaged areas of the wealthiest nation in the world. Kim Oden of the famed Oden Olympic volleyball sister trio, joined him at the start of his quest. Some of you may know Byron for his writings of books like the [Volleyball Centennial](#), or Karch Kiraly's biography. Byron is

a modern day Don Quixote, only unlike the protagonist who chases windmills, Byron's ventures succeed in making an impact on the lives of thousands of others. USA Volleyball, through its regions and national office, has long and strongly supported the work that Starlings USA does, for, like background checks, it is the right thing to do for kids. At the start, Starlings Nationals took place in the downtime of the

USA Junior Olympic Volleyball Championships, where the courts were already set up and open time came in a large break between age group changeovers.

Now this annual gathering brings together over 50 Starlings clubs from around the nation, directors and coaches, to share best practices, success and hardship stories, and prepare for the next season and nationals. For several years the Starlings Nationals has been a standalone event in San Diego, and last year had almost 150 teams competing. The Arizona RVA sends a caravan of officials and operations crew, led by Becky Hudson and friendships of a lifetime are made through the competition. For the second year in a row, we brought those unable to afford to journey to San Diego for the Directors Conference in by webinar.

The big projects we introduced this year were the operational support and limited grant monies available to get these Starlings programs to embrace having their players spend a certain part of their own practices by coaching boys and girls aged 11 and under - the Minivolley program USA Volleyball and the FIVB has been promoting for decades, and with my new book, downloadable as a Christmas present to the volleyball family on Dec 25, these directors were the first to see the 40 years of ideas presented into one document. We have done a custom version of this for Starlings, calling it "StarKidz." My new book will also be translated this winter into Spanish for NORCECA and USA use, and will be available like all the other posters, videos and more on the grassroots button.

Did you say video John? Yep, on Christmas day another present for the volleyball family, Starlings programs included, will be the online availability of a video I helped produce for Puerto Rico in 1998. Titled "Aprendiamos Voleibol Mediante Juegos" or "Learning Volleyball Through Games," Freddie Sanchez, Ricky Amon, Israel Garcia and a host of others along with several scholastic programs gathered to film how to do modified games for schools. It was shared, thanks to the work of Freddie's company Propulsores del Deporte and the Puerto Rico Department of Physical Education, with every school and PE teacher on the island - and received an FIVB award for the production. We will be subtitled it into English early next year, but in the meantime if you want to see the MiniVolley book come to life, check out the video, as we know pictures are worth far more than words. If you have seen the growth of volleyball, pro leagues, national team and all in Puerto Rico, you can see part of what fueled this interest in every school. Byron sent this email to all Starlings clubs which summed up the gathering in his words, so will share it below.

**From:** Byron Shewman [mailto:byronshewman@cox.net]

**Sent:** Sunday, December 13, 2009 11:20 AM

**Subject:** Convention note

*Consistently the best thing for me about this annual event is that I get to spend a little time with the best people I know. Others among you have shared with me the same sentiment. The convention yesterday was truly wonderful. We had about 50 attendees and many more joined us through the Webinar. I think for those who made it in the flesh, it was a day well worth the time and expense.*

*As always, in my view, the best part was listening to each club director give us a report on their club: its history, direction, defeats, and triumphs. I had several newcomers come up and tell me how much they learned just listening to the veterans and how those testimonies were sufficient alone to convince them that this was a group they wanted to be a part of. Such a diverse group of people with widely varying makeups, geography etc. with one common, unifying denominator: all deeply dedicated to providing girls a positive, enduring alternative in*

*their lives. I'm always astounded how articulate and sincere our people are---I suppose it's easier to speak as such when it comes from the heart. Omar Vargas' delivery should have been made to the United Nations.*

*Our presenters were remarkable as usual: John Kessel, Tod Mattox, Michelle Brittain-Watts, Liz Mayta. A collective thanks to you all. A thanks to my friend, Mercedes Sironi, for her technical help and also to long-time Starlings champion, Charlie Jackson, who spent time with us (and also bought us dinner....for those who wisely stayed around last night).*

*A big welcome to the newcomers who joined us and impressed us as well with their expressed commitment.*

*Probably the highlight was John Kessel's presentation of the good news of USAV's sponsoring of the new Starkidz program which holds great promise for our clubs to initiate a grassroots opportunity for young kids. More coming on that.*

*Finally, I'd like to mention that quite a few directors handed me checks that totaled over \$1,000 for the Christmas posada and food/blanket distribution for the poorest people of Tijuana. Just one more example of the people who make up the Starlings family. I will be sending you reports and photos of those events (this Tuesday is the posada).*

*Best wishes for a wonderful holiday and despite the new challenges that 2010 appears to have waiting for us, I can't think of a group that will somehow make it our best year to date in assisting an expanding number of kids who need a helping and caring hand more than ever.*

*Byron*

So to each and everyone reading this far, consider getting in touch with Byron and starting a Starlings program. Note that this is not a program for "inner city" volleyball athletes. The wonderful volleyball loving Native American female athletes of the Navajo Nation are perennial top finishers at Nationals. Having had the fortune to coach and work with some of the first Native American women to compete at the Division One level, like Paula Feathers and Nana Allison-Brewer, these role models just added fuel to the fire for more Four Corner area athletes to embrace and compete in volleyball.

The Native American Volleyball Academy, NAVA, led by Nana, has also been a source of quality education and athlete development for players and coaches with training based out of Farmington, New Mexico (near the gold medal trout waters of the San Juan River I might add). My kids and I have been fortunate to spend time teaching with that camp, and for those seeking a special experience or to help her grow NAVA in other parts of the nation, contact Nana at South Dakota State's volleyball program ([www.gojacks.com](http://www.gojacks.com))

Some of the Starlings programs are also going to work to add "StarBoyz" programs, working with Jeff Mosher at our National office to take advantage of the new 12 and 13 and under programming and discounted National Championship entry for young boys.

Michelle Brittain-Watt's excellent presentation on Grant Writing for Volleyball will also be linked here on Christmas Day on the Grassroots "Best Practices" button on the main USA page. Browse the dozens of other ideas seen there which are shared to help you better grow the game, just like Starlings Directors just shared with each other this past weekend. Now an even larger sharing of ideas is taking place at the AVCA Convention and Division INCAA Final Four for our sport. If you are here, hope to get a chance to share new ideas with you -



and if not, check out the new postings coming soon to this blog, for it is time to give even more in this holiday season. Post your ideas below to do the same, or email me and let's keep growing the game together.

John

## May We Please Leave a Court Up?

November 20, 2009

Over 20 years ago I was working with the University of Colorado program, working with several club teams to merge them into a single varsity program. In this process, I reached one of my top 10 goals in volleyball, that of having a single volleyball court always up for any level of play to use, seven days a week, 52 weeks a year, in the beautiful Rec Center on campus.

You see, when a young aspiring athlete, boy or girl, says "May I shoot some hoop?" it only takes a few seconds to respond to that request - and less if they came with their own basketball. However, what happens at most schools and other facilities when a player or two asks "*May I spike a volleyball?*"

On average every school and rec gym, even the elementary schools, of our vast nation have six volleyball training devices up around the gym perimeter. I don't know why they put up so many nice setting/passing targets, when we really need just a net up all the time, but that is what the culture currently is. To top it off, athletes come in and throw up (in a way that any good volleyball referee would have to call for a throw or lift, since they get to hang onto and control the ball they use so long) these large brown balls at the orange vball target. Then for some reason, volleyball players start to also shoot volleyballs into the orange volleyball target hoops, rather than set or pass them in a way that is legal for the game of VB. I have never wanted to take a basketball and start setting it when I see a volleyball net....so why do we shoot volleyballs thru these wonderful volleyball training devices? The answer is, because there are a million of those, and hardly any nets up when we walk into the gym to be an athlete. So what we seek is simple. Whatever the size of your facility or sports program, that for every six hoops up that basketball players can use, we volleyball players get ONE net up. A six to one ratio seems fair to me, given the tens of millions who play the game, but right now it is six to zero.

Today, all over the United States, if not the world, when a young aspiring volleyball player asks to spike a few balls, the gym supervisor sighs deeply and then says, give me half an hour....and then....

...might, or might not, crank up one, two or even three basketball backboards, which if not done electrically, might wear out the forearms and patience of the director before things even get set up....

...then search for a pocket knife or screwdriver to pop open the tightly sealed standard cover plates...

...then has to haul out two strong but heavy metal standards...

...then drag out, tripping over the cords, a 10 meter long net and hang it at across the standards....

...then look all over the place for the cursed crank, which when finally found, they spin and spin until the net finally magically rises.

Now, don't even consider asking to put up the antenna (unless they are attached and making the net even more challenging to haul out) but hopefully the athlete is still there wanting to hit some balls.

And when they are done playing, the whole operation has to be performed in reverse, taking just about as much time as it took to set it up.

So what would I like for Christmas? Just one court. One measly court set up for volleyball players to just be able to come in and play a bit, without having to bring out the Army Corp of Engineers to help make that small request happen. We did it at CU, and it was used all the time, by both men and women, and actually, coed play was the most popular version being competed.

We volleyball players are not selfish. If some basketball players want to shoot hoop, they certainly may, using the side backboards. They can even get the crank and take the net and standards down, and lower the end backboard, just as just as long as, when they are done, they do what we have spent lifetimes and millions of minutes doing - of putting the net back up and raising the backboard. And mom, you would be happy to note that I asked by saying the magic word, and said MAY we, not can we.

It is only fair. Basketball is a great sport, but so is volleyball, for girls AND boys. We just need ONE court....



## Reflections on Open Gym

November 9, 2009

My son Cody is a senior at the oldest high school here in Colorado Springs. We decided together to start a volleyball club at his school this year, to help grow the boy's high school club program. He is also captaining the varsity lacrosse team again this spring, as an attackman, and by my being head coach, I can fit spring volleyball practice better around the school lacrosse training. In the past he played for his old school district program where he had gone to school for elementary and junior high, before opting into the International Baccalaureate program closer to home. Starting a new team would mean leaving a team which was 3<sup>rd</sup> in the State Championships last year, but he wants his schoolmates to know the joy that comes from playing this sport so many think is just a girl's game.



The groundwork for Colorado's boys high school club program began over a decade ago, when Paul Hastings almost singlehandedly worked for months to find "advocates" at high schools all over the front range, to work with the Athletic Directors to create an opportunity for boys to play. He got the support of the Colorado Rocky Mountain Region of USA Volleyball, and the Colorado Officials, thanks in large part to Nancy Holm, who continues to this day to provide guidance and support at all levels. Paul lost a long fight to cancer a couple of years ago, but left behind leadership like that provided by Josh Crosier, former Johnson and Wales Head Men's college coach. The whole story on how we in Colorado have been working to get boys volleyball to become a varsity sport can be seen at <http://www.cbhsva.org/> and you can contact [Jeff Mosher](#) at USA Volleyball, as that is his main staff focus - growing the under-represented population in our sport of the boys and men's game.

One of the biggest errors well intentioned volleyball leaders make is to follow the old maxim of "if you can't pass, you can't hit," along with its sister phrase "the most important skill in volleyball is passing." There is a lot of truth in these sayings, all the way from beginner to the Olympic level, though I am adamant in noting that the most important skill in our sport is "reading" - and I don't mean books. That said, the problem is how we traditionally introduce the game to boys and really everyone at the youth level - by teaching passing first.

When quizzed on this fill in the blank phrase "Coach, when do we get to \_\_\_\_\_?" Most coaches know the two "correct" answers are "HIT!" and "PLAY!". One of the most important quotes I put in the original IMPACT manual is that from our 1988 Gold medal men's coach Marv Dunphy, which in condensed form notes that the most important hitting drills are pass-set-hit, and dig-set-hit drills. So all this leads us to listening better to the kids and thus setting aside the oft said "once you can pass, you will get to hit" concept and putting hitting first. Now maybe you are starting to understand why in the IMPACT Plus section, the skill pattern is introduced starting with the spike, and then overhead pass, serve, forearm pass....

This leads us to how to hook boys on volleyball - which hopefully can now more clearly be seen. You say "Hi, I am a volleyball coach, let me show you what a spike looks like, and then let's hit." Then after pounding a couple of real spikes, off of a toss from the setter which you overhead pass back, then get set and crush, you then stop and say - "Now I am going to teach you three Olympic team spike calls - which are done at this line - known as the 3 meter attack line - and those are "A" "Pipe" and "D." "When you watch the 2012 Olympics or our national men and women's teams at any time, these are three standard spike calls we use. So let's have at it" - and you set up, hitting the same direction over the net, with two or even three setters (coaches perhaps at the start), calling for A/Pipe/D.

At the same time, watch their footwork, and if a player finishes "backwards" with a left-right finish, and they are not a lefty, take them aside and get them to finish right-left. Teach the parts each player may show you they need - take a minute to show the arm swing with full reach if they don't know how to swing - but make sure they are erring in technique before fixing their technique. It is more likely to be an error in timing/judgment that is happening, which is not solved by talking more about the technique.

So why back row first always? This goes back to the principle of teaching positive errors first. These aggressive athletes may want to pound down, like you demonstrated at the net originally, but they do not have the body awareness to stay out of the net. More like crash into the net actually. By starting every training with back row attack, you accomplish three important things - safety (by not crashing into the net), positive hitting (learning an over the net arm swing/timing first, not an into/under the net one) and positive setting (putting the first sets off the net for both front and back sets, not tight to the net).

Once you have set a few to role model setting and the skill they are first doing of overhead passing, you then step out and let the athletes to the setting too, by creating a pattern that is foreign, but important to the attacker - that is to hit, land then become the setter. Right now our traditional hitting pattern teaches the spiker to fly after the hit. When done on the net, we are teaching our spikers to not have near -the-net body control and simply fly under to chase their spike. It is one of the top ten most non-gamelike things we unknowingly teach our players - the skill of looking like a chicken pecking for corn. It is a skill I can NEVER do in a game - hit and fly under the net - but a skill we "teach" to our players ad nauseum.

What SHOULD we be teaching? How about the six most common things you must do in a GAME after you strike the ball in the air for a spike. Those are:

1. Land balanced and safely and become a blocker AT the net, since you did not kill it.
2. Land balanced and safely and then JUMP up quickly with no real approach to kill the overpass the digger does to your spike (since they are pepper players and trained to dig back to the spiker)
3. Land balanced and safely and then fly down ALONG the net to be a blocker in a new position, as your coach knows the concept of putting your best hitter against their weakest blocker, while putting your
  - a. best blocker against their best hitter, and since you did not kill the ball, you need to slide along the net to front their best hitter.
4. Land balanced and safely and then BACK UP as fast as you can in transition away from the net.
5. Land balanced and safely and then turn and lift your arms up to celebrate as you run AWAY from the net towards your teammates as you killed the ball.
6. Land balanced and safely and then lift both hands above your head, brushing one hand on the other as you run ALONG the net towards a referee, using the universal signal for the officiating crew that the blocker touched the ball.

What DO we do right now? Hit and fly under the net, never learning to land like we will always need to in every point in a game we play, learning instead how to ankle sprain and get roofed on tight sets - rather than how to stay off the net and tool/wipe the block when it is tight. The new net touch rule is not the problem, it is

how we teach play at the net - setting tight/negatively and hitting down into the net/negatively versus teaching positively first.

One of the funniest things is to force them to generalize early on (a GOOD thing) by having them hit then set then chase. It seems it is human sport nature to hit and chase - as player after player will hit then land in an immediate sprint to their spiked ball. So I will put in a big request here for creating more hitters who can set, and hitters who can hit off of any set, by having the tradition change to spike - set - chase. In time, you will pick setters from the athletes you have, but at the start, everyone needs to learn to set, so have them set after they hit, then retrieve the spiked ball of the teammate they set. I promise, they won't be able to do it at the start. They will hit and get well past the three meter line, often even already running under the net before realizing "Oh, I am supposed to set next..." It is a change well worth making, for boys and girls of all ages.

While I am at it, remember the easier sets to set and hit are lower ones. So set more meter balls to start as these volleyball hopefuls first spike the ball - a pretty easy set to hit as the timing is easier, and an easier ball to set, as you don't put the ball up high out of your set, you simply put it a meter or maybe two meters above the height of the net. The antenna serves as the accuracy marker, as it is exactly a meter above the height of the net. Even little kids can set a meter ball.

So we have had two Open Gyms for Palmer, starting early on Tuesday mornings when there is a late school start due to teacher training. I still say pretty strongly that, having come from an ice hockey background when the HS team I coached would have 11pm and 5 am practice start times, that we can find practice times early in the morning, we just don't think we can - despite what swimmers and skaters do. So just after 7 am the first week, 10 boys showed up. I taught them the 3 meter line attacks as above, then the standard floater serve, and then we played speed ball for the last 45 minutes. Maybe this is modified Open Gym, for there is a coach who is introducing something, but most the time they do all the teaching and learning and I am just listening in.

One player I overheard saying that it was the most fun he had had in any sport in years. They did not want to stop when it was time to take down, but culture has to be taught as well, and they did a great job of sharing the breakdown/clean up of the gym, doing it far faster than I expected. You see, one of the "traditions" we want to teach all our sport's teams to have it to "Leave the place you practice/play BETTER than when you came there." Just another part of my core coaching philosophy of "Developing Amazing Leaders." We all should leave the places we visit cleaner than when we got there, it is good for our sport and our athletes.

The second open gym? Twice as many boys showed up, so that said something. Got the players from the week before to partner up and teach the skills of hitting and serving to the new players. Set up a second net with a rope as we had too many players for one net. Added demo-ing then doing the slide jump serve - as that teaches the importance of torque and a low toss (done to themselves in this closed motor program), and then played more speed ball with larger team size. One of the varsity girls team's players, season now ended joined in. Matt, a frosh roofed her - which gave all the chance to chant "He's a freshman" - one of my favorite school cheers to hear in the gym, as it is a cheer for the future of our sport and the team getting to cheer.

The second practice ended with an event I had never seen in my life in the way a six pack came off an overpass. We were playing in a diamond formation in speed ball - three back row hitters and one setter to the right of center, 2 meters off the net. A overpass happened, yet the novice setter jumped 2 meters back anyways, thinking he could set it I suppose. He could not, so he turned, still in the air, and looked at the ball flying over, which was hit full force by my son Cody, drooling at such a nice gift, even though the ball was a couple of meters off the net. Now, I have seen players get hit in the face while at the net blocking and I have seen players digging

down the line, nice and low and ready but whapped in the face. But i have NEVER seen an overpass hit from 2 meters back, strike a player in the face who was up in the air looking at the attacker while also being a couple of meters back.

The ball ricocheted off the poor "setter" and flew back over the net, and landed on for a "transition kill" of sorts. Nobody went for the save however, as every player, on and off the court, were on the floor laughing in hysterics. Cody even landed and fell to the floor laughing as hard as he ever has, while also watching the facial dig fly back over to his side. Last nite I took the kids to see Brad Sherwood and Colin Mocherie performing live here at the Pike Peak Center, if you know what I mean....These are two of the most giften improv comedians ever, you may have seen them on "Whose Line is it Anyways." They did the mousetrap game, where 100 loaded traps are on the stage and they walked around barefoot, with blindfolds, speaking to each other in the alphabet game, and trying to avoid the traps. We laughed hard all thru that and the show, but i still think the hardest I ever saw Cody laugh was after that unique six pack he delivered.

I went back to USA Volleyball, got on EBay, and ordered three rope nets for about \$25 each. The next practice I bet over 30 students will show up, and since I don't have a key to raise the endline baskets, we are just going to put up the center court, and as the bleachers are back, create courts to either side of the center court, anchoring the whole 3 nets/100 foot net line from one wall to the other. I can put in a long piece of wood into the stair step space in the bleacher wall - and anchor there to tighten the net. It will take less than 5 minutes to set up all three nets I estimate. Might put down a painter's tape 3 meter line for the side courts, if there is not a line to use as the attack line, will see. The program has two players who have ever played the game before last Tuesday's first Open Gym. I will let you know how things go.....

So in closing, Jeff and I have some great material out on how to start school programs, spring leagues for boys and girls, and how a JOV club benefits from adding a boy's program. It's all on the best practices section of the USAV Grassroots button, so check it out. While you are at it, take a look at the [Fun Theory Website](#), and come up with ways to make our game even more fun, and share them below, rather than keep the ideas a secret. Thanks for growing the game and remember to laugh and have fun along the way...

### **Reflections on Net Heights and Court Dimensions:** November 4, 2009

I find it baffling that the coaches in our sport do not understand the importance of practicing OVER the net. We take 15 minutes to set up the net - then ignore it for half an hour, letting the players pepper in front of it, throwing balls from in front of it, and generally using it as a wall, not the net that it is. In my clinics, i will put up this NET RULE sign, which you can get by [CLICKING HERE](#), which pretty much says it all.

The thing is, when a girl hits 13 years old, and a boy hits 15, the object that we put up in their way to play over will remain that height for decades of their playing experience - 32 years for a woman and 40 years for the men. It then drops by a whopping 2 inches in height, and the women have to clear that height for another 30 years. The specificity in training core concept that means we need to TRAIN IN REALITY, thus tells us we will have to hit over this dang net which is always over 7 foot high, for all our playing lives. Yet even though this valuable "regulatory stimuli," to quote the motor skill researchers, is going to be in our way, we spend valuable minutes in practice ignoring it.

The NET is Gold, the BALL is Silver, and the LINES are bronze, in my Citius, Altius, Fortius Junior Olympic based world. So I spend alot of time putting up at least twice as many nets as the court might officially fit, and

get the kids to have more chances to play OVER the net.

Another suggestion to those of you growing the game, is to work hard and campaign to KEEP A NET UP ALL THE TIME. You see, if you look around the gyms of America, even at the elementary school level, you will see how many basketball nets up? 2...no, 4, wait no, there are SIX up in most gyms. If a kid wants to practice hoops, what does it take? Just a ball and voila! they are shooting in seconds. What if that same boy or girl wanted to serve or spike a ball? It takes a quarter of an hour, perhaps more, to unlock the nets, haul out the standards, raise the basketball backboard and tighten up the net. When i was coaching at the University of Colorado at Boulder, I was able to lobby successfully to have one of the Rec Center gym courts, to have the net up all the time. Students could then just check out or bring a volleyball, and in seconds, they too could be doing more deliberate, but fun/uncoached volleyball. The basketball players? They sure could use the court, but they had to 1. lower the backboards, 2. take down the net and then when done, put the net back up, and raise up the backboards. Just like we do in the reverse all the time....

So just one court....for our lifetime, Olympic level, coed, non-contact, amazing, powerful, athletic sport deserves it, as do the kids and adults wanting to learn to get better at it. Oh, and while I am at it, since I am always getting this question, I thought a fast summary might help....

### HEIGHTS OF THE NET

The net heights are the same for indoor and beach volleyball (and all outdoor surfaces such as grass). The net is measured from the center of the playing court with a measuring device such as a "Rite Height," or a premeasured long pole. The two ends of the net (over the sidelines) must both be at the same height from the playing surface and may not exceed the official height by more than 2 cm (3/4").

	<b>FEMALE</b>	<b>MALE</b>
Men	*****	2.43m (7'11 5/8")
Women	2.24m (7'4 1/8")	*****
Mixed Six (Coed)	2.43m (7'11 5/8")	2.43m (7'11 5/8")
Reverse Coed	2.24m (7'4 1/8")	2.24m (7'4 1/8")
Standing Disabled	2.24m (7'4 1/8")	2.43m (7'11 5/8")
Wheelchair Volleyball	1 m or 1.75m	1.15m or 1.75m
Sitting Volleyball	1m	1.15m
70 years and above	2.19m (7'2 1/8")	2.29m (7'6")

60 years and above	2.19m (7'2 1/8")	2.38m (7'9 1/8")
55 years and above	2.19m (7'2 1/8")	2.38m (7'9 1/8")
45 years and above	2.19m (7'2 1/8")	2.43m (7'11 5/8")
15 years and above	2.24m (7'4 1/8")	2.43m (7'11 5/8")
13-14 years and under	2.24m (7'4 1/8")	2.24m (7'4 1/8")
11-12 years and under	2.13m (7'0")	2.13m (7'0")
10 years and under	1.98m (6'6")	2.13m (7'0")

## COURT DIMENSIONS

The indoor court size in all 220 nations of the International Volleyball Federation is 9x 18 meters. This is 29'6" x 59'. The attack line is a 3 meters (9'9"). The Olympic doubles court is 8 x 16 meters, This would be 26' x 52'. The National HS Federation, and some outdoor court groups, still say the court is 30'x60', and thus have a "10 foot attack line." If you are putting up a new court, the right size to make it is 9x18m.

Courts which are 30x60' are still legal until repainting can occur. To make a larger outdoor court the official Olympic doubles size, you bring the corners in .5 meters on the endlines and 1 meter on the sideline. A minimum of 2 meters of free space must surround each court for indoors and 3 meters for outdoors. The more space you can create the better. Thus each court side by side will need to have 4 meters of space minimum to the other court, in case a divider net is also used. Some older gyms do not have walkway space behind a court or a full two meters to the endline, so a step-in line is placed for the server to have the full two meters.

Remember to use the "Hollywood Star" concept to reward the farthest successful pursuit of a ball off the court by a team player. It is important to keep all water bottles, sweat shirts and coaches clipboards up on chairs or places far from the court - and keep the FREE zone really free of anything the pursuing athlete - who is looking UP at the ball, not at the floor - might step and slip on. This is especially true in tourneys, where the players often congregate between courts, cheering and hoping to get in. These athletes put their water bottles on the floor and when a teammate goes in off court pursuit, the substitutes scatter to make room, but leave a family of ball bearing like water bottles behind in the hustling ball pursuing teammate's path. Keep the bottles and everything off the floor, so you can scatter and leave a safe path of pursuit for every athlete.

Thanks for helping us get more nets up, and thus grow the game better and faster.

This information was taken from the 2009-2011 USA Volleyball Rulebook, and can be bought or downloaded at our web site [www.teamusa.org/usa-volleyball](http://www.teamusa.org/usa-volleyball), where tons more information exists on growing the game.

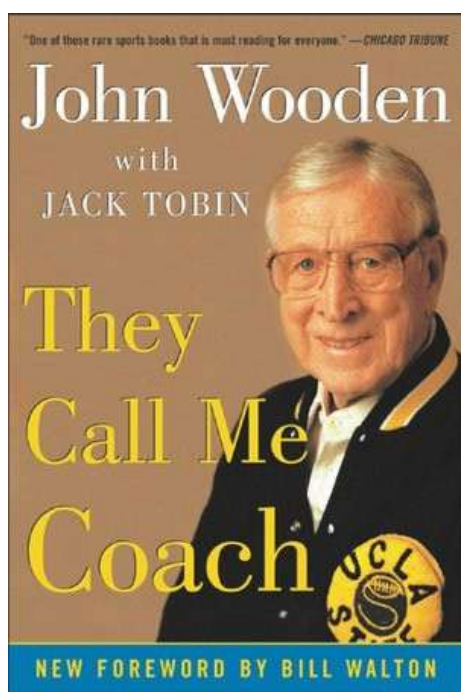


## Happy Birthday Coach Wooden

October 13, 2009

I was fortunate in my beginning stages of coaching in the early 1970s to cross paths with Stew McDole of Graceland College (now University), where I was mentored by Stew and coaches like Chris McLaughlin and Carl McGown. We would work seven days a week doing summer camps, putting in three-a-days for months on end in the heat and humidity of the Midwest. Stew's "24-hour break" looked like this - train one day from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. including the training, competitions and closing luncheon featuring a camp staff skit like the classic "History of Volleyball," then return the next day at 2 p.m. for the all-afternoon evaluations, and first training from 6-9:30 p.m. See, 24 hours off!

We would take this gift of time to do laundry like crazy, nap, and flee to the air-conditioning of a movie theatre. We got so much training in these months, evaluating each day to make the next version better, it was wonderful...and the energy of the athletes coming in never let you get tired.



In these formative years, one of the very first books I read was John Wooden's [They Call me Coach](#). I still have it, a Bantam paperback, yellowing with age, copyright 1972 first printing, costing a whopping \$1.25 new. Therein I saw my first version of the "Pyramid of Success" with the overall concept phrase being *"Success is peace of mind which is the direct result of self satisfaction in knowing you did your best to become the best that you are capable of becoming"* ... This focus on effort over outcome became a cornerstone to my coaching that continues to this day. The theme of being the best teacher you can be, and applying the principles of good teaching, also began with the words shared in his book.

This great man is having a birthday Oct 14, and turns an amazing 99 years young. We all should celebrate with him, for the impact he has had on our sport, let alone basketball. He again has turned the tables, and is giving us all a gift, in a new book called [A Game Plan for Life](#). Do you know that this is his SIXTH book written since he hit 90 years old? Talk about teaching...

If you visit my office, you would find a large poster of the Pyramid of Success signed by Coach Wooden, and over a dozen different books written by or co-authored by him as well, several also signed. You would even see a 4-inch tall figurine of coach, holding a rolled newspaper in his hand. I think I actually have every book he has authored, but I have not taken the time to confirm that thru Amazon or halfdotcom. I can say his teachings have impacted me greatly in parenting and coaching.

When coaches take IMPACT, they hear a story of one of the sections in the manual on coaching philosophy. Marv Dunphy, our 1988 Olympic gold-medal coach wrote his PhD thesis on none other than John Wooden. Marv put in hundreds of hours of personal interviews, research and studying of this man that ESPN magazine recently pronounced the America's best sport coach of all time. So back in 1988 when I was writing the first IMPACT manual, I called Marv to ask him to contribute some thoughts to this new coach's manual. I said, "In twenty five words or less, what did you learn in writing your thesis about John Wooden which you would want

a new coach to know that I can put in this manual?" Marv replied, "I don't need 25 words John, I just need two 'Be consistent.'" He went on to marvel at how no matter he spoke with or about Coach Wooden, that he was struck by how consistently coach treated everyone, and how they all noted that. A good reminder to each of us growing the game, that the kids need us not to coach in practice one way, and treat them differently in competition - they need role models and mentors, not critics and doubter.

For those new coaches who might not know of this amazing mentor coach, I suggest visiting his website at <http://www.coachwooden.com/>.

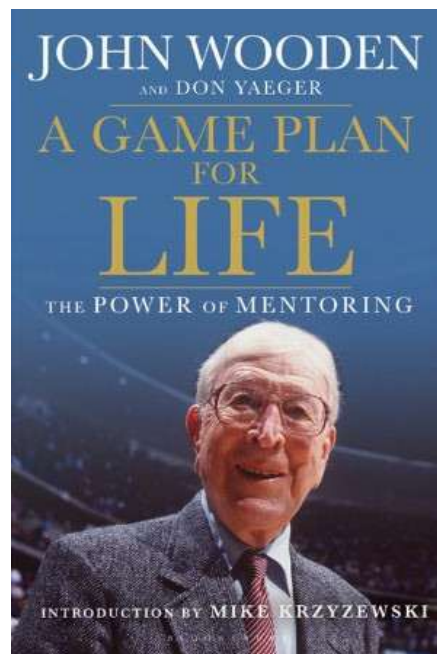
This weekend at my daughter's high school volleyball tournament, I was inspired to see one of the visiting teams all wearing a shirt that said - "You practice for a season; we practice for life." I wish other coaches truly embraced the life lessons our wonderful sport can teach, rather than the focus on winning and achieving a college scholarship. Which made me think of another great online resource that amazingly many are not aware of being able to use - the **Pass It On** site funded in part by Phillip. Nielsen Media says their spots have been view over five billion times. I encourage you to do the same, and share their mission statement below as a great example of how we all can grow the game.

<http://www.values.com>

*Mission Statement - The Foundation for a Better Life creates public service campaigns to communicate the values that make a difference in our communities - values such as honesty, caring, optimism, hard work, and helping others. These messages, communicated utilizing television, theatres, billboards, radio, internet, etc., model the benefits of a life lived by positive values. The Foundation encourages others to step up to a higher level and then to pass on those positive values they have learned. These seemingly small examples of individuals living values-based lives may not change the world, but collectively they will make a difference. And in the process help make the world a better place for everyone. After all, developing values and then passing them on to others is The Foundation for a Better Life.*

So I was pleasantly surprised to hear from Bloomsday last month, when they offered me a free copy of Coach Wooden's latest book - [A Game Plan for Life](#). My gosh, I did not have to buy a coaching book? I was honored and surprised. This is what the publishers say about it... *The first half of his new book, **A Game Plan for Life** tells the stories of the seven mentors of John Wooden's life, the seven people who made him the man he has become. The second half of the book includes the stories of seven people whose lives he's changed, through mentoring. Interestingly, two of Coach Wooden's seven mentors are people he has never met; one being Abraham Lincoln and the other Mother Teresa. One of the people whose life is featured in the second half of the book, Bob Vigars, is a middle school basketball coach of learning disabled children who, similarly, has never met Coach Wooden. The point Coach makes is that mentoring is really about a life well lived.*

And what do I say about it? When a book contains practical tips and wisdom on being a better mentor, from a 99 year old coaching phenom, you should get it and embrace the ideas then share them with others you coach and mentor yourself.



Readers of my blog know the value of TED.com... well here is a great speech by Coach Wooden on the site...

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=0MM-  
psvqiG8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=0MM-psvqiG8)

And Rick Reilly's brilliance shines in this piece called "Love Letter" - about making each of us better people...

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tySxPue9Dmw&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tySxPue9Dmw&feature=player_embedded)

Thanks Coach Wooden, for all the time and effort you have directed at helping volleyball be a better sport too, and HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

P.S. - For any of you who might be interested, a Web site was established to allow those who wanted to honor Coach Wooden to send him a happy birthday wish. The Web site is [www.HappyBirthdayCoachWooden.com](http://www.HappyBirthdayCoachWooden.com). The goal is to have 9,999 send him a note by Wednesday night.

<http://www.buzzfeed.com/melismashable/usa-vs-mexico-border-volleyball-1ase>

### **Tradition Never Graduates**

October 8, 2009

I took a trip to Chicago this past weekend, missing my own kids' homecomings to attend one of my own - hoping in part to be there to take part in the 2016 celebration that wasn't to be. Volleyball in 2016 Rio will be very big - that city hosted the first FIVB World Championships of Beach Volleyball over 20 years ago - so our sport will again be on center stage for the world. We will be able to watch all the events live since we are in similar time zones and not halfway around the world - just not the same hemisphere.

My reason for the journey was to spend time at the 2009 Asics Girls Volleyball Challenge, while also working with the region's coaches thanks to the help of Illinois Performance VB Club. Scott Smith, club director, has a great place to train out of in the Walker Center - and I LOVE his biz card which says "SERVING ATHLETES; SETTING STANDARDS; ATTACKING GOALS"

So much of Saturday I sat in bleachers at Mother McCauley, and watched the silver and gold playoff rounds, until the final match late that afternoon. The "Mighty Macs" gym office had another wonderful sign that said "Tradition Never Graduates" which clearly was evident throughout the gyms being competed in.

When I do clinics in a HS gym, the first things I want to look at are their trophy cases and gym banner hangings. You can learn a lot about a program from these two homes of tradition - and at Mother McCauley, banners for State Championship Titles to Final Eight participation fill up both sides of the rafters. Nancy Pedersen arrived at McCauley in 1983, while her husband Niels created the JOV club "Second City," and these two great coaches and leaders helped grow the junior community in the Great Lakes region at both the prep and club level to new heights. There are also some jerseys retired on the wall - where the players names you can find now also giving back to the sport by coaching, another gift we are all better for.

The Catholic Youth Organization volleyball programming has been the starting point of the pipeline of talent and tradition for over 30 years. Where California has its tradition that includes the beach, the Midwest has taken the CYO programming to help establish strongholds in Illinois, Kentucky, Missouri, and Louisiana, just to

name a few states. Partnering with schools - both public and private -- to grow the game at the younger levels has never been more valuable, as we work to give even more boys and girls the chance for volleyball to be their sport. The CYO program is a shining example of this important part of development. The Challenge began in 1987, and was won by Muncie Burris...McCauley won their own event in 1991 and 1998, while Mira Costa, who was there this year but did not medal, won in 1988 and 2006. Columbia Heights out of Minnesota won in 1990, St. Marys from Stockton, CA won in 1993, and Lincoln East out of Nebraska snagged it in 1994. This year, 12 teams from Wisconsin, Iowa, California, Florida, Utah, Kentucky, and Nebraska joined the 12 teams from the host state of Illinois, to determine the champion. I watched outstanding play, consumed the obligatory \$1 bags of popcorn, talked with great long time coaches like Lisa (Arce) Zimmerman (Mira Costa) and Ted Schulte (Wisconsin/Badger), and officials, including USAV RVA Great Lakes Commissioner Sandy Abbinanti. I also won several trivia contests, in that while talking with Donna Smith about all those banners in the main gym, they started back near when I began coaching - with a 1977 State Championship banner being the first. Who won that first title? None other than Donna Smith, the Great Lakes Assistant Commissioner. She coached McCauley for four years, before leaving to raise her children as a semi-stay-at-home mom. That means being home all day, getting a babysitter for an hour while her husband came home and she headed off to officiate, to bring the family income while still having a parent at home. Many know her more now as a great official, but her roots are back in coaching... The team that won this year, in a 3 set slugfest over Joliet Catholic Academy of Illinois, was some team from Kentucky. Their coach is the USAV RVA Kentucky Region Commissioner, Ron Kordes. I "assume" you know who I am talking about, but to be sure, Assumption won. Just like they did in

1996,

1997,

1999,

2001,

2002,

2004,

2005,

2007

and 2008...

How is THAT for tradition? Standing on the shoulders of their past role models, Assumption players formed a team where everyone was strong and the sum made up more than the parts. JCA played great as a team too, winning the first set before losing 24-26 in the third game. Every player, from the bench to the starters, were a joy to watch, and I especially liked seeing under-six-foot-tall seniors #1 Annemarie Hickey (5'8") and #2 Alyssa Warren (5'9") pounding point after point from the outside -very inspirational to all. In the end, I thought it came down to the team experience of Assumption in such situations, and the serving of Taylor Allgeier, a 5'11" junior who delivered either aces or resulting third ball attacks by JCA that her talented Assumption teammates were able to convert for points.

The rest of my journey was shared with coaches, parents and players on Sunday in a very productive and fun clinic where I got a chance to test the newest "Beyond Beijing Coaches Appreciation" webinar information we are bringing online this season for all USAV coaches. This will allow RVA Commissioners and their staff to communicate and connect to the returning coaches, and for USAV to be able to share the latest research and training ideas with these coaches.

It will not be mandatory, but is simply a chance to say THANK YOU to the coaches returning again to help us grow the game, get the latest information out, and chat about any other questions or topics they might have. Retention of coaches and officials is vital to the growth of our game, and while officials gather almost annually to discuss the newest information from the top, we have not done enough of the same for coaches. Who knows, there might even be a short appearance by our National Team coaches Hugh, Alan, or Karch during the couple of hours we share.



## **We Coach the Way We Were Coached**

August 26, 2009

Each fall for high school, then later when Junior Olympic volleyball clubs begin, training takes place that shows that the science of our sport has not impacted the cultural traditions of this same sport. Well intentioned and even trained coaches enter gyms all over America, and train their athletes they way they were trained. That the science of sport - of biomechanics and motor learning and other disciplines - have researched and found better, more efficient and more successful ways of training, simply seems not to matter, or this information has not reached down to these levels.

Many coaches seem more comfortable with not changing, and continue to teach their players in ways that simply slow down the kids' game learning, creativity and leadership development. These same coaches demand their athletes to change, per their demands of technique and tactics, yet they fail take time to learn for themselves. One of the more remarkable things seen is how much coach controlled, ball banging and flinging barking is going on. Motor skill scientists note that no drills or skills are taught by soccer, basketball, and football coaches controlling the ball. No hoops coach shoots free throws or inbounds the ball so the

players get "a good start," nor do football coaches take snaps so the rest of the team can get a better catch, and so forth. Yet in our sport, research shows that amazingly in many training exercises, the coach gets up to 12 times more contacts per hour than an individual player. This tradition of coaches controlling the reading and key skills in practice -- even when the coach cannot touch a single ball in a game and with most coaches playing at a level far different than those the athletes are competing at - is one of the strongest traditions in our sport that gets in the way of the players' learning.

What is I am going to reflect on the things I see, which I have been writing about for decades, and hope perhaps some can see the reasons to improve their coaching - as they demand of their players to improve. Perhaps we can get a few more coaches to begin to help their players get better faster than they are now...so here goes. Oh, and I am going to ask a lot of questions here, and challenge anyone reading this to answer the WHY, alone or with their coaching staff together - for the coaches and players who know WHY, beat the coaches and players who know HOW.

*First Thing to Ponder* - In America, there are 400,000 girls playing high school volleyball. Some 7,500 scholarships are available for these players when they get to the next level of college play. Some of these go to foreign players, perhaps a few hundred, but each year at least 1,500 volleyball playing seniors on full rides graduate into their chosen profession. Our sport also is filled with players with an overall grade point average that is near the top or at the top of any sport at that school. This is a testimony to the wonderful citizens to be coming out of volleyball. Meanwhile, in the USA, 40,000 boys play high school volleyball, and at the collegiate level, fewer than 100 scholarships are available for all four years. After subtracting the foreign players, fewer than 20 full scholarship level players, again with high GPAs, are seniors entering their next endeavors - including perhaps playing for the National team. Now, from National High School Federation reports, girl's volleyball is the #2 team sport - ahead of all but basketball, and overall #3 in participation with Track and Field being the most popular. For the boys, volleyball hardly hits the charts right now, as hundreds of thousands male athletes go to football, basketball, baseball, hockey, and golf - sports with a professional pot of gold at the far end of the pipeline. There is a clear difference in training of the two genders, with the men having embraced the science of motor skill learning research for decades.

So knowing those numbers, how have the highest level of our sport done - the USA Olympic teams? The USA women have won silver, bronze and silver. The USA men? Gold, Gold, Bronze and Gold.... **WHY?**

*Second Thing to Ponder* - The vast majority of the teams I watch over the years, enter the gym, talk to the players, then get them running in various ways, then stretching. Don't these players already know how to run, but not play volleyball as well? Has nobody seen the extensive Center for Disease Control study showing that in over 300 stretching programs viewed, none reduced injuries? Was it that long ago that these players would sit at a desk for hours, practically immobile, and then hear the recess bell ring, and fly out to 15 minutes of all out activity, and come back in with maybe a scraped knee? None of them ran and stretched in advance of their chosen recess activity, they just went straight to playing.

Scotty Bowman, great NHL coach, noted that USA and Canadian hockey players enter the rink and skate in circles, while players from Europe have pucks and stick handle as they skate around - and felt that to be a contributing factor to why the Europeans were better stick handlers, despite having less opportunities to train compared to what is available in North America.

So as little time as we have, and as important as skill and reading are in playing our game, we still enter the gym, run, stretch, and do not touch the volleyball for 15 minutes or more often. **WHY?**

*Third Thing to Ponder* - Perhaps the most exasperating thing to see happen then usually follows stretching. Our sport is played OVER a NET. In my decades of watching and coaching coaches, it still takes the vast majority of teams over half an hour to get the first ball to fly over the net, from the time they enter the gym. They run, stretch, pair up and then pepper. Reading a ball flying over the net is reality for diggers and passers, and hitting every spike of your life has to happen over a net, yet people take some 15 minutes to set up the net and then...ignore it for 30 minutes of a 120 minute practice. **WHY?**

*Fourth Thing to Ponder* - We fill a gym with players, then pair up and pepper. I have been told that pair pepper teaches "ball control." OK, let's take it to the ultimate level - every kid in your gym is world class at pepper. So correct me if I am wrong here, but that means you have skillfully developed your players to be the best at:

- a. Digging a spiked ball back to the attacker
- b. Digging a spiked ball straight back to where it came from
- c. Having so much "control" that the players stand practically stationary and do not practice home to base movement
- d. Hitting a ball down without a net - and the closer you get to your partner the more down you can hit it
- e. Hitting a ball right where you are facing
- f. Hitting a ball basically right at the digger (so they can dig it), and even apologizing if you do not hit right at the digger.

Excuse me, but wouldn't we want every player on our team to be:

- a. Digging a spiked ball UP on your side of the net, center of the court first and nearer to the setter and NEVER knowing how to dig a ball back an opposing spiker.
- b. Digging a spiked ball on an angle, towards the center of the court to start.
- c. Skilled at moving from base/home (on opponent contacts 1 and 2 - setter tips etc) to somewhere else deeper. This forward/backwards move is made EVERY time the ball is on the other side of the net and we want players GREAT at this, not standing still
- d. Hitting a ball OVER the net every time on a realistic flight for that player (which for our younger/shorter players is UP first!) - and the closer you get to your partner/opponent the more it needs to go UP and get over the net, not down.
- e. Hitting balls any way BUT the way you are facing, so the attackers are more unpredictable and skilled at hitting not just cross court, but line and cut shots.
- f. Hitting AWAY from the digger, not being good at hitting at a digger but being great at hitting the spaces of the court.

My favorite way to do this is to NOT pair up, but to triple up and have the digs go to the teammate in between the other two, NEVER back to the attacker, with the edge players much farther apart than traditional pepper distance, and moving home/base and weaving from hitter to setter to digger. What do we do though? We pair pepper.

**WHY?**



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*Fifth Thing to Ponder* - At this level, if not all levels, you must win the "Serve/Pass War." The teams who serve tough and in, and who can pass other teams tough serves, win the majority of the matches. Simple. The serve is done on the average by each player in a game, about three times, before they lose the serve. How many rotations until that player serves in the game? No, not 5 or 6....it is 11...then they get to focus on the skill of serving and do it again. As important as serving great is, program after program will not see a player serve until well into practice, or maybe even not until the end. The COACH might serve a bunch, but that is another **WHY** for later... Then, even though the way a player has to

DO the skill in a match is to serve some three times then play 11 rotations before getting to serve again, the coaches have their players go back and serve, often at the end of practice, for 5-10 minutes straight. **WHY?**

Tied into the above is what I see every player do in this "serving practice." They serve and watch, then get a ball. Then they serve and watch, and then get a ball. What happens in every game, every serve done by every player in the world? They serve and then sprint to their area of defense. What do coaches have their players do? Serve and watch.... **WHY?**

*Sixth Thing to Ponder* - Coaches often have a lot to talk about, playbook info to share, team pictures to take, defensive and offensive systems to explain. So do teams get all the talking done first, even the short "Practice today is on this Whiteboard" talk - then warm up? Nope, they do whatever warm up and then sit their players down to talk after. I see the same thing in summer camps, where coaches warm kids up and then beckon them over to sit and talk about team systems, or talk for many minutes on they need to work on. **WHY?**

*Seventh Thing to Ponder* - Players slam the ball to the floor - another classic pair drill/warm up. Coaches set up a station (a good thing, we love stations as they promote deliberate practice and more activity/ball contacts in the same amount of time) where the players spike balls against the floor, bounce it off the wall and whammo, hit it again, over and over again. So now these players become the world's best at spiking the ball down at an angle that, in reality would go UNDER the net. In our national team vernacular of developing "good" vs. "bad" mistakes, these ball slamming, wall bouncing players are becoming the best in the world at hitting the ball into the net - a negative error - rather than over the net. Hitting errors over the net are VERY important to teaching defenders' reading skills, as you must decide after maybe a meter of ball flight if the ball is going out, not as it goes by. Hitting out teaches teammates an important skill of getting out of the way, something hitting into the net never teaches. So some say this is done to teach "wrist snap." If we share the science of the sport here, everyone would know that before contact and after contact, nothing is being done to the ball - so the question is how long is that contact? From high speed camera studies, the answer is - from .008 to .01 seconds. How much "wrist snap" is imparted in .01 seconds of contact? I will let you answer that yourself and simply ask, regarding all this downward ball slamming...**WHY?**

*Eighth Thing to Ponder* - After peppering, the coach then often gets the players out on the court to "teach defense." This is followed by the coach flinging and spiking balls from the middle of the net, and from IN FRONT of the net at one player or even a weaving pattern of 2 or three athletes. They read a coach, without moving in their base/home way, a coach who is not hitting over the net, or running in and jumping and all that really go into READING an opponent's intentions as far as possible in advance. At the end of this kind of training, the coach has contacted the ball several hundred times, while each individual player has contacted the ball a dozen or two times. **WHY?**

*Ninth Things to Ponder* - Finally, the kids get to spike. Normally this is done the following ways  
The players stand out of bounds, outside the court and toss this "first contact" to the setter -- **WHY?**

The players get set tight to the net and after hitting lands and duck and run under the net to the opponent's side



of the court. This is done so well that we have hundreds of thousands of players doing hundreds of reps a week where they are learning to land and run under the net, as if this ever happens in a game. **WHY?** Coaches set up this drill so one side hits zone four and on the other side, gosh, they are hitting zone four too! We have a nation of kids who can hit left side, and who are both unwilling or simply cannot hit zone 2/the right side. Could the coach set up hitting so that players get half their time hitting left side and the other half right side? Sure, but they don't, they continue to hit left and left and left and left and create hundreds of thousands of players who are unskilled at hitting right side. **WHY?**

A variation of this them is that the coach tosses the ball - standing either at the net and throwing sets, or standing with a ball cart in a culturally designated spot in the back row around zone 5 and throwing to the setter and repeats this process without moving the ball cart after hundreds of throws. **WHY?**

We know that reading a pass is a hugely important skill for a setter, and reading a live set is a hugely important skill for a hitter, just like reading a live, jumping hitter is hugely important to being a successful digger. Watch beach teams warm up and you see the setter hit at their partner who digs/passes and then reads the live set and hits it. Yet we continue to steal this skill of reading and instead throw passes and sets. **WHY?**

*Tenth Thing to Ponder* - Anson Dorrance, who has won almost 20 NCAA Division One soccer titles, writes in his book *Training Soccer Champions* - "Conditioning is homework." I see coaches creating conditioning stations vs. skill development stations all over the US. Athletes with only 100 hours of practice total until season's end, yet there they are, learning to hop hop hop...doing situps, jumping rope, etc. What do these kids need to get better at most of all? Playing volleyball. They know how to run and do situps and can get a lot of game conditioning playing short court over a net or 1 vs. 1 vs. 1 at a volleyball game station or other options, yet we continue to run and condition them. **WHY?**

Not to mention the coaches who make players run when they violate some rule of the coach. What are they learning by running? That getting in shape is not good is one thing that comes to mind... If punishment were a great way to teach, your first grade teacher would have to run lines when you misspelled a word, or do sit-ups and pushups after adding and subtracting incorrectly, not to mention the fact that everyone coming out of prison after a long punishment, would be model citizens. Teachers know that mistakes are simply opportunities to teach. Coaches it seems think that mistakes are opportunities to make kids run, not teach. **WHY?**

*Eleventh Thing to Ponder* - I see coaches training their kids to be late all the time, training them to react and read a ball being slapped by a coach. I have never seen an opponent slap a ball in a match, but I have seen a lot of players react and run away from the net if I slap a ball while on the court. The most common tradition seen is to slap and have players back off the net, calling "FREE! FREE!" as the ball comes over. Are they learning to read and recognize what a free ball looks like, BEFORE the third contact is hit and comes over? Nope, like Pavlovian pups, they are trained to react to a slap, and move off the net as the ball comes over, thus learning to be late in a real match. They never get a chance to read if a ball is free, or maybe it's just a down ball, or - even though the opponent chasing down the second ball contact is in trouble - if that opponent makes a nice save to the net, there is no free ball and the blockers need to stay and block. Meanwhile, coaches continue to slap balls and watch their kids respond. **WHY?**

*Twelfth Thing to Ponder* - Who needs to get good at hitting every ball over the net, especially every variation that might happen of that final third ball contact chance? If you answered the coach, you fit right in with all the coaches who do just that in every practice. That it will NEVER be a coach's role to do such in a game seems to not matter to these traditional, ball banging coaches. They will stand there, just off the court in drill after drill, and pound a ball at the team on their side, to be dug/set/hit, or they turn their skill to the other side and hit over

the net to zone 5 or 6. The traditional coach does this from standing off the court on the left side (of course, see above...) near the three meter line. The result is that the team does not get a ball coming at them to zones 1 and 2, for to get the ball to go there would require hitting it over the net outside the antenna. On the other hand, the coach may often hit toward zone 1 and 2 to the team on their side, as they stand on the ground, off the court a meter or more, just like the athlete's opponents will do in a match, right? **WHY?**

The solution is simple, simply roam around the outside of the court on either side, being ball contact number two. This results in an amazingly important thing happening... THE PLAYERS get good at putting the third contact over the net, not the coach. Coaches, or players, toss the ball low to any player, and that player works to send it best they can to zones 1 and 2 of the opponents. - while the opponents get better at reading the flight of the second contact and calling FREE!!! long before the third contact is made (see the point made above on ball slapping...). If the toss is medium you want the player making third contact to standing spike it if possible, and the opposing team gets to learn and call DOWN BALL!!! If you throw it higher, you want your athletes to get up and hammer it, no matter where it is on the court. These are skill the players need to have, with feedforward from the coach who is checking for understanding on where that third contact could have gone more effectively (given the game understanding experience of the coach). We do this in the game, but not in practice, hitting the third ball ourselves. **WHY?**

*Thirteenth Thing to Ponder* - Often in practice coaches pull out boxes for hitting/blocking training. Now mind you, if your players were training 6-10 hours a day, year round, there would be a good reason to get players, or even coaches on boxes to hit/block, to give a rest cycle to these players. What about for those putting in 4-10 hours a week, for nine to twelve weeks like a typical high school season? These are the athletes who need every minute to learn the timing/reading/adjustments needed to hit and block live balls. Yet there goes coach again - adding to his/her thousand plus contacts a practice (the ones they steal from the players opportunities to get better) and they stand and spike. Meanwhile the diggers and blockers never learn to read anything but an opponent, frozen in time up in the air. What do you have to watch to learn your timing when a coach or some other player is standing on a box? The only thing moving, the ball. How smart is a volleyball? So coaches unintentionally teach players to watch the ball in blocking/digging. **WHY?**

Well, these volleyballs must be very important in controlling their own destiny, because coaches tell and train you to watch the ball a whole lot. This comment to watch the ball is so silly it is almost sad to hear. Have you ever looked at the eyes of every player and practically every fan, as the ball is flying toward the floor, or over the net? ALL their eyes are wide open and lasered on the ball. Yet coaches seem to believe you don't watch the ball flight already anyways, but instead must purposefully look at your shoes, or look over and wave to a fan in the match and stop watching the ball in flight. What is ironic is that in great blocking, you want the blockers to watch as much of the attackers approach as possible, for by the time you get into the air, as the hitter hits, there is no humanly possible time to adjust. This needs to be done by learning to simply jump at the right place and time in front of each individual attacker - who are short, tall, slow, fast and need to be blocked at different times and places. Yet we stand on boxes and think we are teaching reading and judgment of the attacker. **WHY?**

*Fourteenth Thing to Ponder and Beyond....* If you are now thinking about changing, since the answers to all these "WHYs?" are essentially "Because we coach the way we were coached," then consider getting more to ponder by attending a USA Coaching Accreditation Program (CAP) course. You are encouraged to also click on the grassroots- coaches information button at [www.usavolleyball.org](http://www.usavolleyball.org) and reading some other articles. From the hundred or so there, here are ones that ask even more WHY type questions on many other areas of our sport that need to catch up with the times and start following the science of our game. "The Most Important Skill in Volleyball", "The Game Teaches the Game", "Volleyball Bridges to Cross", "Twenty five Questions for Volleyball Coaches," and "How to Wreck a Player" are the ones suggested you download and contemplate next.

Hopefully you will not be feeling like you are pondering the imponderables, and will be able to blend your strengths as a teacher of the game with the science of our sport. No matter what, we *THANK YOU* for coaching and giving your valuable time to these precious athletes, both on and off the court. If you have any questions, additions, suggestions, feel free to comment below or email me at [john.kessel@usav.org](mailto:john.kessel@usav.org)

## Back to My Iowa Grassroots

July 29, 2009

I have come back to the place that my coaching of coach's journey really began, to a land where nighthawks cry at dusk. Indeed, the 17 year cicadas are now on their third generation since those times, and still vibrate out

their amazingly loud ascending and descending song from the trees. For just two days I traveled along the Avenue of the Saints, first sharing ideas with the youth coaches in Cedar Rapids, before ending with a day with 80 great kids and their coaches in the gyms of Mediapolis, population 1,584 according to July 2008 demographics.



A Graffiti Barn in Iowa brightens up the green carpets of farmland as we drive along the back roads. Like painting large rocks or walls, there always is this creative side to put your name and ideas down on places you have been....Kilroy was

here too I bet... This is where, thanks to the amazing McDole family of Graceland College, I was given the chance to do learn by doing, running more than a decade of preseasons in single summer. Each summer I would return to the humidity and heat, leaving the dry mountain air of Colorado, to base in a town of Lamoni, IA, population 2,450.

It is where Vietnam Vet Stormin' Michael Norman was the only coach on staff who could sleep through the 33 days of triple digit heat. Where even the cold water ran hot, and with no AC in the gyms or dorm rooms, we would have to train in some other ways when the wet bulb readings showed it to be too hot to safely exercise. Where Lang Ping, who I brought along to teach our training styles and our language joined our camp staff, still could not escape her fame. Once two Japanese tourists en route to Mt. Rushmore were riding an elevator in a Chadron State Nebraska dorm, and shrieked LoHay! (Jenny's name in Japanese) and in minutes, an entire bus load of fans were standing patiently outside her dorm room, for a chance to give her a gift, and then have their picture taken with the Iron Hammer. Coaches of impact like Byron Shewman, now in charge of the important Starlings USA volleyball program, Chris McLaughlin of the amazing volleyball program at Punahou in Hawaii, Miles Pabst Olympian in the 60s and Univ. of Oklahoma coach, the Heart of America leaders like Glen Davies, Jerry Sherman, Rod Schall, and Hank Van Arsdale, and so many other great mentors walked tartan surface of Graceland's gym.

Stew McDole basically brought camps to the Midwest, running in NE, MO, KS, and IA long before any college really found the need to do training. I had done my first camp in Carpentaria, CA in 1973, and still have my shirt with my idol Kirk Kilgore, a lefty from the USA team then, and wanted to teach/coach more, which Stew obliged. When recession hit, he mortgaged his home to keep the staff he hired working, and we did free

"satellite camps" further out into the smallest of towns. We did three a days, and our 24 hours off was just that - we did a camp tourney and awards presentation 8 am to 2pm. The next day, we would start the next camp at 2pm and go to 9pm. See, 24 hours off, time to run to leave the Conestoga wagon gym and dash to the AC of a movie in Des Moines - Star Wars just came out. And do laundry. The history of volleyball skit began there after a coach's clinic - those coaching clinics ran concurrently. The highlight of the summer would be the adult camps, where Dr. Dig and others would stay up for 72 hours straight, not wanting to stop and seize up from soreness.

We ripped off van tops by mistakenly driving under too low of dorm entry ways, borrowed police light bars, pranked one another and tormented campers and staffers with mind games. We wore volleyball helmets in the Stripes movie skit, warmed up on the sorest morning (day three of ANY camp) to Barry Manilow's Jump Shout Boogie, danced to Craig Sherman's version of Rock Lobster or Drew Steele's Duck Pond (a warm up variation of Swan Lake...) and drove for hours in storms to the gyms of Chadron State, St. Louis Univ., Univ. of MO Rolla, and the Pittsburg State Gorillas. You see, a 48 hour break really was a day off, but included the time it took to take down one site, that ended that afternoon, pack up and then drive for hours across the farmland, and then set up another gym, that next morning, before getting time to do laundry again...It was wonderfully intense, and I did these all summer long for over a decade. I never counted but I bet I have done 300 camps....

Each night we would gather, sometimes just one other in a dorm room other nights in the lobby of Tess Morgan Hall it might be a dozen or more, and review how the three training sessions went and wonder how to make the next time even better. No different than what good programs do, just the intensity and open dialogue of it all, thanks to trust and creative passionate coaches, was always amazing.

Now, over 30 years later, I get to cram a lifetime of ideas into one day for coaches and then one for players. Still getting to problem solve as both schools are awash with summer construction - so the coaches get to follow a Hansel and Gretel like trail of volleyballs that lead them through a maze of building material filled hallways to the room we can use to show video and share new research and drill ideas.



In growing the game, the use of outdoor courts always seems to get the short end of the stick in the USA, so you can see one of those ideas here in this picture, how a single tennis court can become a youth or camp training spot for six courts (three on each side of the tennis net). Another place to use my yellow rope and a trucker knot.



A former player of mine from UNM, Lori Forrest Gray lost her homes on the river in last year's huge flood. I had done a CAP course the year before and spent time with Lori and her family at her home. It included a fun evening with the coaches watching the Final Four of Men's Volleyball, Penn State vs. Pepperdine. So my host Michelle Goodall, Iowa RVA staffer and a member of the Grassroots Commission, was kind enough to tour me through where the river rose so high beyond its banks. This picture of the Pink Flamingo restaurant, which has been open since 1948 and is rebuilding to open back up again over a year later, says it all. Thousands upon thousands of homes like Lori's this far under water. It was, like New Orleans, hard to fathom.

I even went down Snake Alley, in Burlington, built in 1894 with bricks made to help the horses hooves keep a grip - the crookedest street in the world according to Ripley's Believe It or Not. I also visited the Mississippi where RagBrai ([www.ragbrai.com](http://www.ragbrai.com)) - the ride across Iowa for almost 20,000 riders, ended the day before. It has been a rainy summer, so the corn stands tall and the landscape as far as the eye can

see is a kaleidoscope of shades of green. Steve says the nice thing about Iowa is you can watch your dog run away all day long. I even got to have more walking tacos for camp lunch, as we squeezed in a short coaches meeting and birthday celebration before finishing the lunch break showing more video and training ideas to all the players and staff. I think I will make walking tacos a requirement for all camps and tourneys, they are an Iowa classic.

In the Mediapolis gym, Kensley was there first, more than an hour before camp was to start, earning the first award. Steve Reinschmitt, one of my former USAV interns, had set up the two court gym where camp would center, with two great long spans of rope and yet, every player ignored these "nets" and pair peppered before camp started. By day's end, we had some 360 feet of net up on 6 regulation courts and the kids got tens of thousands more contacts over the net that day, pass-setting-hitting and laughing. The picture here shows this main gym with the kids playing over it, over 25 balls in play doing mostly one vs. one plus one.





So the last grow the game idea to share in today's blog is our energizing exponential chain of victors - where simply you chose a one on one competitive cool down and grow the cheering section of each winner until there are only two left to compete. This means half the camp/school/team is cheering for one teammate, and the other half is on the side of the second last person standing. You get there by having the losing side in each 1 v 1 contest, simply link up and cheer for

the player who beat them. So 1v1 become 2v2, then 4v4 then 8v8, with the losers all cheering on their victor. We did Ro-Sham-Bo, as in paper scissor rock, one throw is all, and in two minutes the gym was deafening with the final showdown. You can do balance war too, or other reaction games and really get things loud and fun to end the session. Do it, I promise they will have fun, and leave with a smile...

Thanks to Steve, Michelle and the Iowa volleyball family there for a great trip back to the Avenue of the Saints....it was well worth taking a vacation day to spend those days in gyms....

## Opportunity is Nowhere

July 20, 2009

This is one of my favorite "words" ever, and given the economic situation impacting us all, leads us into the reason for this grow the game set of options - for I see things as now here, never nowhere...There has never been a better time to grow volleyball, as not only are we a sport for a lifetime, but we are a sport which can be played year round, on a variety of surfaces , using a variety of court and team sizes by either a single gender or coed players of a wide variety of ages.

## Facility Modification

In New York - the GEVA region pays one court fees at levels up to \$150 per hour. Thus, the vast majority of their Jr. Olympic Volleyball Club fees are used up in rental costs, not really helping develop the sport. By dividing a regular court down the middle into two, you can put two teams on one court, and HALVE your rental costs for training. Sure the courts sometimes thus end up about 8 meters long, not the regulation 9 meters, but

you can put a mark on the wall to show where it would still be, and use rope wall standards to vary the height from above adult to low minivolleyball height. If you need a divider net, just put up deer netting, which costs just \$15 for a seven foot high run of 100 feet. Simply cut it halfway and zip tie the 50 foot sections together, then weave a rope thru the top mesh holes and you have a 14 foot high divider net.



Then there simply is using different surfaces and places for training. One of my favorite stories from hosting Lang Ping for several years right after she beat us for the 1984 Olympic Gold medal, was her relating about her first national championship. She was sooooo excited the night before, she could not sleep. Not because it was nationals, but because she was going to play on a wood floor for the first time. I am just back from Vanuatu, where the good courts are smooth concrete, and the village courts are simply on grass, sand or even just dirt. Run your minivolleyball program for kids your players teach on a tennis court, in the fall, spring or summer. If you are in the south, you can opt to run it even in the winter. Then train on those same courts for that practice. Courts can be simply set up for all ages with a rope and two pieces of wood making an "X" for a standard. See below. Sign up for a racquetball court if a facility in your area has one, and set up WallyBall net and play without having to ever chase a ball. You become a better player by playing, so create ways to get your kids playing beyond just your JOV practice time.

### **Affiliated Organization Connections**

Joining the YMCA, Boys and Girls Clubs and other USAV Affiliated Organizations who have facilities and creating a class of junior volleyball for the teams can save thousands in rental costs. Take it one step further and offer your players and staff as coaches for a minivolleyball class, and you create another level of win-win and cost reduction. Since we become a better player if you coach, having your junior players coach the minivolleyball or volleyball classes that happen just before their practices, or even as part of them, makes your players better.

Let me elaborate on this "Coaching then Practicing" concept, as it is important for growing our game. Simply put it is my hope that everyone with a club, regardless of the age levels/groups - has their players spend some part of their week coaching younger/less skilled players. You have them come weekly, and for 1 hour of your two hour practice, put up smaller courts by dividing the net down the middle and play. You can go under your regular practice net for young players, or over/thru the net for older taller kids. Just make sure the net is low enough to all get the joy of spiking. Then create 4-6 kids courts, or 2-4 larger courts for adults and play/train 2v2, 2v3, 3v3...even 4 v 4. Each player on your team should have a team to "coach" and help. After the hour, the kids training is done and your team practices the second hour. Cost? No charge for coaches. No charge for court rental, no charge for coach membership (kids are already USAV members). So you give them a Molten First Touch 140 gram ball, a T shirt and USAV membership (11 and under just \$15 remember) and all is great for under \$50 per kid per season. They become full members in that they need not pay for USAV membership the rest of the year, and since they have a ball already, they can be much more profitable the second time through the program. All it takes is two teams in your club, and you can alternate the teams coaching the hour,

so they get to learn by teaching, but only do it twice a month - plus fun play day festivals every 3-4 weeks for a morning before training - as the teams alternate the training nite the kids come to weekly.

I am going to let a recent email from Eric Hodgson, the Chair of our USAV Grassroots Commission, share with you yet another example of how to develop leadership and low cost volleyball...so straight from Fargo North Dakota, here is what he shared....

*Sitting here in Grand Forks, ND at 6:45a waiting for my fellow coaches to wake so we can head to day 2 of our camp at Red River H.S. Been with these athletes for 7 hours and after a tough first day at camp where they worked very hard, they invited me to come watch them play 90 minutes after our camp ended to something called the East Grand Forks High School Rec*

*The Coaches and I ate quick and drove across the Red River into Minn. (I think) and walked into a 3 court gym teaming with energy. Each court put up and taken down, BY KIDS. Each court being officiated and line judged, BY KIDS. Each court being coached and administered BY KIDS. Each match recorded and started up again, BY KIDS. Nine total teams, 3 per court. Every Monday for 5 weeks, you ref 1 and play 2 with a tournament the sixth week. The cost??? \$25 per girl. One woman oversees the facility and not one coach and very few Parents in attendance. They were having a blast.*

*Seems girl's volleyball is the number one participation sport in Grand Fork's High Schools. Red River HS has 5 high school teams, 2 frosh, 1 soph, 1 JV and 1 Varsity. And yet the Coach says the middle school programs that feed into her need a lot of help. They practice less in a season than in the camp I'm running here this week which is about 24 hours. So they come to HS, get a crack on a Frosh team, and just play....bold concept!*

*The level of these kids is very high, much higher than I expected. But they also get their drivers licenses at 14 1/2 and many have jobs or help with the family farm or business. Great community. We drove back to our hotel last night and ran across 6 sand courts in a park a few blocks from the ol' Travelodge. Not one court was empty at 8:45 p. Keep in mind that the sun doesn't go down here till about 10:30.*

*Good stuff, thought I would share.*

*Peace Ouuuuuuuuut*



The example photos following show what we did for the beach teams to set up and train kids on grass and beach in advance of their training daily in Vanuatu. This set up could be "deadmanned" - burying the anchor point in the ground to anchor to easily and not re-dig the holes - or anchored in other ways, like this concrete block seen on the photo. The deadman anchors are very strong and can be trucker knotted to a super tight net - including a long run of 200 feet. The "X" can be easily raised and lowered by spreading the bottom part. Same thing seen in Alaska in the final photo, so from Alaska to the South Pacific, and all

over the USA we can create affordable programs with kids coaching kids.



Additionally, get your kids playing in adult leagues, mixing in with veterans of the game. Play coed 4 vs. 4 or sixes, getting mom and dad out there to play with their sons and daughters. If your club is larger, you can even form a family league night for two families to play four or six person teams - or even smaller sizes.

### **Save Travel Monies**

Rather than travel for higher level competition, have your teams play up an age group or even two. US Figure Skating is seeing significant growth in its more local learn to skate programs, and volleyball provides, with local USAV planning, the chance for more local competition like Date Night Leagues, and Intra and Inter Club Competitions.

### **More Player Involvement**

Leadership comes from being able to DO, not watch, the training. In addition to having your kids coach younger players or even new older players noted above, come up with other leadership development situations. Have your kids become higher level referees and scorekeepers, and get them working in the adult leagues. Adopt a small FIVB Volleyball Federation, there are over a hundred needing volleyballs and other materials, and create international good will between fellow athletes from halfway around the world. Gather up volleyballs, outgrown good shoes, nets, sponsor change/no longer needed uniforms, printing error t-shirts, whistles, and more. Then ship them to your adopted national volleyball federation. Contact USAV for a list of countries needing such help, and find a USA contact, church group or traveling business person, who can take the gear down for you, rather than shipping it all the way there. The federations know who comes into their nation from the USA on a regular basis.

Like it or not, fundraising projects are great leadership development experiences. Provides for more team building when done properly, and simply develops life skills on how to sell things, be confident, and so many more benefits, especially when done in a buddy system, or all team format - like a car wash. Offer a free car wash, and then as you wash the car, let them know what you are fundraising for, and ask for any level of donation. More often than not, you get a bigger donation than if you just charge a flat rate.

### **More Parent Involvement**

Develop your program to be exemplar by educating your parents more. Check out Dave Epperson's Promise of Good Sports training, Jim Thompson's Positive Coach Alliance training for parents, or use the USAV IMPACT manual parent training section to maximize quality parent involvement.

You can also give your parents a date night, by forming a date night league. This is simply an affordable way to get a lot of play for the players in a short amount of time, by having pools of THREE on a Friday night. If you go from 6-9pm, each team gets a minimum of two matches in, and the teams playing in the crossover matches of first playing the other pool's first and second the other second place team (while 3rd referees), get three matches, as many as a normal four team pool for an all day tourney. You need to keep things running fast, and perhaps play to 21 pts, not 25, to make sure it all fits in the three hours window, but your parents will appreciate the chance to date again, and your kids get to in town play and referee at a very low cost.

## Collegiate Outreach

While each university has 12-15 varsity players who are volleyball knowledgeable, there are likely 10 times more former high school varsity players in college who are only playing intramurals. Over 100,000 high school volleyball players finish their careers annually as seniors, but less than 5,000 varsity openings are available at the college level for incoming freshmen. Post flyers in the rec centers, connect to the intramural volleyball programs, contact the athletic, psychology, education, sociology and other department heads, and get these non-varsity volleyball experts to give back to their sport thru management, coaching and officiating. It could even be connected to a college class as an internship or other outreach program opportunity. They can be involved in the AOs above - the YMCAs, Boys and Girls Clubs, and Park and Rec programs of the area.

In a related way, over spring break or even the summer, run an alumni tournament, pitting your club against the other former JOV club alumni. You can also have an alumni exhibition match over the weeks of their spring break, and have these alumni come in one night during the week training to speak and PLAY with the kids in their former JOV club. These connections are not kept well enough in my experience, and need to be developed.

*If you have any other ideas for creating value in your program by using the wonderful, affordable lifetime sport of volleyball, please share them in the comment section below, or email me at [john.kessel@usav.org](mailto:john.kessel@usav.org) Thanks for helping grow the game together!*

## Landslide

July 16, 2009

What do Tori Amos, Smashing Pumpkins, Dixie Chicks, The Dance, and Stevie Nicks/Fleetwood Mac all have in common? Whether acapella, acoustic guitar, solo piano, or more - each have sung the powerful song "Landslide" in a beautiful way, and those songs I have been playing over and over on my 30 plus hour journey home from Vanuatu today as I am flooded with thoughts of a coach, friend and father who through his spirit and leadership by example, guided Olympians, Paralympians and just good kids, and bad, to change for the better.

Can I sail through the changing ocean tides, can I handle the seasons of my life....

I spoke often in every stop I made in Vanuatu, with the teachers, players, referees, and coaches I just had the chance to work with about those powerful Olympic words of Citius, Altius, Fortius, for that is what we all can use to guide our lives - with time for reflection and family. Wisdom is seen in the South Pacific in the elders, for what they share by example and mentor in their own way, the meaning of each of their small island's culture - varying from each other island over time, and to see volleyball be embraced in such a positive, joyful way, just like what we saw in Atlanta for the Boys JOVCs, Miami for the Girls JOVC, the Festival in Phoenix, Vail for the JO Beach VB Tour stop, and Naval Station Newport for the Wounded Warriors. The latter being my last time to work with Jimi.

And I'm afraid of changing....But time makes you bolder, children get older and I'm getting older too....

In talking on the VBF Beach Training Courts with Steve Anderson, who hails from near Louisville KY, he shared how he is seeking significance and more meaning in his life. He is the only black American to coach volleyball in the Olympics - helping his duo win Bronze in Atlanta, Gold in Sydney and make the medal round in Beijing, but he too is now seeking to give back to the sport. So he joined me in Vanuatu to help the talented women Beach players they have there on their journey from a far away island in Vanuatu with a population of

just a few hundred people - to winning the Oceania Gold medal. Mila's return home brought home a champion who had left her family to follow that path of Citius, Altius, Fortius, and a role model for the children, and women of her native land. It also meant a party for several days...richly deserved. Steve and I talked about his coming back also to speak to JO coaches at next year's event, and an AVP event or two, giving back to the sport in his own native land.

So when I get home tonite at 1030pm, I will be picked up by my kids, as even children get older, and whisked away, tired as I may be, to join them and their friends at the opening show of the newest Harry Potter film at midnite. We already have the tickets, I just hope my flight lands on time....while I like sitting in the front row for most presentations, sitting there for a movie really can put a crick in your neck, and I already have one from the flight from Fiji to Los Angeles.

The tomorrow, I will also re-read Viktor Frankel's [A Man's Search for Meaning](#). If you have not picked up on the value of this book - showing how people can endure any level of suffering as long as they know their life has meaning - then please go get it and read it. Then get your team to read it, and report back to you on it. You can never be too young to learn that many sources in life give meaning to each individual's journey - love, family, history, work, and no matter what brick walls get put in front of you - you can find meaning and growth through each and every one.

Even the loss of a dear friend or family member, whose life ended doing what he loved the climbing of a challenging fourteener as we call them here (there are 52 of them) - called Capitol Peak. The Olympic and Paralympic movement was so fortunate to have Jimi for the years of involvement he gave us all, and the changes he guided so many to make to be swifter, higher and stronger. I hope each of you reading these words today will go make one of those meaningful changes you have sought to make, and give a family member a special call as well. As the great Xbox commercial put it after the 30 second journey from birth to grave...Life is

Short....Play More...



If you see my reflection in the snow covered hills...

Rest in Peace Jimi, I see your reflection in the Pacific Hills too, even if they are only a few meters high above water, in the water you so loved to tread, they rise for thousands of meters from the searoots, formed by the rim of fire that you carried to so many in your passion and love for us all.

## More Volleyball From Vanuatu

July 13, 2009

Espiritu Santo...Wrecks to Rainforest -- Vanuatu, Discover untouched seclusion and beauty...that is what Carte de Luganville - the map of this town says.... To see and do here? World class diving, SS President Coolidge,

Million Dollar Point, pristine coral reefs...game fishing....adventure trekking,...fresh water blue holes...cave expeditions....custom villages....outrigger river discovery....World War II sites....Yachting base...and more... Only I am here to teach, and have been up since dawn, re-building the courts to straight as the rains and play have tilted them towards the ocean. William is a tireless hard worker and the Vanuatu VB Federation is lucky to have him as president.



Friday was the last day of theory, tourney design options, scoring and drill variations - like naughts and crosses and stones - and steal their coconuts were taught and played with great success. They made balls from tree leaves, weaving them into something round and playable. We leveled the courts and built four kids courts next to the main courts, in advance of the training on Saturday. Joe, the VVF Development Officer was amazed at how easy the X standards with an anchored rope could be adjusted to so many heights so fast. The idea I am asking them to do...and each of you reading this far into my grow the game together

blog...is to build a smaller kids court next to or very near the adult courts, so the kids can watch and learn and PLAY, rather than sit and watch. I learned it from Outrigger Canoe Club long ago, where many Olympians began their volleyball play. There, a smaller 6x6 meter kids court, with a much lower net, is next to the two main adult courts. This culture of teaching by playing while watching their role models is a great and perhaps even best way to mentor, as the kids grow up, they get to play with a seasoned veteran on the main courts, and they know what to do. William, VVF President is playing with a 16 year old in the tourney, doing the same thing of mentoring, and good things happened of course. Southern California beach VB traditions have this same mentoring by the wily older men and women - and we need to keep it growing as a key form of development.

We worked through lunch each day, showing videos and talking about the things those showed us. One lunch extended about Volleyball Vanuatu - whose motto is Dream it, Believe it. Receive it meeting on the topic of Luganville mo Samma Volleyball

1. Volleyball long place hia or I died?
2. Yu tink se I olsem from wanem?
3. How now yumi save makem volleyball long place hia I come more gud?

So as they all spoke about administration of the sport, in the end selected Jacob and three others, including the top two women in the course as players and leaders, to run the province's volleyball development. They have a lot of spirit, and now have many more new ideas on how to grow volleyball back in their villages - both beach and the six person game. It was a meeting filled with ideas and dialogue back and forth, much of it in their language spoken too fast for me to understand, but I clearly could understand the passion and hope they were all sharing.



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Saturday each coach invited kids to play from 8am to 10am, so they could teach their "team" - before the coaches got to start playing in their own tournament. Kids started arriving well before eight, so the balls came out early and play began. At the peak time, we had over 40 kids playing doubles on the nine courts we created. Made for a great end of event picture seen here. About 9:30 when the coaches turned into players, they left to talk about format and rules based on how many teams showed up...and the kids just kept playing and playing, and even late into the afternoon the kids would play. It was just wonderful, despite the very heavy winds - we had SUN for the first day, and that was helpful, however our Digicel shade tents flew several times into the Pacific and one sailed upside down far out to sea before we got a boat to save it. Our player water jug was a kettle, and our music system was Williams's computer connected to my portable speaker system - after linking about a dozen extension cords to get power from the Beachfront Resort down to the courts. They had trophies and medals for the top teams, and play was very competitive, but with tons of laughter, and the men played until past sunset as they had a larger draw.

Every session starts with a prayer, and ends with one as the dusk settles at the end of the evening session. Yet I am told even though almost everyone goes to church, they mostly believe in Black Magic first....So it has been interesting



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teaching them how to teach better and about some myths and superstitions in sport. Debbie said her favorite tree in her husband's village was chopped down recently, as it was filled with black magic, according to the priests. The real challenge for having weekend events and even partnerships is that about a third of the people are 7<sup>th</sup> Day Adventists, so they cannot do things on Saturday, while the others have their day of rest - and no sports - on Sundays. So you need to pick your partner based on their church affiliation too.

The course ended that evening with a Pizza Feast for the Closing Ceremonies. Two chocolate cakes - one saying Happy, the other Volleyball....a slide show on the big screen ran of all the days in pictures, while a popular string band played music thru the speakers - including the clinic favorite, Island Girl. The participants, almost 30 in total, got their FIVB Attestations, a shirt or hat from Digicel, and to hear us all toktok one last time. I was given a very nice totem from another island represented in the clinic, with big eyes and made from some wood that is going to put me over on my weight limit if I put it into my suitcase, so it will go home hand carried. It was a special evening to be sure.

Sunday I flew to Port Vila where the last two days are packed from 8 am to pm. Pipeline Programs for teachers there, SEPPA, Indoor referee training, Beach Referee trainings, VASNOC, the Vanuatu Olympic Committee Strategic planning, and Beach national team training - not sure how we will fit it all in, but we shall. Debbie is very organized and efficient, and belongs to the Cult of Done, even though she may not realize it. The day of rest she took me to her husband clan in a village not too far out of town, and the real Vanuatu was seen - with an eight year old birthday girl in her queen's chair, roasted pig, rice balls galore, and the whole family was there. Great-grandmother was mourning the loss of her husband two months ago, not leaving her house during that time, so we paid our respects there.



It was a hard day for me as I just had learned a dear friend and leader in Olympic and Paralympic sport, Jimi Flower, had died Saturday in a climbing accident on Capitol Peak, near Aspen Colorado. Jimi was a animated, passionate father of two great kids and coach in swimming - and a key part of USA Swimming's success in both Olympic and Paralympic - and in his spare time did winter Olympic team leadership too, like the USA Men's Hockey team in Torino in 2006. We just had worked and traveled together last week for the Naval Station

Newport Paralympic project. On our flight back he asked where I was going to next, a common question between sports coaches so of course my reply was Vanuatu...and he said he was taking a break and going into the mountains....what a loss to our movement....

Still, in the village, I became Mr. Magic Man, showing the kids my one and only vanishing Vatu coin trick, and playing tag until we headed to the beach to train and see a new court set up. There at Mele Cove, a new restaurant/bar was playing live music, and a throng of people were playing on a very nice sand court. Mike, the owner, had cut down some giant bamboo stalks, the side of telephone poles, and made them into his standards - they were round, safe and perfect. Steven Anderson, who coached Natalie Cook and Kerri Pottharst - two time Olympic beach medalists including Sydney Gold in 2000 - had arranged some press to be there. This included the Australia Broadcast Company, the ABC of Oz, filming the training of the top girls who have the FIVB grant to play in all the World Tour events to see if they can qualify for London 2012. It was good to catch up. After dark, I came back to my little hotel room and then met for a planning dinner which included showing the

pictures from Santo - seems as we did good things there by all reports. Speaking of reports, this will be my last blog from here - the next two days will be good stuff, but already explained. Next up is Long Island PE Teachers and GEVA grassroots development, then a clinic in Iowa for one of my favorite former interns Steven Reinschmidt, and Jimi's funeral. Hug your kids a bit tighter today; I know I sure shall when I return here from the land of Bali Hi.

## **Ryan Millar, Olympic Gold Medal Setter**

July 7, 2009

Of late, one of my favorite "trivia" questions for volleyball coaches is who set the gold medal match point for the USA Men's team in Beijing? Most guess of course Lloy Ball, the four time Olympic setter who so skillfully bettered ball after ball and gave his hitters the sweet set they desired. But the answer is in the title, as in the chaos and randomness of our fast moving sport, the final rally ended with a dig going to Ryan who set that final ball. One of my favorite quotes shared in the coaching clinics I do follows...

*"A human being should be able to change a diaper, plan an invasion, butcher a hog, conn a ship, design a building, write a sonnet, balance accounts, build a wall, set a bone, comfort the dying, take orders, give orders, cooperate, act alone, solve equations, analyze a new problem, pitch manure, program a computer, cook a tasty meal, fight efficiently, die gallantly. Specialization is for insects." -- Lazarus Long (Robert Heinlein)*

Hugh McCutcheon put it this way for our USA players, saying that he wants players who are good at all the skills in volleyball and great in one or two.

I wrote an article long ago, called "[You will be a Better Player if you Coach](#)," and strongly feel the most important way we can grow our sport is by getting every one of you reading these blogs, to go back to your club and getting your players to coach littler kids DURING those player's practice times of either the HS/College or your Jr. Olympic Volleyball season. Take one hour out of your normal two hour weekly practice to coach youth volleyball. Sit back as the head coach and see how your players interpret what you have taught them as they coach kids. Divide your court down the middle and create FOUR lil kids courts. Play over rope if you have to...just mark the corners, no need for more lines...just give your players the chance to be better players by teaching the sport they love in season.

Well, in a related way, I feel strongly that you will be a better hitter if you set. Karch Kiraly our new women's USA assistant coach, spent much of his time at UCLA not only winning NCAA Championships, but running a 6-2. Younger programs are asked/guided/prodded to run a 6-3 or a 6-6 for kids 14 and under - [Click here for more on that idea](#). The European youth volleyball leaders require their youth to play circulation volleyball - rotating after ever time the ball crossed the net. The idea is when they are young to NOT specialize. If you get your players out this summer - just put up courts and provide a big container of water/lemonade, and leave them be - to play doubles, these wonderful athletes get to work on their weaknesses. The tall hitter sees the serves going to their short partner such that the hitter now sets the second ball. The "IAMASSETTERASIAMTOOSHORTTOBEAHITTER" player gets to pass and HIT all summer long. We create the more well rounded players our national team program needs. Cuba, who won THREE Olympic Gold medals in women's volleyball in the last 20 years, does it in part by running 6-2. This small island nation has beaten the world - including giving the USA women a Beijing pool play thrashing we avenged in the playoffs - by taking their most powerful/fast armed/high leaping hitters - and teaching them to set.

So, the picture below shows yet another way to grow our sport - letting kids hit first, and off of the Olympic Gold medal "setter" Ryan Millar.



The Viper Club in San Antonio Texas brought Ryan and me in early to do come kids volleyball development, and the shot below was one of my favorite - the boy overhead passed a tossed ball from Ryan, back to Ryan, who set the youngster and then watched in anticipation. Pass-Set-Hit...the essence of our game...More ideas on youth volleyball/mini volleyball as the world calls it, are coming soon. We have been sharing them for years here at USA Volleyball, and it seems that many of you are finally starting the pipeline earlier, where it is needed,

without specialization and with the game teaching the game. The ideas in part our in the "Rule Sheet" you can [download by clicking here](#) - where these 30 plus years of minivolleyball rules are summarized into the article about 2-3-4 person kids volleyball. With any luck, the next Ryan Millar will come from your neck of the woods, thanks to the great pipeline you created in growing our sport through USA Volleyball.

Thanks all, for your thoughts and ideas. More to come!

## Tennis Anyone?

June 25, 2009

Warming up on the beach with your partner has two very powerful messages that indoor players and coaches need to listen to so that more kids find success earlier in the challenges of our sport.

First is the tradition/culture of Dig/Pass-set-hit to warm up with. Your doubles partner stands off the net a bit, hits to you, you dig back, they set and you hit. We taught this to all the kids at the USAV Jr Beach Tour Stop in Vail this Friday...and having just done an IMPACT course from 11pm to 130am (I kid you not) to help get some western area teams (including one from Alaska) who had not been trained yet to gain the valuable information in those 5 hours of sharing - I once again quoted Marv Dunphy, our 1988 Gold Medal winning men's Olympic team coach from the IMPACT manual on page 53 - to wit

*"Since we learn best in training situations that are basically gamelike, we should incorporate three contact drills as often as possible. I am convinced that the best hitting drills are pass, set, hit (P-S-H), the best setting drills are P-S-H and the best passing drills are P-S-H. Likewise the best defensive drills are dig, set, hit combinations."*





So why is it that indoor players spend so much time THROW, set, hitting...or even Toss and hit? Coaches who throw for the players are stealing valuable timing, reading and skill opportunities from both their setters (who worthlessly learn to "read" a throw), and from their hitter/passers, who do not learn the rhythm and timing realities of passing and then hitting.

My culture in beach goes back 50 years. We pass set it, with no coaches around then, and we still do. Indoor players should too. ALL the time.

The second beach warm up idea is called tennis. To get your partner reading and moving, you simply go back to elementary school volleyball and hit the ball back and forth on one hit. Warming up in the sand, you cooperate first to hit near your partner, and then start to make them move further. As you are warmed up, you transition to competitive scoring, enlarging the court and trying to put the ball down on the court, but still using just one hit. Warming up more, you get to hit the ball a second, and then even third time, to yourself of course. There are just two of you, and using the net, playing over it, is of course paramount -- something again too many indoor players ignore, by standing in front of it and partner peppering. You have to hustle thru the sand, and of course get to the ball before it bounces and ricochets off the court.

One of my favorite commercials is the Roddick vs. Pong clip, where the electronic pong simply returns EVERY single powerful shot. THE line in the clip is "My life is about finding a way to win..." and then Roddick comes up with a new idea and defeats the pong bar...You can watch it here.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7UfGpt-0ncc>

I will not reveal more, only to say that again reading the ball on the OTHER side of the net, reading your opponent's intentions BEFORE contact, is what this warm up of tennis does.

So in the last few months I have had the pleasure of working coaching clinics along side Tom Hogan assistant coach in Beijing from the USA Women's team and Ryan Millar, starter on our USA men's gold medal team. What made me smile was that both teams over the last quad had a favorite warm up....yep...tennis!

The women started one vs. one cooperatively, seeing how many in a row, ball on the fly, they could get, before adding a second player per side and transitioning to competitive scoring. The men could option to let it bounce and went competitive almost right away. I had watched the women in Colorado Springs play tennis, enjoying the high level version of the elementary school game, as these elite athletes fought hard to find a \*\*\* in their opponents armor covering the court. I did not know until working with Ryan that the men warmed up with it as a favorite also. The moral of this story? Kids of all ages, even Olympians, like games more than drills, competition and scoring as part of it, and prefer to play over the net -- learning to read their opponents intentions in advance.

So get out there and grow the game, by playing tennis and teaching your players the most important skill in our sport - reading. Leave a comment and let us know if there are other ideas on this topic you might want to share. Speedball, and Greedball, variations of monarch of the court games, will be another topic for my blog soon...along similar themes seen above.

## **The Talent Code: Deep Practice, Ignition and Master Coaching**

May 14, 2009

Sorry for the long break in postings - with two kids in teen sports (volleyball and lacrosse) both in state playoffs and finals almost upon us (and proms, who can forget THAT cultural right of passage...) and getting ready for the important USA Volleyball annual meetings, time to free range think has been crimped. I will be posting more now, and wanted to first start with yet another new read - Daniel Coyle's, [The Talent Code: Greatness Isn't Born. It's Grown. Here's How.](#)

Like [Outliers](#), you simply must put this book on your nightstand and READ it.

Have you ordered it online yet? Hey, what is taking you? You will find it making you think in several areas of import to growing our sport and helping kids become Citius, Altius, Fortius. The author went on journeys, to soccer fields in Brazil, a Dallas music school of excellence, and KIPP schools (Knowledge is Power Program - [www.kipp.org](http://www.kipp.org)) to see with his own eyes what Dr. K. Anders Ericsson brought to our awareness from his Florida State offices researching effective practice. Coyle goes even a bit deeper, pun intended, by calling it "Deep Practice" due to the internal effects on our myelin that positively improve one's performance. He also points out the importance of passion - as previously seen in the value of



"street volleyball" - for both "Ignition" and sustainment of the hours it takes to get great. Tying into implicit learning, Coyle says it this way - "Where deep practice is a cool, conscious act, ignition is a hot, mysterious burst, an awakening." Finally, there is mentoring as we have seen done so well in the men's side of USA Volleyball, with Carl McGown, Doug Beal, Marv Dunphy, and others helping guide Hugh McCutcheon and now Alan Knipe. I just crossed paths in a gym at State Districts with Craig Buck (whose son Jason was playing against Cody) and was reminded how there, not just a master coach was helping develop talent, but how each every player in the program, starting with Karch and the whole 1984 gold medal team, through the competitive cauldron and teammate interactions, helped the talent blossom. Coyle calls it "master coaching" for the talented performers, with those skilled at bringing forth the talent within. As we teach the players to problem solve without us, they too become master coaches...

So what does this mean for each of us? I think first, it reinforces the importance of first helping kids develop a LOVE OF THE GAME. Simple but a cornerstone to our ways of training and competing. I just did a Positive Coaching Alliance piece for a new DVD being shot by the amazing Mark Millon. For those of you who do not know lacrosse, he is one of the long time superstars of the sport, and I helped him shoot a DVD that his sponsor is helping him distribute at low cost (\$10) to all the youth lax players and coaches. I spoke about the PCA and Honoring the Game - which we use the term ROOTS, to help everyone remember to respect the Rules, Opponents, Officials, Teammates, and Self. My last line? "Never be a child's last coach..." for we are to do all we can, to help these young players love physical activity and playing/competing and being a great teammate. BTW, there is a new PCA topic (reprinted on the Kingston Soccer Club website) on how coaches should handle cutting players from a team at [http://kingstonsc.goalline.ca/page.php?page\\_id=33596](http://kingstonsc.goalline.ca/page.php?page_id=33596).

I also think it means to give time to focus on those things that INSTILL IMPLICIT LEARNING, including guided discovery and Socratic coaching as we talk about in IMPACT clinics. It means continuing to fan the flames of self learning by playing more doubles, and more "speed ball" and queen of the court- while being there to teach and guide. A PLAYS (Pipeline Leadership for America's Youth Sports) working group meeting in Denver last week brought to my attention to another group working to redefine the role of youth sports Up 2 Us...[www.up2us.org](http://www.up2us.org). Executive Director Paul Caccano sent me a copy of Ann Rosewater's great booklet - "*Learning to Play and Playing to Learn*" which you can get by signing up with the Team up for Youth Program. With Promise of Good Sports ([www.promiseforgoodsports.org](http://www.promiseforgoodsports.org)) led by Festival Founder Dave Epperson, the National Alliance for Youth Sports ([www.nays.org](http://www.nays.org)) and the National Coalition of Youth Sports ([www.ncys.org](http://www.ncys.org)) there are many wonderful paths to helping become a better teacher of any sport - volleyball especially.

And finally, it means to remember to let your kids coach others, so they become better players. For the coaches reading this, it means to seek out those who might help you yourself be a better coach - starting with CAP and other coaching courses. It also means looking to have someone, perhaps a person even not involved with volleyball but an expert in another sport, come watch your practices and give you feedforward. Note that this means that just like you give the players immediate feedback as they perform their skills in games and drills, you would be getting this same kind of feedforward. You might be lucky to get it while you are on the court teaching, right in front of the players (for immediate and frequent feedback is best) - along with delayed feedback that comes from going out to dinner afterwards to talk, or sitting around a gym after practices openly discussing any and everything with the intent to improve.

So more reading, and more ways to grow the sport. Let me know if you have other ideas to share on this topic by posting below and sharing with all. Thanks for your efforts in giving kids a chance to make volleyball one of their sports.

## Stand By Me

April 7, 2012

Just back from National AAHPERD Convention, big success, thousands of PE teachers learning new ideas, and will share that in a separate blog. I spent most my time with the Brazilian Director of Coaching Education and another Brazilian coach, and got caught up in their samba music and rhythm...so this led me to share one of my all time team building songs for a group - including volleyball teams. It is the song "Stand By Me," which is sung together as a group, regardless of singing skill. Everyone knows the lyrics, and you can change the song to "teammate teammate" or "partner partner" (just like Timo did with Pumba). With the power of YouTube now, the impact of this song in the whole of humanity can be seen on many levels. Ben E. King wrote it and while you likely know the lyrics, just to be sure, they follow. The movie Stand By Me is a must see by any boys team, and really, any team of kids, and this first link shows both Ben King singing (as it is always important to see the original artist performing when possible), along with clips from the movie.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vbg7YoXiKn0>

*When the night has come  
And the land is dark  
And the moon is the only light we see  
No I won't be afraid  
No I won't be afraid  
Just as long as you stand, stand by me*

*And darling, darling stand by me  
Oh, now, now, stand by me  
Stand by me, stand by me*

*If the sky that we look upon  
Should tumble and fall  
And the mountain should crumble to the sea  
I won't cry, I won't cry  
No I won't shed a tear  
Just as long as you stand, stand by me*

*And darling, darling stand by me  
Oh, stand by me  
Stand by me, stand by me, stand by me*

*Whenever you're in trouble won't you stand by me  
Oh, now, now, stand by me  
Oh, stand by me, stand by me, stand by me*

*Darling, darling stand by me  
Stand by me  
Oh stand by me, stand by me, stand by me*

When the movie "The Lion King" came out and our beloved doubles volleyball team of Pumba and Timon sang the song,

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n7P5jWu9JLo>

it became a Kessel household hit, and brought a song from the 1960s, into the new century and the lives of my own kids.

I have a collection of the song being sung by many others on my hard drive as videos, and as a team exercise, showing some of these can bring the history of this song and some performers.

To see John Lennon performing it, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O4\\_ghOG9JQM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O4_ghOG9JQM)

then his son Julian... [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_q28NI4OrPk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_q28NI4OrPk) and then

Enrique Iglesias, son of the gifted Julio Iglesias.... Well, you just get to see the power of genetics...

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NmF0Gqlez44>

Then get a whole club to sing it - just like this group from the BBC, and the Boys Don't Sing choir - weaving in the song "Beautiful Girls" as well <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HQxHxloG854&fmt=18>

The BEST version however, I saw this past fall, when Mark Johnson's clip of this song appeared on PBS, and while several versions of this great compilation can be seen there, the original and the whole project's scope and impact can be seen at <http://www.playingforchange.com/>. Rather than explain the project myself, I will let a short excerpt from Mark's blog give you a bit more insight, and urge you to go read more about it at their website. Sport impacts lives as well, but we are competitive in the end on the court - and cooperative off. In all my travels, I always ask the players in the country I am visiting "What are the top five best songs for me to take home from your country?" We go out and work to find them, or they give them to me on a CD as a parting gift. The gift of music is powerful for sport.

### [Director's Vision](#)

November 6th, 2008

*Playing for Change - Peace Through Music is a documentary film that demonstrates that MUSIC will change the world and help bring us all peace. The film features over 100 musicians and includes live performances of music ranging from native Indian reservations to South African Townships to performances in the Himalayan Mountains. Music has always been an integral part of the identity and expression of various cultures on this planet. However, music's greatest power is its ability to transcend cultural boundaries and connect us as a Human Race.*

*The first event that triggered the idea of "Playing For Change - Peace Through Music" occurred 10 years ago in a New York City subway station. I was headed to work one morning, and while in the subway I witnessed a musical performance of two monks painted all in white from head to toe. They were wearing brown robes and one of them was singing in a foreign language while the other man played a nylon guitar. I remember seeing about 200 people of different cultures, races and genders, stop and listen to the music. Everyone there was so moved by the performance even though I can't imagine many of us knew what they were singing about. It occurred to me that in this moment in time was a strong sense of human connection and the ability to overcome our differences as people. I decided right then and there that music is the key to a better world. I also realized it was my calling to go out and find as many of these inspiring human moments as possible.*

The documentary will be very, very good as a team building exercise. Should be out soon! Meanwhile, it is lacrosse season here too, as both my kids play JO volleyball along with LAX in the spring. I coached both my children in lacrosse from elementary ages through junior high - it was a sport I played at Colorado College back in the 1970s when it was wooden sticks. My son Cody has gone from HS varsity goalie as a freshman to varsity attackman this year, while McKenzie made the varsity team as a freshman this year. So the same principles of making it gamelike, appropriate coaching, lots of contacts per hour, etc., worked well in building players in that team sport too, as it is about making it fun, playing a lot and learning technique while you play. You can see what JPLproductions has done for those two positions.

***Anyone doing a great job like these below for Volleyball? Anyone have the time to help us compile highlights for defenders/servers/blockers/attackers? We would love to see it here at USA Volleyball!***

Tribute to the Game Changers - Lacrosse Goalies, using the song "I Put On" by Jeezy Tribute  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EezsWXmgJVQ&feature=related>

Best of 2009 Lacrosse, using the "For the Love of the Game" by Pillar song -  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n6-bTLPABSA>

Best from 2005-2008, using the song "Wake up Call" by Colourslide -  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DczVvIpmtDc&feature=related>

Inside LAX TV has a clip worth sharing - not something we can do in our sport but look at it from the point of view of learned behavior patterns and creativity, if you have never seen it before... (meanwhile I would hope we can soon have an inside VB TV station on the USAV website)  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jEsyBkmjtEY&feature=related>

So today's blog is a bit bandwidth intensive, but we would love to hear from you on other ways to build your team, with or without music or pictures, in the comments below. Please share your thought will all! Good luck in Regionals which are coming up for all....

Addendum on Thanksgiving Day 2011... Playing for Change continues to create and film new episodes, now up to over 50 choices, and this one, a special Stand by Me tribute to Japan, is one heckuva great jam...so had to add/share it today, giving thanks to all who help us grow the game together...

<http://www.playingforchange.com>

[John Kessel](#)

## **TED March Teaching Madness**

March 30, 2009

Technology Education Design posted some very important clips this month, which I feel every leader growing our sport must view, to be both a better teacher, and to give you more energy to do the wonderful things each of you are doing in that task. Three different areas, all vitally important areas of knowledge each of us should know.

## The Importance of PLAY



Some of you know well how strongly I feel about the game teaching the game. In my recent trip to Iowa to do a coaching clinic along with Mary Wise of Florida and other great teachers of the game, one of the things I felt that got the hundreds of coaches to really start thinking about their role was taking them back to when they learned to ride a bike. My questions for them, and you reading this, are simple - How did you learn to ride that complex contraption? This is a skill being acquired that could kill you (unlike volleyball) and which over the years hundreds of thousands - perhaps millions in total -- of children get injured from just abrasions to serious head injuries. So, tell me, did your folks hire a bike riding coach for this

process? Did they put you through bike riding drills? Did they send you to bike riding camp? .... The almost universal answer is nope...yet you learned to ride a bike so well, you can not ride for years, and then just get back on and ride as if you had not stopped riding.

Several years back I spent time working with the National Institute for Play, and have been advising the Coaching School founder Gary Avicious who brings together a group who understand the importance of play in every child's life. You can [see what Gary](#) has been creating. Stuart Brown, who also advises Gary, is the CEO of the National Institute for Play, and TED [just posted a speech](#) he gave last year on play being vital, not just fun. It will give you a chance to "meet" Stuart and learn of the research that he has been doing over the decades.

### Wooden Wisdom

Anyone who has visited my office, has likely seen the huge signed poster of John Wooden's Pyramid of Success, the dozen or so books by Coach Wooden or about him on my library shelves, and even the statuette on my desk of him holding a rolled newspaper. Coach Wooden has been a part of the USA Men's team successes over the years, as Marv Dunphy did his PhD thesis on the man. When I was writing the first IMPACT Manual in 1988, I asked Marv to share 25 words or less that he learned from doing his thesis on Coach Wooden, having been gifted hours and hours of one on one interview/Q&A time with John in the process of crafting his tome. Marv told me he did not need 25 words, he just needed two. BE CONSISTENT. That was what he learned most of all from studying Coach Wooden, the importance of always being consistent for players and for all in the program. New coaches in our sport may not know of Coach Wooden's incredible teaching skills, but [this new TED posting](#) will give you a chance to hear and see this legendary coach's thoughts on success.

### Passion and Shining Eyes

Andy Pai, our hard working CAP staffer down the hall, has been meandering through TED as well, and this week [re-introduced me to yet another great clip](#), on growing music - with parallel worlds to what we do as coaches and work together to grow our sport. The characteristics of the leader you represent for our sport in presenting your dreams and expectations...Zander has so much charisma and energy is it empowering to just watch and learn from him. Ask yourself, who am I being if my players' eyes are not shining - for a conductor does not make a sound and yet creates such power and beauty...

Three homeruns on TED, that I hope you all watch, as you will see three gifted teachers sharing their knowledge in stories and ways that will help you be a better coach. Previous blogs note the value of meandering through TED, to see Sir Kenneth Robinson on how creativity is diminished, and other Wooden speeches and much more. To each of you reading this, thanks for coaching, and let us know your thoughts on these when you feel so inspired.

## Appropriate Coaching

March 18, 2009

Appropriate coaching is an important part of being a good coach. Some thoughts about the use of running and other physical punishment follow. I will go back a bit in time to when the term coach was used to move VIPs, who could afford to ride, rather than walk or ride a horse, from one place to another. This concept then began to be used when a teacher worked to move VISs - as in Very Important Students - from their one place of knowledge to another, higher level. The key here is, to be a coach, you have to move people from one place to another - or else you are not a coach. To paraphrase the great coach John Wooden - "You haven't coached them if they haven't learned."

In watching thousands of games, I see players being out-skilled, by a team who could move faster, read better, pass without error, receive the ball and deliver the shot/attack without pause or fault. What does the coach who is being beaten do in their time outs or breaks in the game? Berate their players for being lazy, stupid, careless, sloppy, and other such derogatory terms. When things end, they again chew out the athletes, and then forewarn them to be "ready to run" when the team meets again.

The question is then, when will we coaches start teaching and become REAL coaches? A coach is a TEACHER first, and ALWAYS. The kids know how to run...they don't know how to do the game's skills at game speed. The players may be able to do the technique in pairs, with limited movement - but they cannot PASS and connect to a teammate while moving. What makes a coach stand or sit there on the sideline, screaming in their frustrations, slamming a clipboard, and acting like a two year old wigged out on sugar without a nap? Do they think that is what a real teacher would do in class? If they did, they would be sent back to teaching school until they had learned what a teacher does - they guide, they catch kids doing things right, they demonstrate, they question with a future purpose, they encourage.

My bet is everyone reading this remembers when they got their first gold star. Decades later we still can remember it - for that good teacher caught us doing it right and paid attention to it. I doubt your school teachers made you do windsprints for misspelling "cat" or pushups for screwing up your chemistry experiment, or sent you to lap the school building because you divided wrong in math. Why not? Because such actions do not TEACH, they are not principles in good TEACHING.

What I am asking today is for each of us to remember before practice what the great teachers did for you when you were in school. Not the coaches, the TEACHERS. The one who made class fun, coming up with creative ways to learn the subject even if it was perhaps boring to some. The one who cared about you as an individual, and took time with you one on one to help you learn a task you were struggling with. The one who taught you new skills, while reviewing at times ones already well known. The one in college who was so educationally entertaining, no matter what the subject matter, that there was always a waiting list to get into that class. The one who may have been demanding, but was NEVER demeaning. In short, the one who showed you how to learn, because THEY were lifelong learners and who gave back to their profession by teaching.



My mom was a first grade teacher for decades of her life...My dad was a dentist who would get up at any hour of the night to help a patient who was in pain. So my role models were strong on the concept of helping people get better. I never saw my dad make people do pushups by the chair before he would treat them, even though they erred by not brushing enough. Nor did I see my mom make the kids run after they erred in any way in class.



Please don't get me wrong, it is not that I am against getting in shape, or running. It is simply that these young athletes need to run while learning skills. They need to sprint chasing balls going out of bounds and saving them. They need to move while passing or receiving the ball. They REALLY need to move between the contacts of the ball, learning/reading to get to the right place and the right time before contact. Most coaches do not teach the game between contacts well, they just comment at contact about the errors they see, even if it was caused by simply misreading or being faked out well. They

need to sprint in to the coach each time that they are called in for a team talk – so they get back on task/to learning sooner and getting in shape at the same time. They just need to get more contacts with the ball and learn skill, not run. They already KNOW how to run, they learned that about 2 years old. They were not born with the sport skill or reading needs that are required to be good at this sport, THAT is what they need to learn, by touching more balls during the precious time called practice. In the matches, too many kids just watch from the sidelines, and even those playing watch, given that there is one ball and so many players. We learn by doing, not by watching.

So at the risk of losing some coaches who did not enjoy their English classes, I will close with several poems. The first was by one of the greatest sports coaches to every ply his trade on the field of play - yet again, John Wooden. I know these words by heart...

*No written word  
Nor spoken plea  
Can teach your team  
What they should be  
Nor all the books  
On all the shelves  
It's what a leader Is himself.*

When the amazing slam poet/teacher Taylor Mali spoke on "What Does a Teacher Make," he created a priceless poem that EVERY coach reading this MUST watch and share, so please view him bringing this poem below to life. For you are a TEACHER first and always and must follow those principles. When Taylor says teacher - think coach, for this is what every volunteer and professional coach does every day.

What Teachers Make, or  
Objection Overruled, or  
If things don't work out, you can always go to law school

By Taylor Mali  
<http://www.taylormali.com/>

*He says the problem with teachers is, "What's a kid going to learn  
from someone who decided his best option in life was to become a teacher?"*

*He reminds the other dinner guests that it's true what they say about teachers:  
Those who can, do; those who can't, teach.*

*I decide to bite my tongue instead of his  
and resist the temptation to remind the other dinner guests  
that it's also true what they say about lawyers.*

*Because we're eating, after all, and this is polite company.*

*"I mean, you're a teacher, Taylor," he says.  
"Be honest. What do you make?"*

*And I wish he hadn't done that  
(asked me to be honest)  
because, you see, I have a policy  
about honesty and ass-kicking:  
if you ask for it, I have to let you have it.*

*You want to know what I make?*

*I make kids work harder than they ever thought they could.  
I can make a C+ feel like a Congressional medal of honor  
and an A- feel like a slap in the face.  
How dare you waste my time with anything less than your very best.*

*I make kids sit through 40 minutes of study hall  
in absolute silence. No, you may not work in groups.  
No, you may not ask a question.  
Why won't I let you get a drink of water?  
Because you're not thirsty, you're bored, that's why.*

*I make parents tremble in fear when I call home:  
I hope I haven't called at a bad time,  
I just wanted to talk to you about something Billy said today.  
Billy said, "Leave the kid alone. I still cry sometimes, don't you?"*

*And it was the noblest act of courage I have ever seen.*

*I make parents see their children for who they are  
and what they can be.*

*You want to know what I make?*

*I make kids wonder,*

*I make them question.*

*I make them criticize.*

*I make them apologize and mean it.*

*I make them write, write, write.*

*And then I make them read.*

*I make them spell definitely beautiful, definitely beautiful, definitely beautiful  
over and over and over again until they will never misspell  
either one of those words again.*

*I make them show all their work in math.*

*And hide it on their final drafts in English.*

*I make them understand that if you got this (brains)*

*then you follow this (heart) and if someone ever tries to judge you  
by what you make, you give them this (the finger).*

*Let me break it down for you, so you know what I say is true:*

*I make a \*\*\*damn difference! What about you?*

These thoughts I think fit the "coach" of ANY sport - not just our wonderful lifetime team sport of volleyball. The kids deserve great teachers, no matter what they have chosen to play. If a coach chooses not to be a good teacher, they can get out of the way and let them PLAY and learn without being coached, like millions of children did growing up... How many great skateboarding, beach volleyball or BMX biking coaches do you know? What, none? Do you know there are tens of millions of athletes doing those sports, yet they have no coach? They coach themselves? Gosh, maybe I am not as important as I thought I was, and I had better get better at teaching my motivated players. What, you want help in motivating them now? Heck they ARE motivated, for they are there at practice, risking in public rather than at home watching TV or anonymously playing video games.

Just shy of 100 years ago, long before those TV and video games existed to take kids off the playgrounds and inside to be less active, Teddy Roosevelt in his "Citizenship in a Republic," speech at the Sorbonne, Paris, April 23, 1910

*"It is not the critic who counts: not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly, who errs and comes up short again and again, because there is no effort without error or shortcoming, but who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, who spends himself for a worthy cause; who, at the best, knows, in the end, the triumph of high achievement, and who, at the worst, if he fails, at least he fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who knew neither victory nor defeat."*

Finally, at the risk of being politically incorrect, for I have an amazing daughter not just a son, I share one last poem, Rudyard Kipling's "IF" for as food for thought, as we are teaching far more than our sport. We are working hard to grow our game and develop amazing leaders.

*If you can keep your head when all about you  
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you;  
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,  
But make allowance for their doubting too;  
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,  
Or, being lied about, don't deal in lies,  
Or, being hated, don't give way to hating,  
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise*

*If you can dream - and not make dreams your master;  
If you can think - and not make thoughts your aim;  
If you can meet with triumph and disaster  
And treat those two imposters just the same;  
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken  
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,*



*Or watch the things you gave your life to broken,  
And stoop and build 'em up with wornout tools;*

*If you can make one heap of all your winnings  
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,  
And lose, and start again at your beginnings  
And never breath a word about your loss;  
If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew  
To serve your turn long after they are gone,  
And so hold on when there is nothing in you  
Except the Will which says to them: "Hold on";*

*If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,  
Or walk with kings - nor lose the common touch;  
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you;  
If all men count with you, but none too much;  
If you can fill the unforgiving minute  
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run -  
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,  
And - which is more - you'll be a Man, my son!*

So as always, you can email me at [john.kessel@usav.org](mailto:john.kessel@usav.org) or leave your comments below and thanks for getting this far in developing your coaching.

## National Conversations on Good Coaching

March 9, 2009

Almost a year ago, Positive Coaching Alliance (PCA), a Stanford University-based non-profit organization dedicated to transforming youth sports and USAV Affiliated Organization, joined with USA Volleyball and seven other of the nation's top youth sports groups - serving five million athletes at the high school level and younger, in a new initiative called the "National Conversation on Good Coaching." The others seeking parents and coaches to discuss these case studies included the [American Youth Soccer Organization](#); [Institute for International Sport](#); [Little League International](#); [Michigan State University Institute for the Study of Youth Sports](#); [Pop Warner Little Scholars, Inc.](#); [USA Water Polo](#); and [US Lacrosse](#).

Since then, three other organizations joined up, including the USAV Affiliated Organization our CAP program with the AVCA will be bringing out an online coaching course with, the [National Federation of State High School Associations](#), plus the [American Medical Society for Sports Medicine](#) and [National Association for Sport and Physical Education](#). It is with NASPE that my next month's four hour session on youth volleyball as a lifetime sport for PE teachers to better instruct and program, will be taught. This is taking place at the National AAHPERD Convention in Tampa, Florida so hope to see some of you there. So USA Volleyball has been in good company, and the PCA has been making a difference through their hundreds of clinics and other outreach programs, under the leadership of founder and Executive Director Jim Thompson.

In this conversation, Jim led with these words. *"There are a lot of misconceptions about what constitutes good coaching for youth athletes, partly because people often confuse professional sports and youth sports, which are fundamentally different activities with different goals. If we can get people all over the country talking about what constitutes good -- and bad! -- coaching, it will be a major step toward ensuring a positive, character-building environment for youth and high school athletes."*

So now that our website allows us to outreach better, I have listed the conversations in order and by topic below. Creating a positive environment to better grow the game and give kids the best experience is what we are all about. Simply print these case studies out and take to practice or a tournament for discussion. I have listed all eleven to date, including the opening situation. The queries and action plans are in the pdfs connected to each topic. Take advantage of these conversations to help grow the game!

#1 - **Old Yeller** *Coach Coates is a yeller. He yells constantly during practices and games. He yells at his players and criticizes them when they do things wrong. He even yells when they seem to be doing things right. His teams consistently have winning records, and as far as you can tell, the players seem to handle the yelling without getting down on themselves or each other.*

[Download for your team](#)

#2 - **The Specialist** *As practice is winding down, Coach Hastings motions you over for a private conversation about your child, who shows enough raw athletic ability to excel. Coach tells you your child has great potential but should specialize as soon as possible, eschewing other sports and training year-round, especially if you hope for a college scholarship for your child. Coach Hastings is a technically skilled coach who has had a number of athletes earn college scholarships.*

[Download for your team](#)

#3 - **The Limits of Sportsmanship** *Sara Tucholsky's first college home run was a 3-run shot in the 2nd inning*

of a scoreless game to determine whether her Western Oregon (WOU) team or Central Washington (CWU) would qualify for the NCAA Division 2 softball tournament. Rounding first, Tucholsky's knee gave out and she collapsed. Mallory Holtman, CWU's star 1st-baseman, reacted to Tucholsky in pain on the ground. She and teammate Liz Wallace carried Tucholsky, allowing her to score the third run for WOU, which went on to win 4-2.

[Download for your team](#)

#4 - **State of Play** Several weeks into the season, you are frustrated by your child's lack of playing time. The team is successful on the scoreboard, winning more often than losing, usually by comfortable margins. As far as you can tell, other parents and athletes on the team seem satisfied with the status quo, even ones who also are sitting on the bench. But you wonder if a coach has a responsibility to get players into games even when there are no external rules or requirements to do so. Your child has not complained.

[Download for your team](#)

#5 - **The Hot-Air Fan** In the stands at your child's game, you hear another spectator berating the officials. Over time, this fan's criticism grows louder and more pointed, with a sprinkling of foul language. You notice other spectators glancing at the fan, and you sense a volatile situation developing. None of the coaches seem to be paying attention to what is happening in the stands and you wonder what your responsibility is in this situation.

[Download for your team](#)

#6 - **Collision Course** In a game that has grown increasingly out of control with rougher and rougher play, your child is shaken up, though not seriously injured, in a collision with an opponent that seemed intentional and unsportsmanlike.

[Download for your team](#)

#7 - **The Ringers** Before your child's game starts, you notice the opposing team looks much different than it did earlier in the season. You are certain the opponent has recruited "ringers" against league rules.

[Download for your team](#)

#8 - **Trophy Time** The league your 10-year-old plays in does not award participation trophies, but some team's coaches buy trophies and distribute them to their players. Your child is not on one of those teams.

[Download for your team](#)

#9 - **Televised Teachable Moments** While watching sports on TV with your child, you see coverage of an incident, such as any of those listed in Positive Coaching Alliance's Bottom 10 Moments in Sports or Top 10 Moments in Sports ([www.positivecoach.org/bottom10.aspx](http://www.positivecoach.org/bottom10.aspx)). Realizing that this is a "teachable moment," how do you react?

[Download for your team](#)

**#10 - When Nice is not Enough** *Your child's coach means well, and the players generally enjoy practices and games. But midway through the season you sense the team is not meeting its potential in terms of effort and wins. You know enough about the sport to think you can help your child's coach improve the situation.*

[Download for your team](#)

**#11 - Working the Refs** *In an intense regular season game, your child's coach is "working" the refs for calls in an increasingly loud, aggressive manner, though without foul language or personal attacks. Your interpretation of the body language of your child's teammates indicates to you that they are uncomfortable, and at one point your child makes eye contact with you, seemingly embarrassed by the coach's behavior.*

[Download for your team](#)

Comments and more conversations with other sports parents and coaches can be found online at [PCA's website](#) on the specific topic.

### **The Tragedy of the Commons:** March 3, 2009

I am starting with a look back into an article that remains timely in this day and age, Garret Hardin's 1968 piece called "The Tragedy of the Commons." Many decades ago, I graduated from Colorado College with a degree focusing on bionomics. My thesis, "Towards a Resourced Based Bionomic Society", was written before computers, so an IBM Selectric with correcting tape got pounded hard as 126 pages of double spaced type were created, using many hundreds of draft pages, literally cutting and pasting with scissors and tape to make the manuscript flow. When I see what my kids can do now, that old sense of in my day "I had to walk uphill to school in snow" flashes, before I give thanks to the way I can now write thoughts and ideas on a computer screen, and not waste paper in my errors.

Later on, my *Encyclopedia of Volleyball* was written on a rooftop in Camogli, Italy, using an Olivetti typewriter of course, while I was in the country playing professionally along with my wife Laurel Brassey. She was a member of the 1980 Olympic boycotted team who qualified for Moscow, and we lived in a magical place, a penthouse apartment, 22 Via del Isola....built almost 1,000 years ago (I live in a house built in 1899 now, and my kids think it is ancient...), our clothesline attached out the bathroom window to a 1,200 year old castle wall. Camogli is a blend of two Italian words, Casa (home) and Mogli (wife) as it was a fishing village for centuries where the men would go to sea, and leave all their wives at home. If you get over there, the town right on the Mediterranean Sea, southeast of Genoa, just one train stop ahead of the better known town of Portofino. The magic of Facebook means now several of my former teammates are my "friends" and we get to see how each other is faring some 25 years later. I am happy to see Paulo, our setter, is growing the game by coaching, and others have children who are playing this sport for a lifetime.

I made the jump to a computer when Jim Coleman and I bought Kaypro "portable" computers. Using the CPM operating system, Jim had a dual 512K floppy version, while I splurged and bought the 10 megabyte hard drive. These devices weighed 30lbs, and were suitcase sized, with a 5 ¼" green phosphor screen. Using Wordstar, I wrote coaching articles for the National Development Camps and many other groups, which I still reference today. As Moore's law moves along ahead of schedule, I now find myself owning 1 TB drives, and using an ITouch to check email, listen to music, watch movies, and have 32 GB in device that I can hold in the palm of my hand - using a color screen that is about 4 x 2" - not that much smaller of a screen than my Kaypro, but more powerful by about 5 factors of 10. Amazing, yet more amazing things are happening on the horizon, you

only need to go to <http://www.wired.com/> and see what the future might bring.

So that long historical introduction, brings me simply to the impact I felt when reading Garret Hardin's piece back in the early 1970s. It comes to mind in part as we at USAV are dealing with spam and the creative ways spammers attempt to force you to read their mass emails. Just this week, our filters were getting so strong, words like "document," and phrases like "If kids" are being blocked, for reasons that took us awhile to determine why. I think all coaches should read about the Tragedy of the Commons as part of background in Game Theory - and while you can google it up, I suggest starting with Wikipedia's entry at: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tragedy\\_of\\_the\\_commons](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tragedy_of_the_commons)

This comes to mind in part because of the work the Positive Coaching Alliance is doing in creating such great National Conversations on Good Coaching. The most recent one is on "Working the Refs" and can be read and commented on by clicking here. It also shows insights into why A-Rod and so many other sportspeople enhance their own body through chemicals as the US Anti Doping Agency and the World Anti Doping Agency fight to keep up with these physical, and illegal, enhancements. USADA has some great reading material free of charge which you can print, use, hand out to your programs, especially in their "Clean Sport and You" program. Some solid optimal Dietary intake information, and interesting ethical topics and more can be found at: <http://www.usada.org/resources>

Off to Iowa in a couple of days to speak with over 300 coaches at their State Volleyball Coaching clinic put on by Championship Productions. I am coming in early, to work with the Iowa RVA on some boys development projects, and whatever else they think we can do to grow the game while I am local. Mary Wise is speaking too, always a treat to hear her thoughts on the game. Thanks for all you do to help athletes have a great time playing volleyball and learning life skills to boot.

### **To Sit or Stand During Matches:** February 27, 2009

This week I got an email from a coach, who asked a great question - sit or stand during match play? Bill, a coach in GEVA, and Peter, from the USOC who I collaborate a lot with on the science of volleyball, have kindly said I can use our email discussion in today's blog, so here goes:

#### **From: Bill Lee**

Hi John, Bill Lee from DIGS Volleyball in NJ. Scott Mose says hello, he was re-telling us the stories about your Cobra invention:-)



I recently attended the CAP session in NY, I really appreciate you and the staff taking the time to spread your knowledge and passion for the sport. I have done my best in the last month to spread the word.



We are having a debate that we could use some help with. Speaking with a few coaches the question was raised as to the benefits of having your players off the court sit or stand. We were always lead to believe that allowing players to sit would make them stiff. One of our coaches noted that not only does the Stanford Women's team sit but all basketball players sit and they are able to enter the game and immediately contribute. Basketball is slightly different in that you have an opportunity to run which could aid in getting loose. Anyway, do you have any thoughts or has USAV done any studies that would suggest one position over the other?

Thanks

Bill Lee

**On Wed, Feb 25, 2009 John Kessel wrote:**

Bill, what a GREAT question. When I get such simple but important questions, I oft bring in a USOC Sports Whiz who happens to be a vball player, Peter Vint. Can I use your email to make into a blog post on the topic, once we get Peter's take, and mine too?

For me, the "study" is called recess. They happen in tens of thousands of schools, mostly Monday thru Friday, in the morning and then the afternoon. The athletes are found sitting, on very small chairs at very small desks often, pushing pencils the size of a log across paper, drawing outside the lines with crayons, being perplexed about why zero times any number is still zero, and even listening to stories in comfy chairs. Then WHAMMO, a bell rings, and these dormant jocks go from zero to 60 faster than any Porsche ever did. They maintain that speed for some 10-15 minutes before decelerating from warp speed, down to below light speed, and return to sitting. They do this, by my observation, an average of three times a day, morning recess, lunch, and afternoon recess.

What I find important is that, I have never seen any of those kids jogging before they go to warp speed....saying "Hey, wait up Billy, wait for me, I have to jog first....nor do I see a single playground athlete saying "Hey wait Kess, I have to stretch, hold the game of until I am ready OK?" ... and perhaps more importantly, I don't see them coming in back to sitting, saying "Oh gosh, I pulled a muscle again..." I do see them coming in early, the school nurse, with skinned knees, and even a sprained ankle - from mistakes learned in new forms of dodging in a tag game, or from inadvertent swing set errors made while attempting a triple pike dismount, and more than a few balls-to-a-face-missed throws and such, as they learn how to PLAY.

I have attached, for both Peter and you, two articles related to the topic, where the CDC and over 100 other studies show that stretching does not reduce injuries. So my response...whatever floats your players' boat. Standing, sitting, they both are OK options just keep them mentally engaged. I would refrain from letting them sleep however, as having beds in the gym would take up too much room.

Peter, what think you?

**From Bill Lee**

Subject: Re: To Sit or Stand

Thanks John, feel free to use the e-mail on your blog.

We have an air mattress for the girls to lay on in between matches on long tournament days. We figured it was better than the cold concrete floor but maybe that's the problem:-)

Thanks for the feedback and the articles, I will share with the group. I will check the blog for any updates. One other thing, what was the name of the little book you carry in your brief case to share with your team? "Would you rather dare book" I'm not having much success at Barnes and Noble asking using that phrase;-)

**From: Peter Vint**

Hi guys:

I am not aware of any systematic study of sitting versus "inactive standing" on performance. It'd sure be easy enough to do. That's not to say such work does not exist, but rather that I am not currently aware of it if it does. That said, I've attached two somewhat recent review articles on the performance benefits of active versus passive warm up. In general, the effects are small and may or may not affect manifest themselves in a sport like volleyball. While assessments have been made on the effect of temperature on joint and muscle stiffness, any implication that this is related to injury remains speculative.

My professional opinion is that there may be situations when an athlete needs to sit for purpose of either instruction or recovery or medical attention. Outside of this, either standing or seated would likely be okay but I'd recommend some sporadic activity (jumping or running or other movements during timeouts or game breaks) to reduce muscle stiffness. I love John's recess \*\*\*\*oggy and think it's a good one here. Ironically, if athletes were seated but allowed/encouraged to cheer their team on, they may actually move around more (getting out of their seats then sitting back down) than if they were standing.

Thinking of the issue on the whole, I think there are a couple of competing issues but I don't know that either is truly significant. One is that either standing or sitting may be more conducive to "keeping an athlete's head in the game". Match awareness may be a more important consideration than any difference in neuromuscular performance (which I would anticipate to be relatively small). That said, in my experience, this may be more affected by who an athlete is sitting or standing next to than whether they're actually sitting or standing. The second issue is that while we may naturally consider standing to be the more demanding or active position, it may lend itself to modest differential stiffening of the quadriceps and hamstrings. If this is an issue at all, it would likely be manifest in athletes with some level o\*\*\*\*nee instability. I really can't say that this would be an issue, but I'll explain and you can judge. Note there is a bit of detail in this discussion and it might be more \*\*\*\*bersome than it's worth. Read on at your own peril.

In standing, the knees and hips are extended and therefore the three single-joint quadriceps muscles (but probably not the two-joint rectus femoris) will shorten and may modestly stiffen in this position if there is no sporadic activity. The hamstrings will likely be somewhat less affected as two of the three muscles span both the hip and knee. While knee extension would tend to lengthen the hamstring, hip extension would tend to shorten it. The net effect on muscle length change is probably about zero. While sitting, the opposite happens.

Here the affected quadriceps muscles will stretch due to the flexed position of the knee. The hamstrings, now stretched by the flexed hip but shortened by the flexed knee again probably stays at a relatively constant length. So, differentially, sitting versus standing could result in somewhat, albeit modestly different muscle lengths at which stiffness may set in. This could theoretically result in differences in levels of initial quadriceps force production.

In sum, my impression is that the duration in which an athlete would sit or stand would likely be inconsequential in terms of neuromuscular performance.

Peter

**From: Bill Lee**

I agree with the concern over what athletes are doing while they are sitting, especially teenage girls!

We talked about them taking stats or similar duties to keep them involved with the match.

During the recent President's Day tournament I watched one team with a rule that states the bench must stand if the team was down by 5 points or more.

Very interesting insight on possible impact of the affected muscle groups.

We appreciate the feedback and will look for the blog and continued discussion.

Thanks

Bill

**From: John Kessel**

and the NYT is even on recess duty... Thanks Peter, very important topic me thinks just in general, thus blogging on it...kess

[http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/24/health/24well.html?\\_r=1&ref=health](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/24/health/24well.html?_r=1&ref=health)

The book Bill wanted to know about is called Zobmondo.

The articles we shared are not all online, so cannot reference them, but here are some links you might find of value:

Runners World 2004

Quoting a section of their lengthy article:

"Ian Shrier, M.D., a past president of the Canadian Society of Sports Medicine, has been drilling into the stretching literature since the early 1990s. In a 1999 paper titled "Stretching Before Exercise Does Not Reduce the Risk of Local Muscle Injury," Dr. Shrier lists five reasons why stretching shouldn't be expected to work. Among them: stretching won't change eccentric muscle activity (when a muscle simultaneously contracts and

lengthens, as in downhill running), which is believed to cause most injuries; stretching can produce damage at the skeletal level; and stretching appears to mask muscle pain, which could cause the exerciser to ignore this key pre-injury signal. He concludes: "The basic science and clinical evidence today suggests that stretching before exercise is more likely to cause injury than to prevent it."

Regarding Peter's articles, both were by David Bishop from Western Australia. If you search for "David Bishop passive warm up" you should get plenty of links to where you can read the abstracts, or buy the articles, for example:

<http://cat.inist.fr/?aModele=afficheN&cpsidt=14836603>

Feel free to comment below and share your thoughts with everyone, or email me at [john.kessel@usav.org](mailto:john.kessel@usav.org) I will be letting the USA Volleyball Sports Medicine and Performance Commission know of this thread, and ask them to comment as well, if they feel they have anything more to add for us all. Again, thanks to Bill for the great question, and keep on growing the game!

## **The Art of Strategy**

February 18, 2009

One of the things that I find fascinating is the "volleyball canyon" regarding the mental game. To read about more of these gaps between what the game itself contains, and what coaches train in practice, [CLICK HERE](#) to read "Volleyball Canyons to Bridge." In this article my amazement comes from when you ask a coach first, what percentage of the game do they think is mental - and they reply on the average, "eighty percent." Then I ask how much they feel they are training mentally in practice, and the response is on average "ten percent."

I also think this is why my coaching philosophy can be summed up in three words " Develop Amazing Leaders," as even these writings and suggestions are working to that end. Thus in my practices, my goals include as examples to:

...get my players to understand why a coach is doing what they are doing

...teach where to serve themselves (and why) - so that during the match - you will never see me calling serving zones in a match

...understand and guide how they can impact the flow and speed of a match - so that by the end of the season, I seek that the captain/team can be calling the match

...hear and guide their thoughts and decision making - so that time outs go from coach input only, to player input/discussion by season's end.

So to those coaches reading this blog, you have seen, as part of the effort to grow the game, several books to read to better assist you as a leader of our sport into bettering the experience everyone has in our sport. That is a core concept within our sport on the court - to better the ball - and is no less important to everyone off the court. Today's reading suggestion, [The Art of Strategy](#), will help anyone, including coaches and parents, on how the science of Game theory impacts every part of our lives.

Perhaps I should first quote Steven Levitt, coauthor of [Freakonomics](#). I have raved about Levitt's book before, so when he says "This wonderful book proves that game theory is too interesting and important to be relegated to arcane academic journals. I am hard-pressed to think of another book I've read that can match the combination of practical insights and reading enjoyment in [The Art of Strategy](#). I liked it so much I read it twice" - I react.

Game theory is a relatively new science - some seventy years in existence is all. You might have seen it first in "The Beautiful Mind" movie. There have been two Nobel prizes awarded in the science - in 1994 to Harsanyi, Nash and Selten, and in 2005 to Aumann and Schelling. When you add in work in mechanism design and information economics, both closely game theory connected, we can add the 1996 Nobel Prize to Vickrey and Mirrless, the 2001 prize to Akerlof, Spence and Stiglitz and as recently as 2007 to Hurwicz, Maskin and Myerson. I share these names so you might google more on their writings, after you get through reading Avinash Dixit and Barry Nalebuff's book, who also authored [Thinking Strategically](#) in 1991.

If I have not scared you off yet by noting all this Nobel Prize stuff, I think you will find this book a great guide to being a better coach. Unlike their first book, this new one not only brings to light new research, applications and development in game theory - it is far better in weaving how cooperation, not just competition, to make the best strategic decisions. The author's first preface in 1991 wrote "strategic thinking is the art of outdoing an adversary, knowing that the adversary is trying to do the same thing to you." They now add "It is also the art of finding ways to cooperate, even when others are motivated by self-interest, not benevolence. It is the art of convincing others, and even yourself, to do what you say. It is the art of interpreting and revealing information. It is the art of putting yourself in others' shoes so as to predict and influence what they do." Indeed, Nalebuff even coined the word, and wrote a book in 1996 called [Co-opetition](#).



Some might think, from my previous reading suggestions, like Predictably Irrational, that it is not possible to bring game theory into the mix. The authors write "some of the most exciting new insights have come from the recent advances in behavioral game theory, which incorporates human psychology and biases into the mix and thus adds a social element to the theory. As a result, game theory now does a much better job dealing with people as they are, rather than as we might like them to be. We incorporate these insights into our discussions....game theory is too interesting and important to leave to the academic journals. The insights prove useful in many endeavors - business, politics, sports, and everyday social interactions. Thus we translated the important insights back into English and replaced theoretical arguments with illustrative examples and case studies."

When a book by page five is showing what game Microsoft CEO Steven Ballmer is using in job interviews, and by page eight, has asides called "Trip to the Gym" (thanks to Financial Times book critic Andrew St. George saying back in 1991 "it is a trip to the gym for the reasoning facilities"), and their #3 strategy tale as "The Hot Hand," -- I am hooked. I know it is part of a coach's way of adding deliberate practice to our training, so we can

better train our athletes and interact with those we are impacting.

Kess

[John.kessel@usav.org](mailto:John.kessel@usav.org)

<http://www.teamusa.org/USA-Volleyball/Grassroots/Grow-The-Game-Blog.aspx> for all the blogs written to date

## **Ancora Imparo**

February 10, 2009

Lately my former teammates from my Italian Pro League days in the early 1980s, have been resurfacing into my life through Facebook of all places. Paulo Rossi, my setter, is now a coach, Massimo Raffaldi, is a doctor, and Giuseppe Gallina - whose family owned the most delicious pastry stop in the country ( a must stop on the way back from practice en route to the train station) just got married. It has been a hoot to reconnect, force out my written Spitalian (that is Spanish interwoven with Italian, to keep my old friends guessing), and to reach back in time to those two wonderful years where I based in Camolgi on the Mediterranean sea (one town up the coast from Portofino, a place most have heard of) in a magical penthouse apartment - Via Del Isola 22. Out the bathroom window, the clothesline attached to a 1,000 year old castle wall. Out the front window, you could toss a piece of popcorn into the harbor.

One of the phrases I learned there, in story told about Michelangelo, was that he said when he was 87 - "Ancora Imparo" - Still I am learning. It is the way great teachers stay great, and great coaches too. So I keep sharing, as part of growing the game, books that have impacted my life. I brought out copies of my favorite 20 books to last month's CAP III group of 17 coaches, and spoke about how each one was impacting my work. One of them was a book by Carol Dweck a Stanford professor. I first became aware of her research though my work with the Positive Coaching Alliance, where I am an instructor. Jim Thompson shared several things, from her new book, at the time, as this was 2006, called [Mindset](#).

A list of the table of contents helps you see what you are getting into, so here it is:

### **The Mindsets**

*Why Do People Differ?*

*What Does This All Mean For You?*

*A View From The Two Mindsets*

*So, What's New?*

*Self-Insight: Who Has Accurate Views Of Their Assets And Limitations?*

*What's In Store*

## **Inside the Mindsets**

*Is Success About Learning-Or Proving You're Smart?*

*Mindsets Change The Meaning Of Failure*

*Mindsets Change The Meaning Of Effort*

*Questions And Answers*

## **The Truth About Ability and Accomplishment**

*Mindsets And School Achievement*

*Is Artistic Ability A Gift?*

*The Danger Of Praise And Positive Labels*

So it was a nice surprise to see the USOC share this article in their newest issue of ***Olympic Coach***, a magazine from the Performance Services department which by way of linking on our MVP CDs on Growing the Game, we have been signing up hundreds of coaches to free of charge...as should you if you are not already on the list.

Here is the [article](#), read it and be yet learning... I know I will be reading all the way this week to and from the Dominican Republic on the many flights it takes to get there, for my NORCECA Tech/Coaches meetings - Kessel

## **How to Make Coaches Great**

February 6, 2009

One of the sites I frequent often is posting new videos this week, as the TED conference for 2009 is happening right now. Yesterday I was talking with Andy Pai from our Coaching Education Program department, and realized he did not know of this website, which I share at every CAP, IMPACT , Webinar, or clinic I teach at since the TED.com site inception years ago. So today, I simply want to say,

***Go browse it.***

You will hopefully get lost in the options and ideas, get inspired and learn - as each remarkable presenter speaks for their maximum 20 minutes on whatever topic they are covering.

My favorite is Sir Ken Robinson, called "Do Schools Kill Creativity?"

[http://www.ted.com/index.php/talks/ken\\_robinson\\_says\\_schools\\_kill\\_creativity.html](http://www.ted.com/index.php/talks/ken_robinson_says_schools_kill_creativity.html)

It is humorous, brilliant and applies to our entire sports pipeline, not just schools. Take 20 minutes and watch this as soon as you can, if you have not seen it yet. When he speaks of Sirena, it is an 11 year old violinist who can be seen in the clip here

[http://www.ted.com/talks/sirena\\_huang\\_dazzles\\_on\\_violin.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/sirena_huang_dazzles_on_violin.html)

The one that may help others learn of TED and the ideas therein, is this week's Bill Gates speech.

[http://www.ted.com/talks/bill\\_gates\\_unplugged.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/bill_gates_unplugged.html)

The former founder of Microsoft talks first about his Foundation's new work on eradicating malaria, and brings the point home by releasing a bunch of mosquitoes into the audience as "there's no reason only poor people should have the experience" Then, at exactly eight minutes into the clip, he asks "How Do You Make a Teacher Great?"... Some very interesting facts come to light - including (at about 12 min) that after three years of teaching, their teaching quality does not vary. Overwhelmingly it is your past performance that determines teaching quality. Knowledge Is Power (KIP) Charter Schools are covered on how they make teaching better - ideas which transfer to sport in its dynamic environment - setting the right tone and involving everyone. What these great teacher development schools are doing is found in a book called [Work Hard, Be Nice](#), and Gates said he will send everyone attending TED a free copy of the book - I guess that is today's purchase...

Amazingly, Teacher improvement data has been blocked in New York from being used in teach evaluations...Sharing great courses can be shared by online video and DVD, which is exactly what we are working on at USAV for coaching education...This summer you will find some of these great ideas coming to life online when the USAV/NFHS/AVCA project is finished and available for all. For now, it is off to Washington DC to do a clinic with Stacy Sykora and Tom Hogan, including some economically disadvantaged program outreach there as part of growing the game...

## **The Magic Hockey Helmet and More**

February 2, 2009

I spent over half an hour this morning on the phone with a parent, who had been ejected from his daughter's 12-and-under volleyball tournament yesterday. He has a daughter who plays another sport, where referee heckling is part of the culture and he is struggling with learning the culture of volleyball. It was a very enjoyable conversation all-in-all, evolving from a "who do I write my letter of complaint to?" to a philosophical discussion on who the game is for, and leadership/role modeling lessons which can be learned, along with the randomness of sport and the great effort shown in certain plays in last \*\*\*\*ht's great Super Bowl.

I often speak in my clinics about changing the role of the referee and the impact this would have on the game. Specifically, what I posit would be to simply allow the referees to heckle, jeer and even spin their head like seen in the Exorcist, at any "bad" line up/"missed" time out opportunity/playset error and more, by the coaching staffs. Of course, the referees would also get to do the same to any parent after their child erred – so that we wonderfully get to hear things like "Whose child is THAT? She/he is TERRIBLE, I can't believe she missed that easy pass, what is she/he blind? Do you PAY for this child's training, because if so, you need a refund..." and ad naseum. Thankfully, the referees, even those in their teens, are far more professional than the coaches and parents, and they do not give out such drivel. It is a point.

Hockey Canada and USA Hockey partnered several years ago to make a brilliant series of 30 second clips, which end with either "What i\*\*\*\*ids treated us the way we treat them" and "If it is wrong, here, what makes it right at the rink." It was part of their "Relax. It's Just a Game" campaign in 2002-2004. USAV got permission



to share them on the MVP CDs, as they are wonderful parent education clips. They can be found at the links below:

- **Click Here for the 2002-03 campaign material, PSA, radio clips, print material**
- **Click Here for the 2003-04 campaign material, PSA, radio clips, print material**

Well, leave it to some nine-year-old Canadian hockey player doing a school assignment to add another GREAT piece to YouTube in the same vein. To view a YouTube clip on **Magic Hockey Helmet**, **click here**. It is a MUST see, and must share to others as we continue to remind ourselves on how sports are for the KIDS, and must not be acted upon as if they are much older, or even professional. Miller got on Canada AM this morning, so this video has already been seen 100,000 times, but my bet is it will go viral as we share his insights and humor via the magic of his helmet.

Dave Epperson, founder with his wife Bernice of the famous Volleyball Festival (now moving to Phoenix in summer of 2009) has been hard at work over the years working to help parents and other sports leaders get "Sport's Promise" to shine, and eliminate the more negative sides seen in sport. His work can be found at [Parents For Good Sports](#). USAV Affiliate Organization - the Positive Coach Alliance (PCA) - also has been working with USA Volleyball on an excellent program called the "[PCA Coaching Tools](#)".

Next up for me, a trip to Washington, D.C. to work over the weekend with parents, players and coaches, along side Stacy Sykora and Tom Hogan from our silver medal women's team in Beijing. Then three days later it is off to the NORCECA Technical and Coaches Commission in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, where we will be holding our 5th Annual NORCECA/FIVB Development Centre Teachers and Educators coaching clinic, with three-time Olympic Gold medal Cuba coach Eugenio George and some other great zonal coaches. This year the focus, per FIVB Development Commission member Mark Tennant of Canada, will be to build on the "Volleyball in the School Symposium" I spoke at in Canada in 2007, for the elementary age groups. Some good developmental things still happening at the 5-12 year old level and will share what I learn on my return.

Thanks for all you do to help grow our sport. We know these other resources above can help you in this adventure – share more if you know of great ways to bring the magic and sports promise to build better kids and programs.

## **How We Make Decisions**

January 30, 2009

Most of you reading my work over the years understand the importance I place on improving the most important skill in our sport – reading. As in reading the opponent, anticipating, judging what is going on etc. Stu Sherman took me back over 20 years ago to when his brother Craig, on his way to being the head coach of Mizzou, had his camp group sit and read the newspaper the first morning when that session was to be taught, so I wanted to make that term more clear, and not get tricked again.

So I have been excited to this week another must have book for any big picture thinking coach's library – Jonah Lehrer's How We Decide. Just a review of the eight pages of the index provides a great glimpse into why I have pre-ordered the book and was delighted to get it this week, well ahead of it's Feb 9th official release date. The first chapter that Amazon lets you read, I simply have to quote one part of, and note the importance of some of

the points made, when tied into Malcom Gladwell's excellent article on quarterbacks previously covered. I love how Leher brings forth the randomness and chaos of sport in his description of the decision making job of an NFL quarterback. Other sections bring back the fallacy of the hot hand - tying in how the brain and the chemicals therein deal with this and other decision making. An enjoyable read to be sure...

With the High Performance and CAP I/II/III Clinics just finished, I have again looked back on the importance of growing the game wide and far, so that the USA National Team coaches have a better chance of finding more talent, while working also on letting the players who are late bloomers, blossom into the great sport talent they have hidden inside. I put together a quiz on this topic, which I include below.

### Match Quiz – Match the Athlete To Their Sports Background

#### Athletes

- A. Michael Jordan
- B. Larry Walker C.
- Kenny Lofton D.
- Cynthia Cooper E.
- Scottie Pippen
- F. Sammy Sosa
- G. Mark McGwire
- H. Hakeem Olajuwon
- I. John Stockton
- J. Jackie Joyner-Kersey
- K. Chris Drury
- L. Tom Brady
- M. Mike Whitmarsh
- N. Bart Starr

#### Sports Background

1. Played only basketball in college at Arizona
2. Was only 5'11" as a senior in High School

3. Not recruited out of high school
4. Wanted to be a pro ice hockey goalie, but was cut
5. Did not start playing ball until 14 years old
6. Did not start playing ball until 16 years old
7. Outstanding goalkeeper in soccer
8. Was a top college basketball player at UCLA
9. Was cut from his high school hoops team at 16 years old
10. Eyesight as a child was 20/500
11. Pitched in the Little League World Series
12. Played pro basketball before winning an Olympic medal in another team sport
13. Drafted 199th yet by his 4th season had two Superbowl MVP awards
14. Drafted 17th round yet won seven league titles

So Brady and MJ are in this quiz above (answers at the end of the blog for those who just can't wait to know if they passed...). With Michael Jordan, arguably now known as the best basketball player in the history of the sport, it is amazing that:

1. At age 16 (when many are being cut from volleyball programs at too many levels), he was cut from his HS team...
2. At 18, only three colleges really recruited him...and...
3. In the NBA draft, he was not picked first, but third.

If that is not a statement for keeping as many in our sport as long as possible, then I ask you to consider these facts of Tom Brady...Drafted 199th in the NFL Draft, Pro Football Weekly had this to say about him – “Poor build. Very skinny and narrow. Ended the '99 season weighing 195 pounds and still looks like a rail at 211. Lacks great physical stature and strength. Can get pushed down more easily than you'd like.” Reminds me of what they said about Wayne Gretzky, the “Great One” in the sport of hockey – that if you put a big fur coat on him, he looks like a human pipe cleaner... The value of play in developing decision making skills is for another topic, along with the need to get more “street volleyball” being played... Still, yesterday I looked at a picture of the [Pond Hockey Championships](#), where on 25 outdoor rinks on one section of Lake Michigan, 250 teams got the chance to PLAY the game the way Gretzky grew up, and could only smile in understanding. A competing group did another hundred teams in Minnesota - <http://www.pondhockeynac.com> the weekend before.

So back to how decisions are made...Lehrer writes wonderfully about the chaos of sport, saying “ The quick

decisions made by a quarterback on a football field provide a window into the inner workings of the brain. In the space of a few frenetic seconds, before a linebacker crushes him into the ground, an NFL quarterback has to make a series of hard choices. The pocket is collapsing around him—the pocket begins to collapse before it exists – but he can't flinch or wince. His eyes must stay focused downfield, looking for some meaningful sign amid the action, and open man on a crowded field. Throwing the ball is the easy part.”

When we sit at home and watch from all our camera angles and the “eye in the sky” it is nothing like being on the ground with all this happening...as Lehrer then notes...”But this view of the game is deeply misleading. After the ball is snapped, the ordered sequence of neat X's and O's that fill the spiral-bound playbook degenerates into a street brawl. There's a symphony of grunts and groans and the meaty echoes of fat men hitting the hard ground. Receivers get pushed off their routes, passing angles get cut off, and inside blitzes derail the best intentions. The offensive line is an unpredictable wrestling match. Before the quarterback can make an effective decision, he needs to assimilate all of this new information and be aware of the approximate location of every player on the field. The savage chaos of the game, the way every play is a mixture of careful planning and risky improvisation is what makes the job of an NFL quarterback so difficult. Even when he's immersed in the violence – the defensive line clawing at his body – the quarterback has to stand still and concentrate. He needs to look past the mayhem and make sense of all the moving bodies...Each pass is really a guess, a hypothesis launched into the air, but the best quarterbacks find ways to make better guesses....”

I hope all of you reading this get a chance to benefit from the research and better understanding of how we make decisions, as we journey together to become better teachers of our sport and better at growing the game in that process.

Oh, and for those who want to know...

A-9 B-4 C-1 D-6 E-2 F-5 G-10 H-7 I-3 J-8 K-11 L-13 M-12 N-14

## More Street Volleyball Please

January 26, 2009



Hanging out at this year's NCAA Volleyball Championships in chilly Omaha, Neb., one cannot help but be warmed by the wonderful hospitality of the Cornhusker Nation and Great Plains members. Wednesday night, thanks to Sue Mailhot, commissioner of this region &ndash - which leads all 40 RVAs in growth/membership per capita - USAV staff spent time with the Great Plains Board of directors.

I got a chance to catch up to Alli Aldrich, USA Sitting National team Paralympian, and see her silver medal from Beijing. I also got to meet new and old friends who grow the game so

well in this volleyball passionate state- including former commissioner Dave Spencer and USA National Men's Sitting Team member Brent Rassmussen.

One of the topics that came up was the AVCA Pre-Convention Seminar that ended on Wednesday. To a packed house, Hugh McCutcheon took the attendees on the Men's National Team's gold-medal journey in Beijing. Later Sue Woodstra, Diane French and Joanie Powell did the same thing for the Women's Team.

At the dinner Wednesday night, I spoke more about the USOC seminar on maintaining expert performance that I have previously mentioned here. The presentation by Mark Williams on talent development was on my mind, and I wanted to share one of the most important things I learned here.

In England, at the age of eight, thousands of kids are accepted into Soccer Academies. They go to school and learn one sport - football, the number-one sport in the world, which we call soccer. That we have to call the world's most popular sport something else in our nation says something all by itself, but I digress. These young athletes then train for nearly a decade, year-round and at the ripe, old age of 16, their "graduation" as it were take place. They find out if 1). They are signed to pro contracts or 2). "Released" and sent off to just play recreationally.

So Mark set out to see if he could determine what might separate the players signed vs. those let go. After a long look, they found really only one key thing that they could measurably say was different. The kids who were released, played an average of a couple of hours of "street soccer" a week. This would be like sandlot games for us, games played without a coach; rules set by the players; scoring options determined by the players; field of play determined by those playing.

Those who were signed to pro contracts? They averaged just under 10 hours a week of street soccer. Wow.

For those of you knowing my connections to the Institute for Play and getting those great articles on the value of play in a developing child's life, you might not be surprised. The way the game teaches the game, and the value of random and creative play, comes out important once again.

Mark made an important side note, that when the great players did just hang out and perhaps partner up while having a ball with them - they did not just partner pass - they would see if they could deliver the ball in a wild assortment of ways, off different body parts, bank shots, varying spins or bounces. Again they were creative in doing something, not static.

Nike took that observation and put it into some popular commercials.

On another related note, Hugh McCutcheon's change over to the women's National Team side is a great Christmas present to our sport in America. I will mull that over more in a later blog.

So for now, hope your holidays are going great and the finals' week for many of the kids in your lives went well. Back to the Convention Center.

**Passion, Burnout and Teaching:** January 26, 2009

I just watched a very powerful **ESPN Outside the Lines** story on a very special athlete, Elena Della Donne. I strongly urge all Junior Olympic volleyball directors and coaches to watch it, as well as read the story. It has three important threads woven together – burn out, passion and being a teacher.

The short of it is that Elena was known as the female LeBron James. She signed with UConn and this past summer walked away from the program and the sport of basketball, as she was burned out. Donne is now playing volleyball for Bonnie Kenney at the University of Delaware and made the Patriot League all-rookie team.



The line that hit me most was this - "Now that I play volleyball, I know how it feels to have a passion for your sport," she says. "Before, I just thought, 'Maybe everyone's faking it because this is horrible.'"

If you can catch the replay on ESPN, it is a MUST watch. A written version about 10 minutes of the interview can be seen at ESPN.com, by [clicking here](#). I feel it is a must watch.

Meanwhile, on the subject of passion, today is day three of the Boys' Youth Holiday camp and the Girls' Select camp here at the OTC in Colorado Springs.

The gym is filled with future stars playing with great passion - and yet now I wonder if any of the kids are faking it the way Elena had to... I have watched a couple of practices and the passion Elena found in volleyball is seen clearly on courts 7, 8, and 9.

Court seven is hallowed ground as it is where the USA Women's Paralympic teams of 2004 and 2008 trained en route to their bronze then silver medals. I can still hear the passion of that talented team when I walk in to watch the kids.

Ron Larsen, with the Beijing Gold medal memories still near, starts another cycle of helping grow the next generation of the best USA players we can develop, with a strong staff. Char and her crew are doing the same with even younger "select" (14 and under) aged kids. Six are from Hawaii, said a mom I was talking to in the gym last nite, and others are East Coasters. It seems we have the nation covered.

I will head over today and take some pictures to post on the site this week.

Thanks to all the coaches for giving their holiday time up for the kids, and to the parents for the same. Happy new year everyone!

### **A Coaching Challenge and Reality: January 26, 2009**

Just back from Milwaukee where over 60 coaches shared two full days of a CAP course. I got up at 3 am to catch a 6 am NW flight there and spent a very interesting part of Friday with the Badger Region Board of Directors and Junior Leaders, sharing ideas on growing the game...

Jenny Hahn and the group there run a very innovative region, with many great volunteer leaders USA Volleyball is fortunate to have involved. So for two days Cecile Reynaud, Stu Sherman, Tom Shoji and I shared the ideas of over a hundred years of coaching expertise and the latest science of sport. The site was a superb one. Wayze World with 8 well lit courts and tons of space for each court.

A lot of understanding went on over the two days, along with a lot of laughs. I tasted perhaps the best root beer I had ever tasted, made with honey they say, by Sprechers, and had more than a few bratwursts, and was pleased to see some coaches I first worked with decades ago...still teaching and still learning, along with many young coaches.

So two things stood out, beyond the people doing so many good things to help grow our sport there.

### **1. Never be a Child's Last Coach**

This is one of my mantras, and I am very proud of the number of my players who continue to play long after school volleyball is over, as well as those who give back to the sport by coaching and officiating. Retention is a very important area to improve in this wonderful lifetime sport. I heard a story about a passionate player who, due to the kind of "coaching" she got at college, had stopped playing the game. I will write more on this problem later, but for now, I challenge any of you reading this to simply never be an athlete's LAST coach...and think about what that means to your own skill development and coaching...

### **2. Train in Reality**

So many coaches seem stunned when we start to guide them towards understanding what pepper and partner passing and all sorts of traditional drills do in a player's development. It seems they are so shocked with the idea of using the net the whole time you HAVE one there, that they think that we are saying never pepper or partner pass. Marv's line about "train in reality" was oft said, but the point remains that when we have such a limited time to have the net, and our teammates, you simply must use it the whole time. Sure the kids will partner and pepper, in the driveways, back yards, and even school hallways until they break the fluorescent lights...but to spend so much time setting up the net, then to ignore it for the first 10-30 minutes of practice is not understanding the importance of both cumulative effect and the reality of our limited time of training. Development of positive mistakes first is also very important and not well understood it seems, given the amount of time training negative errors, but that is a different topic...

On the flight back, this quote came to mind that I will share – like Sprechers, you can google up John Holt and find some good writings and ideas by him...

"Not many years ago I began to play the cello. Most people would say that what I am doing is "learning to play" the cello. But these words carry into our mind the strange idea that there exists two very different processes: (1) learning to play the cello; and (2) playing the cello. They imply that I will do the first until I have completed it, at which point I will stop the first process and begin the second. In short, I will go on "learning to play" until I have "learned to play" and then I will begin to play. Of course, this is nonsense. There are not two processes, but one. We learn to do something by doing it. There is no other way..." -- John Holt

Hey, Happy 2009 all. Let us know how we can help you grow the game.... John

## HP Clinic Lessons Shared

January 26, 2009

So we are in the fourth day of this year's USA Volleyball High Performance Coaches' Clinic and CAP I, II, III sessions here at the Olympic Training Center. Hugh McCutcheon, Tom Hogan and Peter Vint headline a group of our sport's most passionate people in presenting ideas to teach the sport to the athletes and coaches who make up the High Performance indoor pipeline.

I hope some of you get a chance to interact with those coaches who have come here. That which you teach, you learn, so get them to teach you what they thought they picked up, so they can learn it better. Hugh brought a coach into the gym often, who was not here physically - but through what he has taught so many of us - Carl McGown. I was fortunate to first meet and learn from Carl's teachings in the 1970s, and because of him, made motor skill learning part of the first IMPACT manual back in 1988, sharing his research and knowledge to touch first year coaches in this very important area of the science of sport.



So it was a pleasure to see and hear how Hugh continued this sharing, as he too has been powerfully impacted by Dr. McGown's teaching. Hugh brought Nicole Davis, libero for our 2008 Silver medal women's Olympic team, out on the court in front of all the participants to show his ideas on the skill of passing. Working with Nicole, core ideas were stressed, that are important to the future for all USA players of any age or skill level – Repeatability, Variance, and Risk... Repeatability - at the highest level, every player is a stud - it is the player can perform the skill successfully more often, no matter what the level of competition.

Variance - in order to increase the chance of repeatability, you need to minimize the variance in your movements. Simpler is better, consistency comes with such economy of movement. Don't know until you go - or else you are wasting time and adding movement.

Risk Management - in order to increase your chance for success, we need to get better at risk management options. Traditionally, for example, the setters wait at the net, which makes for half of the errors that are only a meter off of perfect, going into/over the net, vs. the same distance of error from perfect being "safe" and off the net a meter. By positioning the setter target 5-6 feet off the net, you can error by 2 yards, and still have the ball playable in all directions. Tom Hogan noted that vs. Cuba, the toughest serving team in the world with two players ranking in the top servers in the world consistently, their "Error Off" option was used, putting the target eight feet off the net. For more on this concept, see "[From Positive to Perfection](#)".



Lots of other topics were covered, which will be available from the USA Volleyball office later in 2009, by DVD. While the new men's team coach will likely not be announced until the end of this month, Hugh clearly has a vision for what he will like to see happen in the next quad for the women's program. He spoke often of principles and the science of the game, which does not change between women and men. He noted how "we are salesmen first, and change agents second."

"We want to have a system that is based on principles, not based on who the coaches are. There is nothing I am telling you here, you would not be getting it from CAP or IMPACT which are based in science. Embrace it because it makes sense to you, and so you can do it more often- the result. You should do it based on principles, as we know what good passers look like and what they do ALL the time, it is not a coincidence, it is that model that I am coming from." When asked about the differences between the men's and women's game, Hugh replied "What is the difference? Don't we live on planet Earth and the laws of physics apply? I am approaching it as volleyball, whether you are a woman or a man. The idea of 'women's vs. men's' volleyball is doing nothing but stereotyping. Guys have issues too. We are going to do everything we can to be great, based on science and principles."

Later on Hugh and Peter Vint did a myth buster segment. There was some lively discussion on these, among others, which Peter used the science from the Biomechanics lab studies to dispel these...

Myth: The wrist snap is important in attacking

Myth: An athlete's ability to read the game/make correct decisions is unalterable

Myth: Toed-in base positions are best for passers and defenders (and/or blockers)

Myth: Starting a move on the balls of the feet results in faster movement times than starting flat footed

Myth: Piking at the instant of ball contact is a good thing to do

and a bunch more....

The closing session Hugh spoke about the need for "generalized specialists" who are good in all areas of the game but really good in 1-2 skill sets. He noted how we are specializing too early in volleyball. There is not rocket science, the way you get good at passing is by passing, and the way you get good at the game is by playing the game. Trying to teach the game from a generalized basis, you will be better at working together as a team, and win more of the little things that are being lost. "When you start teaching the game, the most important thing is to make it fun...for if at the end of the day if the game is not fun, it will be really hard to keep them around." Our opponents in other volleyball nations can

1. Execute all of the fundamentals at a very high level
2. Have correct technique and are biomechanically efficient
3. Make all the little plays - they cover, can set out of system, can dig, etc.
4. Make all the right choices about where to stand, who to set, where to block etc.

If I am going to ask my kids to work hard, I need to work hard too. We should connect as best we can to our kids...they should not be berated to get good, we are service providers to facilitate the hours of each players live to something they enjoy, so when we do what we do, we need to ask if this is right by the team and the individuals. Coaching is a valued career in our nation amazingly, but it is something you earn, not something you require. We have to be into best practices from ourselves, making it a good and positive experience (not all rainbows and ponies), and not beating up on the kids, for ultimately we want to grow the game...positive reinforcement has longer effect on players than negative, so I want to catch them doing it right a lot, right Kess?

...  
After this philosophical discussion, the first question was...what is your favorite drill? - Hugh's response - "Subtle variations on familiar themes" - and then he continued on how gamelike/over the net they warm up and train.

On a closing note, in this first week of a new President, I thought you all would enjoy knowing of a connection he has to our sport. One of my first mentors back in the 1970s was long time Hawaii Punahou High School head volleyball coach Chris McLachlin, who is married to 1964 Olympic volleyball player. This *Sports Illustrated* story shows how Chris impacted our newest president...among others. Thought all would enjoy.

[http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/2009/writers/alexander\\_wolff/01/13/obama/index.html](http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/2009/writers/alexander_wolff/01/13/obama/index.html)

Hope to see you at next year's HP clinic, or a CAP course down the road in 2009...

Email - [john.kessel@usav.org](mailto:john.kessel@usav.org)

## **Capitalization Rates, Birthdates and more in Gladwell's new book, Outliers**

November 18, 2008

One of the first things that came out of our USOC conference for me was to hear from Dr. K Anders Ericsson that Malcom Gladwell was coming out with a new book. Sure enough, I went online and ordered Outliers, due out in a week. It will go alongside his other GREAT reads titled – Tipping Point and Blink. Interestingly, the conference was the first time Dr. Ericsson and Dr. Richard Schmidt had met in person, which I have no doubt will make for some future even better research.

Even more wonderfully, in the last few days without knowing of the conference or talk mention, other coaching leaders began sharing information with me about must read links to this book and research, where Malcom addresses lots of topics that impact coaching and program development. He speaks about the “Relative Age Effect” where in many sports like hockey and soccer, there is a disproportionate number of kids making the top levels, who simply have birthdates in the first half of the year. I love that he considers our sports organizations to create a parallel league starting with cutoff date half a year later than the current one. I do know in volleyball, by using the “start of school year” date cut off, we minimize the impact of birthdates, but I am sure it still exists.

Why does this matter? Because as Gladwell points out, this makes for a poor “Capitalization rate.” He notes that this failure to get all 12 months of kids and their talents involved is “Not a poverty restraint, it is a stupidity restraint...” Showing “An example of where institutions get in the way of the development of human potential” He then goes on to note work by James Flynn who asked, why do Chinese Americans achieve at such a high rate? In short, it was not IQ, it was due to Capitalization rates – because they simply worked harder....Give

American kids and Chinese kids a challenging math question and you see most kids give up after 2 min, but the Chinese American kids will keep working 15 or more minutes to solve it.

Effort and Persistence...These are the things we need to reward more on and off the court...Things in the player's control. So PLEASE go check out these two great links. The first has a video so you can actually hear Gladwell speak. Both contain important ideas that will impact kids sports, and should be understood by all coaches.

[Malcolm Gladwell Explains](#) How Long It Takes To Become A Genius Level Expert In Your Field In His New Book *Outliers*.

A gift or hard graft? --- We look at outrageously talented and successful people - the Beatles, Mozart, Rockefeller, Bill Gates - and assume there is such a thing as pure genius. Not necessarily, [argues Malcolm Gladwell](#).

## **IMPACT and Clinic Thoughts**

November 18, 2009

Having just done three IMPACT Webinars and a clinic for the Columbia Empire Region, including watching Saturday nite's 6A Oregon State Championships Showdown between Jesuit and West Linn...some core thoughts come to mind with what I am sharing, and want to pass along to all.

My Top 3 Books right now, reading and re-reading...

**Talent and the Secret Life of Teams** – Terry Pettit, available December 1, 2008, [www.terrypettit.com](http://www.terrypettit.com) to get it. Terry was kind enough to email me a printers copy to review. Get a copy for the club.

**The Man Watching** – by Tim Cruthers, the biography of Anson Dorrance, from any online retailer. –

**The Origins of the Competitive Cauldron**, Gender differences in coaching and much more. I got Sean O'Neill to get a copy a couple of years ago - he was a USA Table Tennis Olympian who also coaches Paralympic Table Tennis, and in Beijing was the NBC color person for the Table Tennis competition. I will never forget his late nite call, "cursing" me saying, that he could not put it down, and was only to page 186, and it was already the best coaching book he had ever read.

**Fooled by Randomness**, N. Taleb, (ties into the articles Decisions Decisions and the Tea Leaves of Sports Talk). I will just let Fortune magazine's back of the book statement sum it up for me here..."One of the Smartest Books of All Time..."

I also bought **The Snowball, Warren Buffett and the Business of Life** - by Alice Schroeder. "Life is like a snowball. The important thing is finding wet snow and a really long hill." -- Warren Buffett. My gosh, this tome makes Harry Potter books look thin - it is 960 back-bending pages. So I am leaving it by my bedside and plan to start it over the holidays.

My Top You Tube Video to share and watch "What do Teachers Make" by Taylor Mali. His other talks about "The Impotence of Proofreading" and several others are also great to listen to.

## My IMPACT Four Cornerstones

**GAMELIKE** – As in train in reality, based on Motor Skill research **CONTACTS PER HOUR** – Kids learn by doing, not by watching **PARENTING=COACHING=TEACHING** – So all the ideas and thoughts shared are based in the principals of teaching

**EFFORT AND MASTERY OVER OUTCOME** – As winning is more important based on a how won, and the result of who you played... Add in the most important skill in volleyball....**READING** the play (and the game **BETWEEN** contacts) and you start to get to If you have any questions, or new ideas to share, please comment. The USAV Grassroots Commission that I head up, and others will answer all questions and pass along all ideas shared to grow our sport all over the USA. Again thanks for coaching. I hope that the ideas shared help you on your road to become the best coach you can be (while not comparing yourself to others) – while never being your athlete's last coach.

Best wishes in the season ahead, and keep in touch.

### Doing the Right Thing in London: Sep 06, 2012

Had a morning off from jury duty, so I got up to meander the Paralympic Village and Olympic Park. The one thing that never ceases to bring a smile to my face is the huge number of people guiding their blind or wheelchair bound country men and women. With a village population of 16,000 beds, you see this support every 100 meters as you move around anytime day or night. Enter the main dining hall and that job of doing the right thing, helping the nation's best athletes in time, guidance and even fiscal commitment, is seen at every food station. The food options are vast, from "the best of Britain" to "The Americas," Asian, Indian, and of course...McDonalds. There is always a line at McDonalds and my favorite treat to head to bed on it the Whispa McFlurry....carmel, chocolate and vanilla ice cream yummmmmm.

The word that comes to mind all the time you work with these athletes is courage. To trust your guide as a blind athlete while running, bike riding, skiing, swimming and more. The "tappers" who touch their swim racer as they get to a certain distance from the end of the pool and wall. The long jumpers who have learned to fly down the runway and leap in front of countless fans into a sand pit they hope they are aiming at. The courage to overcome what has happened, from sitting volleyball player Martine Wright who lost both legs in the London Underground bombing back in 2005, the day after London was chosen as the Olympic/Paralympic hosts, and now is playing for Team Great Britain.

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-2197848/London-Paralympics-2012-Gruelling-workout-Martine-Wright-Secrets-Paralympic-body.html>

How about the South African swimmer who lost his leg to a shark while rescuing other swimmers lives in the bloody turmoil in the water.

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2197975/Achmat-Hassiem-Paralympic-swimmer-motivates-imagining-hes-fleeing-shark-ate-leg.html?ito=feeds-newsxml>

So many nations are not disabled person friendly, so crutches, not wheelchairs are the best way to get around, yet these competitors still find time to work and train, to reach these Paralympics as the best from their country.

The other thing that many may not know is the major support USA Volleyball athletes, coaches and officials help provide our Sitting Volleyball Teams with their membership in USA Volleyball. As in the other disciplines of our sport – indoor and beach, the teams train year round, with full time staff – in this case Bill Hamiter and Elliot Blake currently. Based at the US Paralympic Training Center at the University of Central Oklahoma, the annual programming costs to support these sitting athletes is hundreds of thousands of dollars – with competition, housing, meals, travel and staff support. We do this as it is simply the right thing to do, but could not do it without the help of each of you who join USA Volleyball. So as the women play on Friday for the Gold medal against China, I want to say thanks to all of you who are supporting these players with your USAV membership, for it matters a lot. You have choices to make and I for one appreciate when you choose to support USA Volleyball, so we can do programming like this, as well as support our Olympic and High Performance program pipelines for both males and females. Also once again Ottobock gets a shout out from me for their work in the village as a technical service provider since the 1988 Paralympics in Seoul. These games they brought TWELVE welders alone on a staff of 80 technicians to help with any repair or upgrade needed, and man sites in the village and at 9 competition venues. They are nearing the 2,000 repairs and get this, “whenever the equipment is too worn out and the athlete cannot afford a new one, we replace it for free...”

Last nite I was on ABC – the Australian Broadcast Company, talking about sitting volleyball around the world. Like getting the mayor of London, Boris Johnson, and one of the most beloved screen/TV stars of Great Britain, Barbara Windsor (spry enough at over 70 to still play sitting volleyball, I invited the ABC staff to come to the venue and take on the staff. I also got a tube of Vegemite – which says “Warning, may cause spontaneous outburst of ‘Aussie, Aussie, Aussie, Oi!, Oi!, Oi!’” On my return, I got several emails from coaching friends in Oz who were pretty shocked to see me on their television that morning. Just part of growing the game, no matter where and when...

So just some observations from these Paralympics, an event I first worked as ACOP sitting volleyball producer in 1996 with Phil Bush, Jim Stewart, Pierre Farmer of Canada (who is here on the jury staff), Kathy Scott and many others.....

*Wheelchair Chicken games in the streets and walkways of the Paralympic Village, yet I have never seen anyone collide.*



*The WOVD website has over 5,000 likes....thanks to all who are checking in there, along with our USA Volleyball page. Jason is doing a good job taking pictures and posting right after each match.*

*The floor wipers here are top notch. I filmed them for reference/lessons as the WOVD moves forward into 2014 World Championships and 2016 Paralympic in Brazil. Simple lesson – see this? Do that... I think in 2016 all families with USA members making our*

*Paralympic and Olympic team should have special shirts made with their athlete's last name on them... With Brazil hosting in 2016, the battle will be between USA and Canada men most likely to see who can also qualify from our PanAm zone, which is just one team. The Dutch fans remain the #1 ranked in wackiness, well ahead of Brasil. The Iranian fans are the most passionate, closely followed by Japan. But nothing beats the crowd at the venue for noise when Great Britain is on the field of play, in any sport. I thought during the Opening Ceremonies that the stadium might shake apart from the noise level, and bet the Queen and all her subjects, and the rest of us, lost some hearing during these games.*

*China's sponsor is 361 degrees sportswear. I guess the idea is that you can see beyond the whole panorama of a person's normal view with that extra one degree. Sorta like the 211-212 story of one degree making a difference from hot water to steam to drive locomotives and power the nation...*

*Great transportation system here, with busses pulled into service from all over the United Kingdom, a lot of Excel venue drivers are from Scotland. Once they figured out the route, things have been very smooth. The total games workforce is 200,000 – 6,000 staff, 70,000 volunteers and 100,000 contractors. They have built over 200,000 temporary seats, and right now, as Track and Field is played in the Olympic Stadium nearby, I can hear the thunderous cheers with each event happening. My favorite part about the Opening Ceremonies, other than the amazing Stephen Hawking speaking to all, were the apples...I will miss the closing ceremonies as I depart as soon as competition ends, for we have the FIVB World Congress to help host in Anaheim later this month.*



*Our venue is THE place to be at Excel – we are with individual sports- Boccia, Wheelchair Fencing, Powerlifting and Table Tennis, so the announcer, staff and set up is always rocking – with the morning/afternoon sessions filled with school classes in uniforms.*

*My favorite silly thing they do getting the crowd to “play” the bongo drums overlaid on their image. Today head coach Bill Hamiter just asked for the ice cream from a McFlurry and poured his CocaCola onto it, instant Coke Float. Wise man that Hamiter.*

*Cecile Reynaud has been doing a great job as Team Leader for the ladies, and will bring back some powerful insights into sports programming when she returns to teach at Florida State.*

*Bobby Clarke, who I have known since the early 1970s, and partnered with in a doubles tournament in 1977 where we lost to a young Karch Kiraly, said to shoot him if he said he says he is working in Rio. Bobby has worked as the chief staffer of volleyball at nearly every Olympics since 1996, doing volleyball, beach volleyball and sitting volleyball, and living in London for the last 3 years to accomplish that. He is headed back to the USA for a long deserved break from volleyball... They said they have 26,400 tennis balls, 2,700 soccer balls and 6,000 Archery target faces. We have a few hundred volleyballs which are used just one match, then will be donated out to volleyball venues as part of their legacy program. The same thing happened to the sand after the beach event, some 10 or so beach sites were created in England using the sand from the venue.*

*I got a chance to “meet” Mandeville today, the one eyed mascot named after the first disabled event, the Mandeville Games which began the Paralympic movement. Andrew Getting from Sport Court International saw the pic and told me that when he was here in London earlier this summer with his six year old daughter, she asked “Dad, is this city famous for aliens or something?”.. and that is the best way to end this, along with a GET WELL SOON to Bill Neville, who is recovering well from a stroke of all things up in the Puget Sound area...*

### **Testing Your Preception and Awareness: Sep 02, 2012**

When USA was playing Brazil in the London 2012 Olympics pool play, a missed call was made against USA as opposite Clay Stanley hammered a ball off the blocker’s hand that then went directly into the antenna. This happened in milliseconds, but right in front of the official on the stand, who perceived that Clay hit the ball into the antenna first. The speed of the game of volleyball, over 100 kph often, can cause for even the best referees to miss the call, something we all can see later “easily” in super slow motion. Later in the tournament, a jump serve “ace” on Italy was shown to be clearly out. While it is likely that top international volleyball matches will soon see the line calling replay devices as seen in international professional tennis, in the next quad, as the FIVB is testing systems, this Olympics and Paralympics does not have instant replay.

Here at the Paralympics, the each side of the court is 4 meters shorter and 3 meters narrower, and the play action over the much lower net is very fast, while including each contact being checked for still having your bottom on the floor. It is a new skill set and the referees here are very good at seeing both, with the second referee checking floor contact and calling as needed, much to every player’s consternation. My favorite part is when all four line judges signal an antenna out of bounds contact, waving three times back and forth in perfect synchronization as if they were all connects. As in the Olympics, the scoreboard and scoresheet itself has gone electronic, still will paper/flip board back up in case of power outages. We also have eight TV replay breaks, lasting a maximum of seven seconds, in each set. The referees have been having special training to see the red light/paddle just in front of our jury table, controlled by the TV producer, as it is a new thing to the first referee’s awareness pattern.

Please make sure to listen to Tom Hoff’s Gold Medal Secrets free USAV webinar, <http://www.teamusa.org/USA-Volleyball/Grassroots/Free-Webinars.aspx> as he spoke very well on how pattern awareness is a big part of blocking and playing success. From those, you make decisive decisions and go with that choice – you don’t want to second guess yourself in action – as the time to process and perform skill action is simply too short. This is a big part of why GAME play needs to be increased by most programs, over drills, as drills simply do not teach a player to be aware of the patterns in play by certain players. When I do clinics, I ask the coaches – why is it you could walk from the bench to save a tip shot, but your players out on the court can’t save it? – THAT is the awareness that comes from play, seeing/knowing a tip is more likely in this contact even before the contact/shot is made, by being aware of the patterns in the play of the game and match.

So here at USA Volleyball we thought others might like to see our Top 10 List of things that test our awareness and perception. Enjoy, and if you have others to add, share in the comments for all to learn from, or email me at [john.kessel@usav.org](mailto:john.kessel@usav.org)

1. Awareness Test – How many passes does the team in white make?
  - [Click here](#)
2. Awareness Test #2 – Whodunnit to Lord Smithe?
  - [Click here](#)
3. National Geographic Perception and Reality Part 1 of 3 – Watch the other two also.
  - [Click here](#)
4. National Geographic Ability of Attention Part 1 of 3 – Watch the other two also.
  - [Click here](#)
5. Volleyball Self Set
  - [Click here](#)
6. Volleyball Self Set #2
  - [Click here](#)
7. Special Awareness Training – Super Spike Competition at BYUUI
  - [Click here](#)
8. Amazing Animated Optical Illusion
  - [Click here](#)
9. Mind Tricks
  - [Click here](#)
10. Perfect Perspective
  - [Click here](#)

And in closing a couple of random thoughts...

Being ahead 24-15 in rally scored International Volleyball means you will win, right?

- [Click here](#)

Special Serve Reception Training

- [Click here](#)

Proof of how hard back-to-the-opposing-spiker-digging-training, aka Pepper is...

- [Click here](#)

**Missing John Armuth:** AUG 31, 2012

Wednesday at the London 2012 Paralympics was “Preliminary Inquiry” day – where the team uniforms are checked to make sure they were made to the guidelines of the International Paralympic Committee and the World Organization of Volleyball for the Disabled (WOVD). The teams I checked were batting about .200, with variations from nations having huge logos of their national federation (this is not allowed, only the country flag and 3 letter code – that is why you see our Olympic and Paralympic teams not wearing the USA Volleyball logo, it is forbidden at this world level), to player names being too small (television needs large as possible). The teams were sent this “how to” guideline a year ago, yet most still err in some way or another.

We also check the rosters and passports, as spelling mistakes happen (not good for the media) and staff changes were frequent for various reasons including tragedies back home. Probably the most genuinely spirited teams here is Rwanda, who under the guidance of Pieter Karreman, have qualified from the African zone. I first met Pieter two years ago while working the World Championships in Edmond, Oklahoma. He has been living away from his friends and family in Holland for several years, working to help the sitting volleyball program grow



almost as a volunteer getting his expenses covered. Check out this YouTube clip ([Click here](#)) of the team to get a sense of that great spirit with which they play the game we all love.

One night Pieter joined John Armuth, long time USAV junior leader, who was in Oklahoma on his own time to help me photograph the event. We celebrated John's 59th birthday together, and his retirement from teaching for over 30 years. Armuth's mom and dad had passed and left him a farm, and he had bought a new sports car and was loving life. John had been a part of our USAV junior division for decades, and we had first met when I was doing a CAP coaching course in the 1980s, and he worked tirelessly at both the high school and club level to grow the game with USA Volleyball and the Hoosier RVA.

He found one of our Paralympic sitting volleyball medalists, Brenda Maymon, and also helped three-time Paralympian, Kendra Lancaster, at the high school level in Indiana. He followed their success with great pride as they won a bronze medal in 2004 while in high school and a silver in 2008. One of my favorite moments of the 2004 Athens Paralympics were with Kendra, as I served as team leader, a position that this year is being performed so capably by the wonderful Cecile Reynaud, long time Florida State head coach and USAV leader/CAP clinician. You can read those blogs I posted daily 8 years ago here, if interested. This time as a jury member, my blogging is going to be very limited, and instead you can see what Kendra, Katie and Cecile are writing about in their blogs.

Kendra is an arm amputee, a real disadvantage in the sitting game as you move with both legs on the court, while much of the game is played above the head. Kendra's prosthetic hand was falling apart at the fingers, from all the high speed blocking, serving and setting going on. So we journeyed cross the village to the Otto Bock center where the technicians there inserted thicker, stronger wires into her "hand" and shaped it a bit more volleyball set like, while still keeping a shape that allowed her to also block. The center was filled with athletes getting their prosthetics fixed in some way, including getting better fits to their unique situation. One of my favorite moments was before the medal ceremony. Kendra was off the floor in the stands and had removed her arm to put on the US Paralympic award sweatsuit. Somehow that arm then vanished into the celebrating USA men and women's team gathered there, and remained "actively hidden" shall I say, in a variation of a game of invisible hot potato, as Kendra pleaded with her volleyball family to give her back her arm. So many big brothers she had there in the team and the team around the team, with sheepish grins of "I dunno where it is Kendra, just go out there without it, they will give you the medal either way..."

Kendra last year was in a major head on car accident which almost took her life. Like the fighter she is, she preserved, and is back again for her third Paralympics, something all in the Hoosier RVA and all of USAV can be proud and thankful for, as her arm is still a whip and her skill and attitude is a valuable part of this team's push for a gold. See this recent story by Becky Murdy - <http://www.teamusa.org/USA-Volleyball/Features/2012/May/16/Return-to-the-Floor.aspx>

I had dinner last nite in the Paralympic Dining hall, that wonderful place that is open 24/7, with Kendra and two others of the four Paralympians from Athens still on the team. Lora Webster is now a mom of a 19 month old, Allie Aldrich is now a teacher in Nebraska, and met Kendra's boyfriend, who is on the Great Britain team. They met at those same 2010 Worlds, and this fall Kendra is likely to be in the middle east as her boyfriend is a pilot in training. Of course, I would hope that any pilot of my plane considers his or herself a lifelong learner and always a pilot in training, seeking to stay up with the latest technology, as having a pilot who simply relies on their certificate from 20 years ago would not be good. Hmmmmmm...wonder what that means in relating it to coaching...lol.

After the Worlds, John came to the USA Volleyball offices to work with Andy Reitingner on the less fun area of structure and function, the administrative side of junior volleyball that is not as enjoyable as being on the court, but still so very important. We went out one night, and after talking about my ideas in youth and sitting volleyball, he had me drive to Walmart at 1 am, so he could buy some 2 inch wide white ribbon, to do both sitting volleyball and kids options with a fast set up, as noted in my recent blog “The Evolution of Volleyball Nets.” Two weeks later, John was on his way to his new farmhouse in his new sports car, waiting at a stop sign before crossing into a busy street when a car from behind him failed to stop and pushed him into oncoming traffic which t-boned the driver’s side and took his life.

His loss I still feel deeply, as he gave back to our sport not in the way of the easier and profitable ways of junior girls volleyball, but in the areas that were not so fiscally rewarding and those areas which were less popular, like the sitting team and the administrative work needed. I had talked about getting him here to London in some capacity as with retirement comes time to do things like this which are not about profit, but about doing the right thing. He would have rejoiced at Kendra’s comeback from her serious accident, and helped those less fortunate understand what is possible both with technology, which he taught for decades, but also in people working together to grow the game. So tonite, jet lagged awake at 4 am London time, after the joy and hope seen in being part of the Paralympic Opening Ceremonies, I raise a toast (the benefit of the Paralympic Village dining hall being open 24/7...) to one of the good guys gone, and ask that all in our sport do a better job of working together to grow the game with USA Volleyball, in his honor and that of so many others who have left our sport too early. Armuth, this one is for you.

FYI, pics of all matches posted just after competition come up at [www.wovd.info](http://www.wovd.info) if you just sign up for their Facebook page. This morning the famous mayor of London, Boris Johnson, paired up with one of Great Britain’s treasures, the TV and film actress from the East End, Barbara Windsor, to play sitting volleyball after the Great Britain women’s match. The pics of that and tons of great action shots are posted at the WOVD site, as part of our work here in developing the sport. The other pages worth keeping up on our Paralympic adventures are found at these links...

<http://www.teamusa.org/USA-Volleyball/USA-Teams/Sitting-Volleyball/Women/2012-Paralympics/Helpful-Links.aspx>

Email me at [John.kessel@usav.org](mailto:John.kessel@usav.org) if you have questions about our sitting volleyball program or work we are doing around the world to grow the game of sitting volleyball, or comment below and we will get back to you!

## **Top Ten Volleyball Kicksaves: Aug 03, 2012**

The motto of the International Volleyball Federation, that “FIVB” logo you see on a large white screen, is “KEEP THE BALL FLYING.” One of the rule changes after the 1992 Olympics was to allow whole body contact. Up until then, while the beach game allowed full body contact, the indoor game required that the ball be contacted above the waist. The rule change does help keep the ball flying, as seen in our USA Top Ten Kick Save list below, which includes one just done by Brazil at the London Olympics.

### 10. High School Volleyball Kick Save

- [Click here](#)

### 9. Diablo Volleyball at Anaheim Sport Center

- [Click here](#)
- 8. Kick Serve Reception by U15
  - [Click here](#)
- 7. “Kinsey’s Kick”
  - [Click here](#)
- 6. Swedish volleyball, Habo Wolley Libero Kick Save
  - [Click here](#)
- 5. Lowell vs SH – Great long rally, save is at 40 seconds in
  - [Click here](#)
- 4. Dallas Skyline Juniors Kick save at the USAV Southern California Las Vegas Tourney
  - [Click here](#)
- 3. FIVB Beach Volleyball World Tour, Brazil vs Brazil kick save
  - [Click here](#)
- 2. A long-time favorite, kick assist set by Erik Shoji at Stanford
  - [Click here](#)
- 1. Brazil Olympic Team Libero hustle kick save London
  - [Click here](#)

**Honorable Mention** - Our number one miracle play(er), using both his head and his arm, in a Navy vs Stevenson Univ match

- [Click here](#)

### **Volleyball Variations**

Now, that seen, most volleyball players should know there is are two variations of our game that do not even allow arm/hand contact! Here are just two great example of each version of the game of volleyball...

**Sepak Takraw** USA team - 2009

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v9W5ZBZW8C8>

Brasil Video - 2006

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KarRwATAqk8>

### **Foot Volley**

Footvolley World Cup Salvador Brasil – 2011

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wgj4FJpEI04>

Playing on Copacabanabeach Brasil with the guys – 2011

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q\\_NN4q7I2Co](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q_NN4q7I2Co)

### **Court of Dreams: Jul 05, 2012**

An almost four hour flight from Miami over the Caribbean Sea brings you to the island trident nation of Barbados, home to some 280,000 perpetually smiling people. I love the story of their flag, with blue bands for the sea and sky, and a yellow band for their golden sands - as they have some 60 miles of coastline. Just 133 square miles, about 2.5 times the size of Washington, D.C. means the smell of the sea is always present. Palm trees galore along with coconuts and people at the roundabouts selling fresh coconut water. Neptune's trident is also on their flag, broken to signify their breakaway as a former British Colony, and the fact that I keep going to the "passenger" side only to be asked if I would like to drive.

I am here to finish Phase 3 of our SportsUnited grant helping six NORCECA nations. They all joined Bill Hamiter, Sue Gozansky and me at the FIVB Development Center last year for a week of training, then spent another week in Phoenix at the Volleyball Festival to experience the USA and get more training – including

playing with Arizona Special Olympians and playing sitting volleyball with 2 time Paralympic medalist Lora Webster. This final third phase has all the phase 1 and 2 coaches teaching what they were taught to their own nation's coaches and players, while I provide updates on research and immediate feedback on their presentations.

I delayed my flight by a day to ensure things for family and friends were safe from the Waldo Canyon fire. While friends lost their homes, and others had their homes standing right next door to neighbors who lost theirs, only one friend lost most everything, not getting ALL of his 5 P's (passport, papers, pets, pictures, people) taken care of in time. This meant I hit the ground running in Bridgetown, landing at around 3pm and starting my first session Friday at 5pm at the Garfield Sobers Gymnasium. There the first curveball -- or perhaps I should say in this Commonwealth land of cricket and netball, the first spin bowler - had us totally adapting the schedule due to the passing of Sherlock Clement Yarde, a prominent football leader and member of the Barbados Labour Party. Thus the gym slowly shrank from 2 courts to one, then none, as a stage was constructed and the chairs for the congregation to come grew row by row and the Notre Dame Sports Club footballer's practiced their choreographed soccer ball passing drills as part of the next day's service. Nonetheless, the night's session was a big success, and lasted almost two hours over the scheduled ending time, as everyone wanted to know more and ask questions about the topics. There were 20 total coaches in the clinic, with lots of player activity planned through Tuesday, after the course ends.

Saturday we moved to the Barbados Olympic Committee center, for classroom topics then journeyed to the beach to train everyone in those disciplines. They discovered the competitive fun of speedball on the beach, and the national beach teams learned they had been training on 9 meter courts, not the correct beach doubles court size of 8 meters a side. There were other sports coaches and high school teachers in our mix, and the volleyball leaders were amazed to see how those "non-volleyball" participants were the ones who played on long after the clinic officially ended. A good lesson for all in the way the game teaches the game, especially when you add some form of scoring to the mix.



Sunday we got our gym back, and spent the day with more presentations on skills, drills and leadership development. I had brought a 4 nets on a rope for their youth volleyball development, and after they saw how it added four more courts to their training site where just 2 nets were being used, a long discussion ensued on how to grow the game. The gym they use has a wood floor, covered by Sport Court tiles. Apparently some time ago they brought the ice follies to the facility, only to discover their wood floor was permanently damaged by the melting water at the end of the event. Thus Sport Court was the surface now. We played sitting volleyball as well, to much delight of the players, and covered Special Olympic options as well, and the goal was set to get 4 of the coaches to find, or be the players to take a Unified volleyball team to the Special Olympics World Games in Los Angeles in 2015. The sport has fallen off a bit lately, but these two years of clinics have energized the coaches in attendance. Their passion is powerful, stronger than their frustrations. Netball for the women is the #1 sport by far, a Commonwealth Games sport – I think some 24 nations from the past British Empire compete in those quadrennial games. The parallel worlds to basketball coaches not allowing players to play any other sport was fascinating. So I told the story of a netball player from Australia which I will share with you here (remember that important proverb – What is truer than truth? – The answer is *the story...*”



I attended a MiniVolley course in Japan in 1985, and met Jon Dunstan, who was working for volleyball in Australia but from England. He made me aware of a 6’1” lefty netball player from Perth, who also dabbled in volleyball. In the end, Pauline Manser came to the Univ of New Mexico to play volleyball on scholarship. She was amazed that there were crowds, and that she did not have pay to play, starting with her uniform and shoes. In her freshman year we took the team over Labor Day weekend up to Aspen to play in the Motherlode. There, Pauline and her Division 1 university level partner warmed up crushing balls, then played two, under 5’4”, wide bodied shall I say, about 40 year old opponents. Pauline lost 15-0, 15-2 as I recall. These varsity players were more than perplexed and frustrated, after such a stellar warm up, and their journey to having better volleyball IQ had really begun. Making a long story short, I spent time with Pauline in Sydney in 2000 at the Olympics, where I was the USA beach team leader and Pauline? She was simply battling to a 7<sup>th</sup> place finish in the world in the Olympic Games hosted by her home nation...and now? She is the Australian women’s national team coach – and it started with netball over 25 years ago... So these Barbados coaches found hope.

Cost is a factor, only one nice indoor gym, cost is \$30 a court per hour. Volunteers and kids can’t afford that. They need balls and nets more than anything, to bring the game to the schools. So we finished on the concept of a Field of Dreams, build it and they will come... even to have the Beach Volleyball National team demonstrate, as volleyball is even considered an elitist sport. This Sports United program also has resulted in four Trinidad and Tobago teams competing this summer in Phoenix, in the Volleyball Festival, as their coaches came and were stunned by this 70 plus court event for kids all being played under one roof.

So the challenge I have presented to this nation is...can you do the same for at least little kids and/or middle schools for your one big gym. I just measured it, their big place, which we lost for clinic use yesterday due to their beloved football presidents untimely death and funeral, is 35x160 meters. That would allow us to put up 30 mini courts indoors. You would use the sport court tile seam lines to make most the court, just putting down corners and a part of a side line or two, not the whole line, saving time and tape/money. They would need 7 rolls of deer netting, which come 7 foot high by 100 feet long, to be woven on top with cord and used at the divider nets to keep balls from rolling endline wise. Chairs would be the side protectors. Then, using the “date



nite” league idea of teams of three, you could have that one evening...with music playing like the Lime Music Festival. Even better, a one day Festival with waves – Start in pools of 3, after 2 hours, top move to one side. Second in the pool go to the middle, and losing teams move to the other side. I have said if they make it happen, I will pay my own way to come

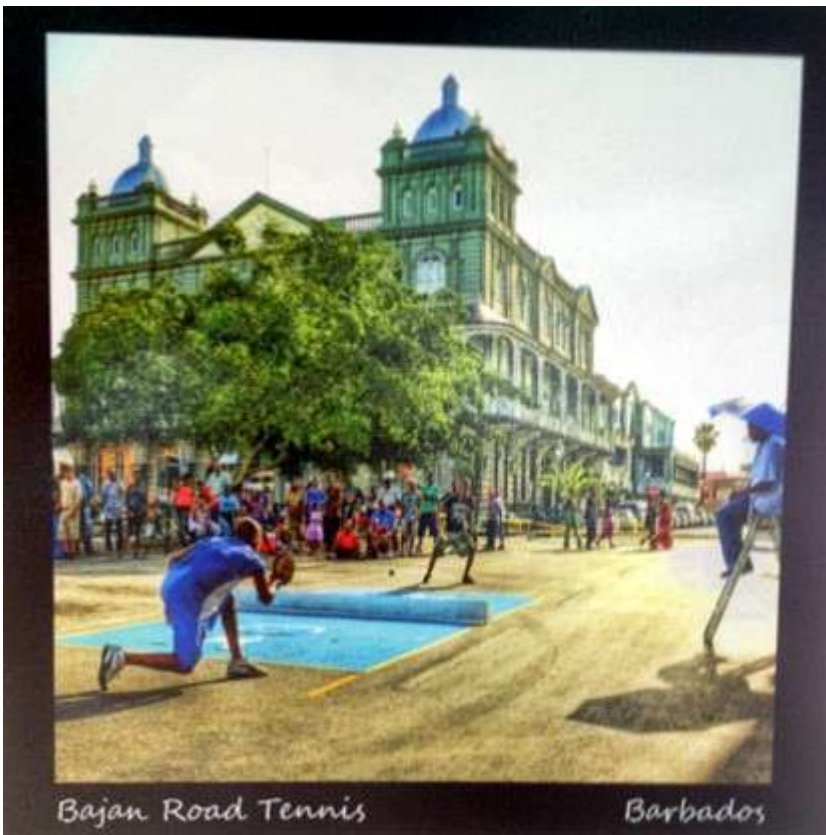
celebrate the event the first time they stage it, and help do a coaching clinic for the PE teachers at the same time... I hope I get to return for that very reason...This is the space, with 6 courts up...

It's too bad I don't like coconuts as there are stands everywhere including lots of coconut water options. They used to be known as British Hondurans so they of course drive on the “other side” of the road and so you walk up to the passenger side only be asked if you were offering to drive...There are many options for deep sea fishing but I have no time to pursue my father's deep passion, so instead in his honor I had two meals of flying fish...Late one night after the clinic ended we went to a Lime open air music festival...the beat was infectious and the food stands had plenty to fill me up with local fare. The fields near my residence are filled with small soccer goals, and kids playing 2 on 2, reminding me of how valuable playing “chumash” was, 2 or 3 sided teams on 6 foot tall 18 inch wide goals I used when coaching my kids in lacrosse, and of my friend Peter Vint's postings of his son's 3v3 soccer tournaments. Speaking of small, there is a frog a bit larger than a quarter that from dusk to late in the night sounds like a broken screen door being opened while broadcast on a megaphone set to maximum volume. There was a noise outside our training gym that I had to go investigate and I found about 100 people playing in a very competitive domino tournament, with every single person putting their tile choice down by slamming it onto the table... In the car rides to training sites, it seems as every radio announcer's job is talk over every song with their own comments and even lyrics...Headed one break into old Bridgetown, where their iconic clock tower rises in imitation of London's Big Ben (which is on the USA Volleyball Olympic Team indoor pin for London too!) and the famous West Indies Cricket Oval sits, like a spaceship landed. You see, this is the land of 400 and not out. Indeed, I have a statue of that famous cricketing moment of Brian Lara in my USAV office no less. For more on his great accomplishments in a sport few American's understand, see this link - [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brian\\_Lara](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brian_Lara) and watch the moment here, starting at about 18:30 in this 21 min clip <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ren37TRhe1o>



By the official end of the course, all the coaches who had attended Phases 1 and 2, had spoken on a topic they felt their nation's coaches needed to hear. They each created their own powerpoints, and delivered some great information. All wanted to find more dedicated leaders and to give all they contacted more love for the game. Coaches felt there is a need for a consistent national language.

Cameron's talk I loved as he related to how he teaches karate, similar. That helps. Put the fun in fundamentals. The Commonwealth Game sports of netball and football dominate – volleyball is a new sport. So aggressive netball coaches said I keep all my girls in netball. We addressed ways to get kids to give other sports a shot. Like Bajan Road Tennis, Badminton and of course, Volleyball!



Lauren had since our clinics introduced volleyball to 215 new kids. Janae had an opportunity to play on scholarship in the USA and spoke of when 10 of 12 players who went to Jamaica, went to study in America, and the fact that beach doubles is now a scholarship sport. There was a great presentation on warm up as their national team has changed “so the players are getting warm, not the coaches.” Troy did a GREAT job on drug abuse, weaving Long Term Athletic Development into the mix and showing a powerful film on steroids, along with flyers and info on the pills and other things available and how to work against them.

Monday and Tuesday I stayed on to work with a large Sports Camp, and the youth national team players, who were both

training and helping coach (that which you teach you learn). So from 9 am to 3pm we trained kids and their coaches on the ideas now learned. Six nets were up, not just two, and nearly 100 kids trained. I showed funny and serious videos to the kids and coaches during the lunch break, so the training was pretty much non-stop. I coached until 1pm, then went outside and had the best snow cone I have ever had, tangerine green apple, joining a long line of kids from the sport center (which is named for a famous cricketer by the way), and then I caught my 3pm flight back home to home, in time for celebrating the fourth of July with my kids. I sure hope they get the schools behind the idea and have a great volleyball festival, for all kids deserve a chance to make volleyball their choice... Thanks to John Griffin and the Barbados Volleyball Federation for the chance to share ideas, now on to preparing for London excellence and if that happens, medals too!

### **World School Volleyball Championships: By John Kessel | Jun 10, 2012**

I have returned to the Mediterranean Sea, where almost 30 years ago I played volleyball in Italy, only this time I am up the coast, in the town of Toulon in France. I am here to make a presentation at the International School

Sports Federation (ISF) Sports and Education Symposium and attend the World School Volleyball Championships. This is part of USAV's continuing development of the sport projects, in this case to help others understand the opportunities of disabled volleyball and sport – Paralympic, Special Olympic and Deaflympic primarily – and to support the high school teams in both the beach and indoor versions of our sport for a lifetime. In two weeks I will be presenting in Indianapolis to the National Association of Coaching Educators. There, I will meet with our Affiliated Organization, the National Federation of State HS Associations to see what we can develop for all sports including volleyball and Arizona's varsity program in beach volleyball.



It was a wonderful large group of sports leaders, including former Sardina Italy volleyball player and current ISF President Andrea Delfin, Nick Fuller, current Director of Education for London 2012 Olympics & Paralympics, and Konstantinos Georgiadis, Honorary Dean of International Olympic Academy in Olympia Greece, and Gudren Doll-Tepper, Vice President of Education/Olympic Education for the German Olympic Sports Confederation. Sadly Freddie Sanchez, who I helped produce the Puerto Rico video “Learning Volleyball Through Games” back in 1997 ([CLICK HERE](#) to watch that, in Spanish of course), was unable to attend due to a serious family illness.

Nick's work was seen in the 2012 Games in London where annual National Sports week has 20,000 schools and 7 million kids in the UK doing an Olympic or Paralympic sport. Their bid over the others was far more youth



oriented and they have been putting action behind the promised words of their bid, including starting their legacy work back in 2008. One of their new ideas was a recipe contest, with 6,000 entries and the winners knowing their creation will be served inside the Olympic/Paralympic Village dining hall. I also appreciated that he noted they apply the Olympic values to their Organizing Committee and are very friendly and supportive of their Rio 2016 compatriots: <http://www.rio2016.org/en>.



Konstantinos presented a detailed summary of Olympic history – Baron said in 1897, accurate for the times. Gundren is a good speaker, and she spoke English well so as to make my break times more interesting. Her groups session, entitled “Girls, Encouraging their presence in sport at all levels” had a quote from the Olympic boxer Myriam Lamarre that was intriguing - *“The blows that I take shake my opponents and the foundations of society.”*

Eric Micoud, a popular French professional basketball player closed out the first long day. He came to the Washington DC area as a junior and played two seasons at Georgetown before turning pro and playing many times for the French National team. As he spoke very good English, and has a 6 year old daughter, we had lots to talk about and I want to thank him for his hospitality.



Being in France always makes me wish I had learned French...even knowing Spanish and Italian well does not seem to help me get the essence of what is usually being said. Of course, the Symposium was translated by headset in real time, but I had meals with the one representative from Burkina Faso and was having to pantomime a lot. No doubt I have likely made some sort of “promise by gestures” that I will send him my first born and a car if he only can send me an email.



The USA and Canada used to be members of the ISF, and we are now working on what needs to be done to rejoin the group for our sport and others. Of course the challenge is determining how, with 22 boys and 49 girls volleyball states with varsity programs or state championships, who is the lone USA representative, but we will figure it out. I find it interesting that in one place in France, you are within less than 20 miles of the German, Belgium and Dutch borders – Thus the relative ease of staging international competition in Europe compared to the challenges of even a single state championship in most states in America.

My presentation I will email to you as a powerpoint pdf if you request a copy – apparently it was well received,



with a lot of “Super!” comments with a thick French accent after it was over. My program’s moderator, Alexander Schischlik, Team Leader of UNESCO’s Social and Human Sciences Division, said he had never considered using sitting volleyball as a way to let both disabled and able bodied players share the game together – and few had even seen the game played, so that alone was worth the four days of travel to get to and from

Toulon. The second part was World

School Volleyball Championships, from Jun 2-10 with 61 teams from 34 different countries and 196 best 3 out of 5 matches. More can be seen here: [www.unss-medias.org/volley](http://www.unss-medias.org/volley) Toulon’s rugby team played in the French Championships in Paris, the French Open was going on at the same time (congrats to Nabal...again...) and all the nations had soccer matches in the quadrennial event, the Euro 2012, to those dominated the airwaves, but the event made front page news as you can see below.

Each nation’s team is “adopted” for the event by a school (from elementary to high school level), and most nites are a family meal nite with those from the hosting school families as the cultural experience is a big part of this event. This includes a big “Nation’s Nite” where all the teams share information about their country with the other teams, through food, dance and talks. Their trophies for both all tournament team players and the top four finishes in both divisions, were hand made locally. Host nation France and the UNS were especially proud of the 80 youth aged officials they had working throughout the event as part of the UNSS program “Towards a Responsible Generation.”

Wearing USA Volleyball in an event without USA teams is an interesting experience. When I walked into the volleyball venue, the first person to speak to me was Karen Schwartz, formerly playing for San Diego State University when my wife then, Laurel, was their setter. After graduating, she left to play professionally in Toulon, fell in love, married a French computer wiz, and had a daughter, who is a swimmer but was there helping host one of the visiting nation’s teams. Quite a trip on the wayback machine Mr. Peabody.... Then the Greek team coach said he had worked with Lloy Ball and asked for my card, then looked shocked at reading it and said “I read your blog all the time!”

The level of play was strong, similar to that seen in our 17 and under open division at the US Jr. Nationals. A

seesaw battle went on between Chinese Taipei and Poland, and in the end, thanks to the aggressive jump serving of a lefty, #8, from Poland; it ended 15-13 for Poland. The girls division was a showdown between Spain and Brazil, with the Spaniards winning in four well played sets. Taking third was China for the boys and Lativa for the girls. The Taiwan boys celebrated points a bit differently than most by running as a team to the endline around the server to come. Meanwhile, the Brazilian girls were clones of their Olympic champion's team in both celebration and mannerisms...the power of having their national teams on TV all the time down there, and being such heroes.



I have a photo gallery I took of the action which can be seen by clicking [HERE](#). My favorite part other than the nice long rallies was the closing ceremonies spontaneous dancing –CLICK HERE to see the clip I posted. The dancing inspiring song they are playing is Cheri Cher by the African group from France known as Magic System, worth a fun warm up music set for any nation's team, so download it!

I spent one evening meal sharing ideas with the staff present from Peace and Sport (based in Monaco), who made me aware of this ball, which they were quite impressed with... The reality of the lack of balls (and pumps, along with rough conditions), and other resources in this area, this TEDx speaker addresses quite well. Since we are USAV, helping everyone, not just one group, I wanted to throw out the idea of

a volleyball version....tho it might not make electricity....I have been rereading Daniel Kahneman's newest book [Thinking Fast and Slow](#) and love the sentence "I enjoyed the extraordinary good fortune of a shared mind that was superior to our individual minds and of a relationship that made our work fun as well as productive." So if you have 15 minutes to learn about a remarkable new soccer ball, go click these two links.... <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2llYQqrmZwA> and <http://unchartedplay.com/>



Next up...playing one last time in the King of the Mountain Father's Day tournament with McKenzie before she gets too old for the division we helped Leon Fell start about a decade ago. This year's KOM is the 40<sup>th</sup>....and I was there for the first one, playing on the sand in the Open division. Where the heck did my jump go over the last four decades anyways?

So a big shout out to the Greek coaches reading this, and to all other nation's coaches,

especially those right here in the USA, who are working to be better teachers of the sport, and growing the game together. Holler- [john.kessel@usav.org](mailto:john.kessel@usav.org) - if you have any questions and meander thru the other blogs and areas of our USAV website which contains so many helpful areas to your volleyball journey.

## Celebrating Together:

May 31, 2012

Just finished our annual meetings in Salt Lake City, where all the USAV leaders come to share their season's experiences and best practices and plan ahead to grow the game anew. This being an Olympic year, our CEO Doug Beal shared a special powerpoint at the Congress, celebrating the achievements of volleyball in the USA, aka USA Volleyball in his State of the Game. It is shared here, since so many of you reading this blog could not be in Salt Lake, yet you are growing the game so well in your part of our nation – we wanted you to celebrate too. [CLICK HERE to download](#) and read it, you will learn a lot about how the Team behind the Team, which is all of us, is doing at USA Volleyball.

I also appreciated the Intermountain Region, not just for being great hosts, but for helping the PVL get off to great success, and for naming their team “Utah Unity” – Many moons ago I wrote a volleyball magazine article, “Unity in Volleyball,” ( [CLICK HERE to download](#) ), which STILL is something we must strive for in our sport. Ricky Amon, former great from UCLA, and national team member in the early 1990s, just scanned it and sent it on to me with thanks, and thought it important to remind us about UNITY again... Thanks Ricky...

The final night of meetings before play begins, is the “Boyce Banquet” in honor of Dorothy C. Boyce. Dorothy joined USAV in 1952 as a consultant on women's volleyball and took on many leadership roles over her 22 years of involvement, including being USAV Vice President for a decade. Traditionally, I sit at the banquet with Mike Hulett, who, if you don't know of him...well dang it you should. I knew what was coming, as I had contributed a lot of photos of Mike, having been with him for decades as he helped head coach in our USA Paralympic programs. So take time to read the link award below, and watch the video ([CLICK HERE to watch](#)) that I took of his surprise in being honored with USA Volleyball's highest award, the Frier (named after the USAV leader who almost singlehandedly got volleyball into the 1964 Tokyo Olympic Games, just one of those

things that we all should know and celebrate too...). Mike's achievements are something we ALL should celebrate in volleyball. Just another thing USA Volleyball does to help volleyball for all, including the disabled of all ages.



<http://www.teamusa.org/USA-Volleyball/Features/2012/May/25/Mike-Hulett-Selected-as-USAVs-2012-Frier-Winner.aspx>

Mike and me at a recent US Open, where the USA Sitting Women's team was training....

I returned to celebrate with my daughter, her graduation from high school...I missed her capping ceremony, LAX team banquet, and Athlete Awards Ceremonies, to be at our USAV annual meetings. Such is life as a single dad. McKenize is named after Dave McKenzie's father, Bill – and seeing his success in helping the USA men's team qualify to the London Olympics was another event to celebrate (not to mention sold out crowds at the Men's NCAA Divisions I AND III Volleyball Championships!) The chance to celebrate started at her grad party shared with the wonderful Hannah Huffman, where dessert was the "meal." Hundreds of friends and family mingled and had fun doing the human sling shot ([www.thehumanslingshot.com](http://www.thehumanslingshot.com)), Airzookas (<http://www.airzookatoys.com/>), croquet, bocce, and taking silly group pictures in a photo booth. It ended with her graduating on Sunday, summa \*\*\* laude no less. How she found the energy to attend dozens of other friend's grad parties, can only be answered by one word – youth.

We have talked, and I have seen the same thing happen to teams, about the breaking apart of a group, which for "Mac" as we call her, really is 13 years since kindergarten, of some wonderful friendship groups. The sports of volleyball and lacrosse (they lost in the LAX state playoffs 13-16 to Thunder Ridge earlier this month), are core to her daily life, and she was honored with the Doc Stowell award for athletics – for combining athletics and academics, and being the "kind of player everyone wants to have be part of their team..." So tears came to my eyes, as the randomness of life stole a young woman from Yale who clearly is the kind of child any parent would dream to have... Marina Keegan's piece "The Opposite of Loneliness" is something that ALL teachers, coaches and parents should share and discuss with their students, players and family... ***PLEASE take the time to click thru and then read the supporting comments and links to this powerful story...***

<http://www.yaledailynews.com/news/2012/may/27/keegan-opposite-loneliness/?cross-campus>

And thanks to all of you for your help in growing the game together. [John.kessel@usav.org](mailto:John.kessel@usav.org)

### **The Randomness of the Bigger Game: Feb 01, 2012**

This guest blog is by Eric Hodgson, chair of the USA Volleyball's Grassroot's Commission and full time Director of Outreach for the Arizona Region of USA Volleyball. For more on his position, click <http://www.azregionvolleyball.org/Outreach/index.html> Note: If going to the doctor and medical tv shows are not your cup of tea, you might have someone else preview this great story for you....

I just hit the floor.

The pain was so excruciating and unexpected my body told me in no uncertain terms it was my only option, so I obliged. I laid there for a minute and tried to get up but my body hadn't changed my mind. I was at the moment a slave to the slicing pain I felt in my abdomen and now had no intention of angering it again.

My breaths got shallower and I looked at my skin sweating profusely and starting to turn a shade past pale.

I was in trouble. Appendicitis? Gall bladder? What the heck was happening?

Clutched in the fetal position on my office floor, I pulled my cell phone off my desk with my foot, and called 9-1-1. I could barely talk and surely didn't want to upset my abdomen anymore so I stayed as still as I could. Minutes later I heard sirens get closer and people banging on my front door which was locked and pulling at a garage door on an opener. I closed my eyes. I remember being tugged and pulled, a blood pressure cuff feeling like it would sever my arm it was so tight. I husky voice resonated in the background of a foggy mind..."His BP is 60 over 34; we got to get him out of here."

I don't remember much after that. Wearing only gym shorts, I felt the cool air hit my sweaty skin giving me an instant chill as I was gurneyed into Thunderbird Samaritan Hospital's emergency room.

The next few hours were more of the same. Tests, more tests and I finally realized that I needed to call my wife. Something was amiss and as much as I didn't want to worry her, she needed to be here.

A few hours later I was given a room in the I.C.U. A couple of different doctors came in and proclaimed I had a severe case of pancreatitis, inflammation of the pancreas. The tests showed the organ in distress and I felt relieved they knew what it was, but still wondering how to get my next pain shot quicker. It was still killing me. I could only lie on my side and every time I switched sides it was as if it all started again.

A little while later, the surgeon came in and sat down. He was going against the grain telling me he didn't think it was pancreatitis since I didn't fit the profile and that you needed 2 of 3 conditions to diagnose. We had one he said adding there's nothing to show HOW you got this condition.

*I later realized how in his own way, he used statistics to buck a popular theory and kept working to find another answer, something that as coaches we strive to do everyday with our teams.*

The night was rough. Of course you can't sleep in a hospital and an I.C.U. ward is even worse. Close your eyes and a bell, buzzer or light goes off. Nurses round the clock; taking blood, checking blood pressure, giving you shots, ordering more tests. It was a non stop parade of interruption but if whatever they did took this pain away, I was okay with it.

Around mid day next, my wife and Dad were in the room with me. My Dad is going through his own medical malady at the moment and was leaving his treatments to come see me. It made me sad that I had to burden him so much, but I was so glad he was there.

Suddenly a pain worse than the first lit me up inside and raised me up off the bed. "Go get a nurse" I yelled and rolled on my side. From there, I don't remember much. According to my wife, a nurse came in and saw my eyes fluttering. She yelled for help and within 10 seconds 7 people were around me. "He's crashing" was the only thing my wife heard as she watched this unfold. At one point, my blood pressure was 30 over 17.

The only thing I remember about it was a voice of an Asian doctor snapping his fingers in front of me and yelling, "Stay with us! Don't go anywhere, stay here with us!!!" I couldn't figure out what he was talking about.

I do now.

*I recently watched an astonishing soul cleansing by a doctor named Brian Goldman on the TED network. ([http://www.ted.com/talks/brian\\_goldman\\_doctors\\_make\\_mistakes\\_can\\_we\\_talk\\_about\\_that.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/brian_goldman_doctors_make_mistakes_can_we_talk_about_that.html)) His confession about how physicians aren't perfect further solidified in me how much medicine, like so many other professions including coaching, isn't black and white. Like coaching, through trial and error, years of experience, constantly looking for more and better information, you are still left with doing your best which at times still isn't good enough. I was about to find out first hand that Doctors aren't perfect and their diagnosis aren't always spot on!*

Later that night, answers became clearer. The surgeon, bucking the theory of the other doctors, had been right. Further tests showed a Splenic Arterial Aneurism. The artery leading to my spleen had ruptured and was causing internal bleeding and the pancreatitis. They snaked a scope through my groin and attached a small slinky over the aneurism to seal it off. If the bleeding stopped, things were good to go!

I spent the next three days in I.C.U. and my life became all about numbers and stats and a need for ice chips. My wife never left my side and slept on the couch in my room, waking up whenever I rustled and keeping tabs on the numbers with the nurses. I was given two units of blood and told that my hemoglobin which is around 13 or 14 in a normal human should come up a point for each unit. After the two units, it fell. Another two units and it came up slightly.

On the third night, a terrific nurse and former high school volleyball player named Ashley came into my room. I had gotten a pain button that released morphine whenever I pressed it. She came in and told me in a most humorous way to stop being macho. That I couldn't get better if I had to spend all my energy fighting the pain. Hit your pain button she told me, adding, "You know you really don't look all that macho anyway!" and retreated from the room smiling ear to ear, almost as big a smile as mine.

*It made me think of how important a sense of humor is and how valuable it can be in situations of pressure and self absorption. A well placed quip or comment can ease the burden and produce some amazing results.*

For the rest of my stay, I hit that pain button every 20 minutes per her orders.

I was solemn knowing that I was missing my team's first tournament. We were a 15's team placed as the four seed in a four team pool in a 16's tournament. But the texts I started getting from the Parents made my day fly by. *We upset the # 2 seed in two sets, lost a tight one to the #1 seed and then beat the #3 seed in three! My two amazing assistants, who were in their first tournament without any help or guidance, stuck to their principals and the skill sets and game plans we worked on. As we talked about, they were going to make mistakes and they did, but they learned from them and pulled off a miracle day.*

On the night of the 5<sup>th</sup> day, a proactive nurse who told me of her high school volleyball prowess in great detail, came in and said the numbers were still too low especially since they had hung two more units earlier in the evening. She called the Dr. who ordered a couple of tests. One was a contrast ultrasound where I had to drink a liter of this vile citrus flavored spew and I had to down the whole bottle in an hour before the test. Diligently I timed a glass every 10 minutes. Like clockwork I drank this down, gulp after horrid gulp. Down to my last half glass, the nurse peered around the corner. "You're going to kill me." She said. I looked up and cringed. "The Dr. just cancelled that test. You don't have to drink anymore."

*I wasn't going to get mad at the nurse, she was just following orders and in further thought, why get mad at all. There have been plenty of times as a coach I've made a bad call and a team of mine winds up executing a bad game plan or not executing because of my shortcomings as a coach. They didn't get mad at me and it forced me to get better at what I do. Blame is a bad out for anyone, moving forward should be the focus.* The next morning the Surgeon came into my room. He sat down and said matter of factly, "We're waiting for the numbers from last night but you're still bleeding into your belly. I want to do a splenectomy."

I was stunned but he exuded confidence. He had been right about the pancreatitis which gave him credibility. "Is there any other options?" I asked.

"Bleeding to death," was his answer.

*His confidence in not only his diagnosis but in the way he delivered it to me put me at ease. I often think about those coaches that ooze confidence with their players and other coaches, whether coaching 12's or the Olympic team. It is a trait that is earned with hard work, education and expertise. His confidence led me to the operating room 75 minutes later.*

After 2 ½ hours, I was spleen-less. The incision was 8 inches from belly button to sternum and it was accompanied by a gnarly drain that tubed out of my belly into a little reservoir to gather and dispose of all the blood product.

The next three days were about walking. "You have to get up and walk!" was the mantra from nurse after nurse. So walk I did. As I hear now from people that have had abdominal surgery, you don't realize how much that part of your body is incorporated into every movement. I became fearful of the random cough, hiccups and shivering.

I was given a clear liquid diet which, just so you know, includes NOTHING that is clear. I became a 9 year old again asking for popsicles with every nurses visit. One of the night nurses proved again how small the volleyball world was. She had played in the State semifinals against my Daughter's team 10 years before. We chatted about the girls on that team and where they were now. It was a nice diversion from walking and broth.

It had been 9 days since I had eaten and when I was given the green light to eat, nothing tasted good and my appetite resembled a bloated sparrow. Soup, a hamburger, salad...nothing tasted right. I was told this is a byproduct of the surgery.

I tried to get some work done. I had about 130 e-mails and started dissecting them for importance. Using my touch screen iPad, I quickly realized that morphine and touch screen is not a marriage made in heaven. I spend hours retyping only to twitch once again and delete what I had just written. Ugh! E-mails would wait a few more days!

The surgeon came in and proclaimed me ready to go home four days after surgery. I was ecstatic! I couldn't wait to get out of the hospital despite the excellent care I had been given. Something about tossing and turning on your own bed and NOT being woken up by a blood pressure cuff or exhausted I.V. line.

A week ago I had 25 staples removed from my abdomen and a drain that in my mind was the length of the



width of me, about a foot, turned out to be closer to 5 feet. That was exactly as unpleasant as it sounds. I was used to doing 7 mile hikes almost daily in the Phoenix Mountain Preserves and now I walk around the block and need 10 minutes to rest up. I remember an old adage about the E.D.G.E. of pain: Every Day Gets Easier. It's what I live by for the coming weeks.

I am set to be back to normal in 5 or 6 weeks. *It's a process, something the Dr. said a number of times to me and I smiled thinking how many times I've uttered that phrase to my teams and the coaches I help train. "It's all part of the process."*

It's humbling to flirt with physical disaster. It amplifies everything around you and makes you notice the littlest of things. I am forever taken with the Steve Jobs quote in his Stanford speech he gave seven years ago, "No one wants to die. Even people who want to go to heaven don't want to die to get there. And yet death is the destination we all share. No one has ever escaped it. And that is as it should be, because Death is very likely the single best invention of Life. It is Life's change agent. It clears out the old to make way for the new." Now I have seen life's change agent and it's time to clear out the old and make way for the new. I thought about this point hard when, on my first walk in my neighborhood and put my iPod to my ears, selecting random on the song choice. Out of the 800 plus songs, one Steve Jobs may have picked personally fired up first.

"The End" by the Doors!

I smiled listening to it and then chuckled to myself when the next song randomly came up, even more fitting that its predecessor.

"With a Little Help from My Friends."

Upon further research I found that the odds of a splenic arterial aneurism are .02% with a mortality rate of over 10%. My surgeon said in 22 years of practicing medicine, this was the second one he had ever seen that wasn't induced by an accident.

In other words, a random occurrence.

I spend my coaching life talking to coaches and players and parents about the randomness of our sport and until three weeks ago, overlooked the big picture; how random life is. My wife ran through the litany of what ifs with me in the hospital. What if your cell phone was downstairs? What if you had been driving or hiking alone or had been at practice? What ifs are the speed bumps we use to slow down our lives but they can be more of a hindrance than a help. Once healthy I want to continue to teach this game, this amazing and random and wonderful game to any and all that will listen.

I thought about my team, not my club girls but my team; My Mom and Dad who set aside their own personal health issues to be there for their son. My wife who put her life on hold to make sure I had mine back, sleeping on couches and keeping herself up on everything having to do with my care. My daughter who despite being scared put on a smile and made the best of a tough situation. Even my grandson, all of 4 years old, came in to see me after the surgery and gave me a lesson on how hospital beds can raise and lower like an elevator while laying next to me. A carnival ride hidden under dingy linen sheets! The people I work with at the Arizona Region office that scrambled to cover my obligations and doubled up on things so I didn't have to worry. This is my team and I'm grateful for all of them.

Random is exciting and random can be scary but random also keeps us on our toes, alert and ready for anything.

After the past three weeks, I feel like I am ready for anything!

### Warrior Transition Unit Europe - Veterans Day Thanks: Nov 11, 2011

This seems fitting to post on Veterans Day...I've been on the second largest US Army base in the world this week, somewhere in Germany about 120km from Frankfurt, in between Mac's regionals (they advanced, now 26-0...) and the State Championships in Denver. The Army is observing Warrior Care month, and the Warrior Transition Battalion – Europe have a four-day “Train the Trainers” event going on, that includes Archery (so 2x Paralympian Kevin is here, Wheelchair Basketball and Sitting VB. The theme “Healing the Mind, Body and Spirit: Unlocking Unlimited Potential.”

So on my daughter's 18th birthday, a long morning hug goodbye led into the 90 mile “dash to DIA” to catch a flight to the east coast and then the overnight into Frankfurt Main. On landing, rented a car and opened the driving directions that US Paralympics had emailed me to the Hotel Barbarossahof... in the first 1,000 meters I was opposed to *Head east on Anknunftbogen toward Abflugbogen... Anknunftbogen turns slightly left and becomes Abflugbogen... Slight right onto Abflugring ...Slight left onto the B43 ramp to A3/Köln/Mainz/Wiesbaden/Kelsterbach...* Driving alone, I could already see the adventure ahead, so I bailed out and rented a GPS unit...



Ah, the German Autoban and a five speed...in the no speed limit areas, my little Renault clocked 200 KPH ,” bringing back memories of my first time going over a hundred miles an hour driving a car on the Pacific Coast Highway back in my high school days... On arrival and check in, I noted that the “Herald Post” newspaper which is “serving the communities in US Army Garrison Baden-Wurttemberg” has Heidelberg High School's Carrie Smith on the cover, attacking, during a match against Ansback and Hohenfels. They won and, ranked #1



in Division 1, they came to Ramstein to face seven other D1 schools in the European Championships. Some coaches from CAP courses in the past are over here, and while I misconnected with Hia Sebastian darn it, Brian Swenty did drive 4 hours to spend two days helping, and planning on ways to help the American High Schools in Europe and the Pacific. Brian's team took fourth but he said it was the most rewarding season ever...he is doing good things, his USAV CAP training being put to good use and more, as he now is going to do a sitting program back at his base...

Your basic beer and meat meals with the US Paralympic staff taught me some interesting things...to wit...

Kevin Stone is here, 2004/2008 Paralympian who does a lot of service dog work with Congress, regaling us with stories of his dog jumping on congressman's chair. Kevin was injured in a car crash where his driver lost control, tumbling 150 feet down a hill. Kevin survived with a TBI and spinal cord fractures, but his driver did not... about Chuck Leer, marine injured in Vietnam by a Chinese mortar who competed in China 2008... of 62 year old Butch Johnson, if he makes it in 2012, will be a six time Olympian in archery, who has medaled...so I need to search <http://www.teamusa.org/USA-Archery.aspx> or [www.teamusa.org](http://www.teamusa.org) and learn more about him...

WTB-E Commander Lt. Col. Michael Richardson noted that "the survivability of today's injuries, especially in battle, is remarkable, but those injuries and the subsequent disabilities are very long lasting" So true, as what killed soldiers in WWII and Vietnam, with advances in medical care and response times, the soldiers now survive...Here is an article that ran in the "Stars and Stripes" about this Paralympic Adaptive Sport Experience. As you can see from both the video and film, we got the 3 star general,

<http://www.stripes.com/news/sports-paralympics-style-aids-wounded-warriors-rehab-1.160255>

The biggest memory will be of the staff, with Kevin and Tyler in their wheelchairs, going to dinner at one of the largest castles in Germany. Built in the 1200, wheelchairs and disabled access was not part of the plan. A team effort to get our two fellow staffers to enjoy everything we were seeing, on a magical nite in the fog...Here are three of my favorite pictures that I took that night...

One of the sessions over the four days was called "YEAH-BUT" after the famous "yeahbut birds" that flock around these training events. Here is the list from here: No ADA (American Disabilities Act)...Equipment.....Resources (Access).....Money.....Lack of motivation (closed mindedness)...Education...Communication and Protectiveness...Lack of Expertise...Lack of Respect to Instructors...Time!...Selling Programs...Culture Change...Publicity...Limited Profiles...



Another site topic was on Energy Management....Reinterpret Challenges as Opportunities....Reinterpret Nerves...Tactical Breathing/Relaxation....Grip/G ravity – Control/Can't Control....and GOAL SETTING....Values...Dream Big....Set priorities, actions, attitudes...Commitment (Curtis Martin)...Monitor Progress... and Integrating Imagery....Imagery Script....Use before, after, during event....Used for pain, skill development, improved performance.

For those wanting to know a bit more about the program's training overall and information on recovery and rehab, check out "[Building a Soldier Athlete](#)" -especially the appendix. It was fun watching Kevin at the Rod and Gun club teaching all the trainers archery, using the adaptation options, by having one of their teammates shoot sitting in a chair, and another (to simulate being an amputee) shooting with one knee on the same chair...I got to go as the Sitting team core staff is now trying to qualify the USA men in the ParaPanAms in Mexico, so let's wish them luck in getting past Brazil this time (4 year ago, they lost in Brazil, 13-15 in the gold medal qualifying match in front of 7,000 screaming yellow shirted fans...).

So ASAP, I am planning on going see a ski movie in Denver that is narrated by my father's old USC college roommate, none other than Warren Miller. The name is *The Movement*, and is about Rick Finkelstein. The notes say...*In 2004, he was paralyzed in a ski accident on Aspen Mountain. With a severed spine and internal trauma, he wasn't expected to live. Six years, nine surgeries, and a seeming lifetime of rehab later, his dramatic return to Aspen was captured on film. Even with the latest gear, expert coaching, and mentorship from the sport's pioneers, Rick faced a daunting challenge with many risks and no guarantees. "The Movement" is about making tough choices, beating the odds, and living life to the fullest; Miller and Robert Redford narrate this incredible documentary by Kurt Miller and Greg I. Hamilton.* I say, watch it...along with [this 2 minute film I took of double match point](#) happening between Army and Air Force, and Navy/Coast Guard and the Marines at the Warrior Games this past May. That clip will show you all why sitting volleyball is part of the WTU program, not just here in Europe but around the world...

Citius, Altius, Fortius all, Veterans Day gratitude, and thanks for your help in growing ALL sports...

**Great by Choice / Thinking, Fast & Slow:** Nov 02, 2011

OK, One down, two books to go....

I blogged about the one down The Rare Find last week.

<http://www.teamusa.org/USA-Volleyball/Features/2011/October/26/The-Rare-Find.aspx>

The two to go?....

Well, I'm now reading Nobel prize winner Daniel Kahneman's [Thinking Fast and Slow](#). (remember that article "Decisions, Decisions," that impacted me so greatly in the 1980s on the concept of "regression to the mean," now also part of IMPACT) Back cover praise?

*"Daniel Kahneman is one of the most original thinkers of our time. There may be no other person on the planet who better understands how and why we make the choices we make. In this absolutely amazing book, he shares a lifetime's worth of wisdom presented in a manner that is simple and engaging, but nonetheless stunningly profound. This book is a must-read for anyone with a curious mind."* - Steven Levitt, co-author of [Freakonomics](#) and [SuperFreakonomics](#).

or...

*“This is a landmark book in social thought, in the same league as Adam Smith’s *The Wealth of Nations* and Sigmund Freud’s *The Interpretation of Dreams*.”* – Nassim Taleb, author of [Fooled by Randomness](#) and [The Black Swan](#).

So what is next up? [Great by Choice](#), by Jim Collins and Morten Hansen... [Good to Great](#) is a must read from a decade ago, and this new one just came out Oct 11<sup>th</sup>...the last chapter of the book is much like the New York Times article linked below, well worth the read all by itself. Amazon reviews are quite praiseworthy of it, and general notes include:

*Ten years after the worldwide bestseller [Good to Great](#), Jim Collins returns with another groundbreaking work, this time to ask: Why do some companies thrive in uncertainty, even chaos, and others do not? Based on nine years of research, buttressed by rigorous analysis and infused with engaging stories, Collins and his colleague, Morten Hansen, enumerate the principles for building a truly great enterprise in unpredictable, tumultuous, and fast-moving times.... [Great by Choice](#) distinguishes itself from Collins’s prior work by its focus not just on performance, but also on the type of unstable environments faced by leaders today.*

A nice Fortune excerpt from the book on managing through chaos is found here...think of coaching in tournaments and all we do in the chaos of the game...

<http://management.fortune.cnn.com/2011/09/30/jim-collins-great-by-choice-exclusive-excerpt/>

And check out this NYT story on the spark of luck.... Please share other articles and books that are impacting and changing your coaching for the better...it is how we all get better...

[http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/30/business/luck-is-just-the-spark-for-business-giants.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/30/business/luck-is-just-the-spark-for-business-giants.html?_r=1)

Oh and on that sharing note, what did I order today? .... [Incognito: The Secret Lives of the Brain](#) by David Eagleman... Why?

Cuz of this...

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wpSBdA0Dc14>

So since next week I fly to Germany to work with the Paralympic Military Program over there- as Bill and Elliot are at the ParaPanAm in Mexico at this same time,, i now have more than enough to read and learn from...and hope you have the time to do the same. Thanks for your help in growing the game!

[John.kessel@usav.org](mailto:John.kessel@usav.org)

P.S. Yet another great NYT read to catch before it might be locked away...

[http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/30/opinion/mona-simpsons-eulogy-for-steve-jobs.html?\\_r=3&pagewanted=all](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/30/opinion/mona-simpsons-eulogy-for-steve-jobs.html?_r=3&pagewanted=all)

## Powerful ESPN Story Telling: Sep 15, 2011

Those of you who have seen me speak know how much I value story telling to be the best teachers we can be. In previous blogs I have noted some of the great information found in TED.com, and Playing for Change

So the AVCA wisely shares webinars in October about Down the Stretch – given the thousands of scholastic girls teams – both coaches and the players, who are in that final push towards season ending excellence. For me, some of the best stories to share come from ESPN’s Emmy Award winning show, E:60 “The Best Stories in Sports...” Knowing how busy we all are, I have pulled out from youtube the ones which I feel many coaches would find of value – for either personal development, or that of team bonding and development. Since these are stories mostly best shared down the stretch, I am sharing them now so you can decide if and when to watch them as you do apply your craft in the art of coaching... E:60 – stories that are good like

GREAT stories at E60, all you can find, in addition to those on youtube, are at the main site:

<http://espn.go.com/espn/e60/index>

*My favorites posted on YouTube are noted and linked below.....Hope you and your program benefit from the great tales that the E:60 staff has taken so much time to put together...*

**Homerun** - One of the most powerful stories of sportsmanship many have seen or heard about but as time passes, your team may not know of it. The story of Sara Tucholsky’s home run, the ESPY Sportsmanship Moment winner. Sara spoke to the Volleyball Festival Opening Ceremonies back in the year it happened, along with one of the players who assisted her.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ttkBP2XDZvE>

**Unbreakable**..A story about depression and teen suicide – 15 powerful minutes that apply to a lot of top HS athletes sadly...

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bfj3Suuk4Tk>

**Haiti Women’s Soccer** – We work a lot with Haiti in volleyball, but the story is not really told...this story is much the same, just a different team sport and we are doing lots more Paralympic Sitting volleyball development for the amputees.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tey6oVuEAt0>

**Josia Viera** -- The joy of playing a sport you love, even if life makes you age far faster than it is supposed to...

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xCSzysu\\_fly](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xCSzysu_fly)

**Second Impact** -- E:60 explores Preston Plevretes' life after tragedy

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f0xJT53SZqQ>

**The Children of Bophal...** The power and desire to play a favorite sport no matter what is seen in this....

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5chwg2ESwXc>

**Amputee Soccer** – Haitian Amputee Soccer Team...most of the world cannot wheelchair around the environment they live in..these guys are great at showing how you can learn to move and play given the injuries they have...

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ghlMkqAEC4>

**E60 Freestyle Soccer** – We need to start doing more freestyle volleyball during the breaks in a tournament.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rpi5205WjvQ>

**The Alligator Wrestler** – Pushing yourself to be the best you can be in the choices you make about the things you do in your life...

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oHpmtCG8RwU&feature=fvsr>

**Knuckleball Girl** – A different way to send the message to all ages of players about the importance of developing a great floater serve....

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b5dDtsxsLH0>

Now, add in the great 30:30 ESPN shows, which I own about a dozen of their shows ... Given that we are down to the semifinals of the World Cup in Rugby, there is one 30-30 film I strongly get you to watch. – The 16<sup>th</sup> Man – Hollywood Reporter says this about it,

<http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/30-30-16th-man-tv-29554>

it won a Peabody award and you can get it on Amazon.com at a very good price, used and new. Finish this Rugby finishing focus, there is a must read blog just posted by Arizona State University's head coach Jason Watson, who is originally from Australia, on the Gold Medal Squared website...READ IT...

<http://goldmedalsquared.com/blog/2011/10/over-achievers/>

There you have it... a whole season to share impacting sports stories that strengthen your team and programs. Share yours below in the comments from ESPN or seen on YouTube so we can all share. And for those wondering, my all time favorite movie list for teams, up to 2004, as I used with the 2000 Olympic and 2004 Paralympic teams I was team leader for – can be downloaded below. There are some NEW good ones out too of course, starting with Real Steel... Thanks for you help in growing the game together and let us know of other

stories to [share....john.kessel@usav.org](mailto:share....john.kessel@usav.org)

[http://assets.teamusa.org/assets/documents/attached\\_file/filename1/50692/Movies\\_for\\_Training\\_Camps\\_to\\_the\\_Games\\_6.10.04.pdf](http://assets.teamusa.org/assets/documents/attached_file/filename1/50692/Movies_for_Training_Camps_to_the_Games_6.10.04.pdf)

## **Inclusion Through Sitting Volleyball: Aug 25, 2011**

Many readers know of my passion for the disabled side of our sport – from Paralympic to Special Olympics. Some recent news is that the World Games for the Special Olympics will be in Los Angeles in 2015 so start planning, and I will be serving on the Jury at the 2012 London Paralympics for Sitting Volleyball, marking 28 years of doing these Summer Games in some capacity, since my first work with the 1984 Games in Los Angeles. So with that in mind, I wanted to ask each junior volleyball and Paralympic Sports Club to consider including Sitting Volleyball in your outreach, training and programming.

To make it easier, here is the material we have to help you make it happen. Remember, that in the majority of sitting programs around the world, the athletes are NOT disabled, but instead choose to play the game without jumping. Making it easier is the fact that there are only four major rule variations between the Olympic and the Paralympic game – can you name those four? Well we have the material below to do just that, and get your kids to play with disabled kids, or to have your whole junior team train more with using their hands and getting their upper body into better shape! This blog simply shares the core resource material we have created at USA Volleyball to help you.

1. **I'm a New Coach** - This section of the grassroots button has some vital articles to read so that the start of your program is a success, including the free [Minivolley book](#) which has both a chapter on sitting volleyball, as well as tons of training, warm up, cool down and scoring ideas.

<http://www.teamusa.org/USA-Volleyball/Grassroots/I-am-a-New-Coach.aspx>

2. **Sitting Volleyball Webinar** – Attached and linked below is the current webinar/powerpoint – we will be doing another one this season free to all attendees. <http://www.teamusa.org/USA-Volleyball/Grassroots/Free-Webinars.aspx>

3. **Sitting Skills Poster** – Click here to download then take to print and post on your gym wall. <http://www.teamusa.org/USA-Volleyball/Grassroots/Posters.aspx>

4. **Youth Coloring Book** – whether you have younger players in the program, or are working with disabled adults, the book has several sitting volleyball cartoons for coloring, so an athlete's children or extended family members can join in having fun with this version of the game, and all other versions. [http://www.teamusa.org/~media/USA\\_Volleyball/Documents/Resources/USAV%20Coloring%20Book%20v10%204612.pdf](http://www.teamusa.org/~media/USA_Volleyball/Documents/Resources/USAV%20Coloring%20Book%20v10%204612.pdf)

5. **Sitting Volleyball International and USA Team Skill Poster Sets** - We have created 24 posters – six USA



men, six USA women, six International men and six international women from the thousands of photos I took during the 2010 World Championships in Oklahoma

6. **Get Sitting Volleyball Videos** – contact [john.kessel@usav.org](mailto:john.kessel@usav.org) so he can use “WeTransfer” to send you key videos from USA and international play to watch and use in your program.

7. **Read the Newest Rulebook** – the 2011-12 version is linked below and attached to this blog.  
[http://assets.teamusa.org/assets/documents/attached\\_file/filename1/50756/Sitting\\_Volleyball\\_Rules\\_2011-2012final.pdf](http://assets.teamusa.org/assets/documents/attached_file/filename1/50756/Sitting_Volleyball_Rules_2011-2012final.pdf)

8. **Contact Elliot Blake** – He is on staff to help you create and connect your program to USA Volleyball and all the resources and events available. To see much of this material which applies to all versions of the sport, go to <http://www.teamusa.org/USA-Volleyball/Grassroots.aspx> and start looking around!

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### **Bionic Warriors and Heroes: By John Kessel May 16, 2011**

This week begins one of the more special annual events held at the U.S. Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs, the Wounded Warrior Games. No time for Tuesday Tips for the Coaches of Chaos, sorry. This event is just mega-important to the volleyball family. That said, this Thursday is a special free webinar for YMCAs which you are welcome to also attend as readers of this blog, should the topic interest you...



Saturday (May 14), I took a break from my planning and operational duties as tournament director of the sitting volleyball part of the Games, to coach. My son Cody and USAV CAP staffer Andy Pai are coaching the Special Ops Command (SOCOM) team in the event, but on Saturday both of them had to be at the Colorado Boys' State High School Volleyball Championships coaching, and unable to train their team here. So I got the honor and privilege to work with these guys. They will be competing against teams from the Armed Forces branches of Army, Air Force, Navy and Marines. Given the recent activities of the Special Ops teams overseas, there is a heightened awareness to this truly special group of wounded warriors. The training for this group has been short – the Marines and Navy have been training for this event for months. So this small group, just eight of them, are on a crash course to learn the game. Their logo is pretty intimidating, and they call themselves the Bionic Warriors. Pretty cool all-in-all.

So what are they working on? You might have guessed serving and serve reception, and been right for sure. Combine that with make your motions simple and repeatable as possible, and always error on the side of the positive mistake, not the negative error, and you have the core of what they are focused on. They will run a 6–6, and the only “new” things they are working on – putting up at least two serve blockers, allowed as one of the four rule differences of the game, and using their hands to move, not their legs. This last part takes time to make automatic, and since reading and movement are even more important on such a low net/short court (just over a yard high net and only a six-meter wide by five- meter deep court) where the ball is coming from opponents who are just a few meters away, it is likely to be our Achilles heel. Those who have played more, and thus use their hands to move better, will get to more balls. We know our “system” will be mostly being “out of system” and therefore they are hustling and getting to as many balls as they can to just put up. Backrow attacking comes from just the two- meter line away from the net, and really all six players will be a part of the attack options every time the ball is on their side. Since they want to error off the net, and set at least a meter off the net, you will see a lot of backrow hitting too.

Perhaps the best player on the team is Mike Day. You won't find out much about how he ended up here as a Wounded Warrior, but he did share this with me as we sat on the bench during a water break. He was shot during a single room firefight between himself alone and four enemies, in the town he noted ironically was named Karmah, Iraq. He was the only survivor. They had automatic weapons, he had a rifle, but ended up using his pistol to take down three of his opponents. What did he take in the process? Twenty seven shots...27....half to his body armor...half to his body with no armor. He says how lucky he was as "only two bones were hit..." his thumb and scapula. He has tattoos over some of the bullet holes, flames surrounding the scar/tattoo. As he is Special Ops, that is about the end of the story, but you can read this insightful journalist's look into the town and the recent history there since the fall of Saddam - <http://www.michaeltotten.com/archives/2008/03/the-liberation.php> Cody and Andy are enjoying training and coaching them in this event – it really is an honor just to share the same court with all these Wounded Warriors who have given so much for us all.

Hopefully one or more will also be able to make it to the U.S. Sitting National Team level, and again represent the USA in a future World or Paralympic competition. Nonetheless, the spirit of play and competition here this next week will be a joy to be a part of. So if you find yourself in Colorado, come on down to the U.S. Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs and check out the competition.

Our medal round finals will be Saturday afternoon 1-4 p.m. at the main Sport Center One, the finals will be an all USAV Staff run event. Pool play is going on each evening 8-10 p.m. – Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday up on two courts running at the same time on Sports Center Two courts.



Bonus...If you can't come join us, get online at watch it!

<http://www.teamusa.org/US-Paralympics/Military/Warrior-Games-presented-by-Deloitte.aspx>

Kathy DeBoer of the AVCA sent me this link after my blog post, so adding it in today, after a great evening of competition.

<http://m.npr.org/story/136360318?url=/2011/05/17/136360318/veterans-compete-for-gold-at-warrior-games>

## A Hard Day for Haiti: Jan 12, 2011

I missed the first power tourney to travel for work. I went to San Diego for two days to teach coaches and leaders at the Starlings USA Directors Convention. Starlings is a program for economically disadvantaged athletes. USAV and Starlings USA promote the Haiti Street Project, where Haitian kids make bracelets by hand. We would love to see more RVAs and clubs get involved. Go to [www.haitistreet.org](http://www.haitistreet.org) for more information on how your club can get involved.

So I thought this e-mail from Byron Shewman of Starlings USA – who will be in Haiti next week – could be a message all USA Volleyball leaders at ALL levels. Coaches, directors, parents and players should read this today, given this week’s anniversary of the event. I will be traveling next month to the Dominican Republic to do a clinic, which will include their neighbor nations and Haitians. This summer, a State Department grant I am directing will bring 10 coaches from five different nations, including Haiti, to the United States for training at the Volleyball Festival in Phoenix.

This past weekend at the Starlings Convention, I took this picture of Edeline, speaking, and Isemene so you can see of whom Byron writes. There is also a picture of all the Starlings directors who made it – the others attended by webinar. Thanks for all you do to help grow the game beyond the court boundaries.

**From:** Byron Shewman

**Sent:** Wednesday, January 12, 2011 5:19 PM

**Subject:** A hard day for Haiti... and for Edeline



Photo: John Kessel for USAV From left, Edeline, Isemene and Byron Shewman at the Starlings USA Directors Convention.

Today I came home from an errand and quietly walked into the house. Yesterday, Edeline and Isemene had advised their English teacher that they would not be attending class today as they would spend it in prayer and contemplation of Haiti and their loved ones there.

From the hallway I saw Edeline on her knees, her one hand slowly waving in the air as Haitians do when they pray, her voice in soft supplication to God. As what can happen with her, stress and emotion had triggered

painful pulsations in her head but she continued praying. Later in the afternoon, I saw her pacing outside, the small tape recorder held in one little hand while the other gesticulated. The bright winter shined on her cocoa skin. I listened from a distance. Now her words came in a strong, resolute tenor. She was recounting what happened a year ago today and, although in Creole, I caught her description of the moment when the man with the crowbar broke through the rubble above and yelled down into the mountain of debris, "Is anyone alive down there!"

Listening more, something struck me that I had never realized before. She was talking about the complete darkness that befell Haiti. Amidst all the unfathomable destruction, within a few hours there was no light, no electricity. There were a few flashlights (a flashlight is even a luxury for most Haitians) and candles here and there. But the ensuing nights passed without light, obstructing movement and any relief to the shrieks of pain and terror filling the blackness.

Today was a hard day. Sorrow never left Edeline's face trouble visited her sister's visage even though Isemene is much more introverted. It will be a hard night. The messages coming from Haitian radio stations that they listen to will bring small comfort: Words of hope, songs of encouragement, readings of Biblical verses to draw parallels with Haiti and the travails of Old Testament tribes in cruel deserts. Its' not the same. There is no sadness that can match that of Haiti's history, nor what happened a year ago today; 200 years of it. Left as the world's center of orphans. Would that God answers some of Edeline's requests today. And some of the millions of desperate pleas that will lift into the Haitian sky tonight.

Byron

### **Growing Through our 3<sup>rd</sup> Season of Webinars: Sep 20, 2010**

You know, USA Volleyball (USAV) has maintained a web presence since the mid-90's, starting with the help of Tom Jack at [www.volleyball.org](http://www.volleyball.org) and progressing through our current partnership with [Team USA](http://TeamUSA.org) and the USOC...Jim Coleman helped create stat and game analysis even further back. Many of you may not realize USAV has been doing online education for several years, too - so I wanted to share a tiny bit of history and important facts, and a lot of good news for what we are doing to help grow the game this season.

After our historic success in Beijing 2008, the board of USA Volleyball re- focused programming on three core pillars for our sport – “Sustained Competitive Excellence,” “Growing the Game” and “Commercializing the Sport.” Following the successful implementation of the IMPACT Webinars in 2008-09 and the popular free Jr. Olympic Volleyball (JOV) Coaches Webinars in 2009-10, USA Volleyball will be expanding its free webinars for 2010-2011 into parent and JOV club director programming.

This year's national and Regional webinars, newsletters, articles and regional support will continue in the first two areas, while expanding into area of commercializing the sport with the assistance of our fellow Olympic family members, including the U.S. Olympic Committee, other USA Sport National Governing Bodies (NGB) and NORCECA National Federations. A full year of webinars will be offered, with all but the IMPACT versions being FREE to USA Volleyball Regional club directors, coaches, players and parents, as part of our partnership in keeping costs low and educational value high. If you are a USAV coach of juniors - you are a Jr. Olympic Volleyball, and/or a Jr. Olympic Beach Volleyball coach - as all USAV junior coaches of at any age level are recognized by the U.S. Olympic Committee to be USAV JOV coaches as well. That is part of the partnership of working with the programming of an Olympic Sport and its official NGB like USA Volleyball.

As part of the pillar of Sustained Competitive Excellence (SCE) - IMPACT Webinars have already begun and will be held twice monthly from until next June. These courses featuring the latest research in coaching philosophy, risk management, motor learning, drill design, minivolley and youth volleyball, beach volleyball and Paralympic volleyball programming. Last year, some 4,000 new USA Jr. Olympic Volleyball coaches benefited from the 22<sup>nd</sup> annual version of this 4-5 hour Fundamental Coaching course, in both Regional in person and national Webinar versions.

In the Growing the Game (GTG) pillar, back by popular demand are the Jr. Olympic Volleyball Coaches Webinars. This program last year was attended by over a thousand USAV and NCVF coaches, and will be offered again at no cost in two hour sessions covering the latest in science-based coaching principles and research – including Long Term Athletic Development (LTAD), Minivolleyball from our fellow National Federations around the world, Paralympic Sitting Volleyball, and much more. This continuing education clinic will be repeated monthly in 2010.

Last week, USA Volleyball received a substantial State Department Grant to help share coaching and volleyball programming ideas with the nations of Dominican Republic, Honduras, Barbados, Trinidad & Tobago and Haiti. *USAV regions and all our family of JOV coaches will be invited in 2011 to join in shared international webinars being hosted to cover sport programming and grassroots level programs for both boys and girls – including Special Olympic and Paralympic training.* High Performance indoor and beach volleyball programming for men and women is also being shared. USAV will be working with our international volleyball federation, the FIVB, to extend the grant to a dozen other nations in our NORCECA Zone.

Still within the Growing the Game Pillar, last spring USAV partnered with the Promise for Good Sports (PGS), and after testing the programming in several USA Volleyball Regions, the program – both regionally delivered and Parents as Partners Webinars will be offered in participating Regions. The annual schedule will be determined after the October 6-9 Regional Volleyball Association meetings in Denver, Colo.

Grow the Game Webinars are also going to be offered based on the most popular columns (based in view rates) of this very "Growing the Game Together" blog. You may be surprised to know that USA Volleyball's website is ranked #1 of all the Olympic sports offered under the Team USA website, generating a whopping 27 percent of total traffic. This blog, *thanks to all you readers from so many parts of our sport and other sports*, happens to be the second most popular blog over the last two years, of all the thousands of blogs offered at the U.S. Olympic Committee community pages by the 43 National Governing Bodies of sport. I can only say thank you and promise to work on sharing new ideas and insights here and in the webinars as well.

Free webinars will be offered and national team coaches will also be reaching out to share the core ideas they want to share to all USAV Regional Jr. Olympic Volleyball coaches (remember, that at means YOU, as a USAV Regional coach of any age, you are part of our USAV Jr. Olympic Volleyball and Beach Volleyball programs!) in webinars scheduled to be set around their World Championships preparations, as well as the preparations being used for the already London 2012 Paralympics qualified Women's Sitting Team.

Finally, in the Commercialize the Sport (CTS) area, several webinars, also at no cost, will be offered. In JOV Club Management, successful club directors will share their insights and best practices in managing the business of running a club well. If you have something you would like to share in these webinars, please get in touch with me.

Ahead, USA Volleyball will offer to its members many other chances to dialogue and share best practices on how to better grow the game and your club programming. Promise of Good Sports “Parents as Partners” webinars, State Department international sharing webinars and National Team coaches Core Concepts webinars will be announced after the RVA meetings (October 6-9).

### *So who will be joining us this season?*

How about Carl McGown, founder of the Gold Medal Squared program, who will speak soon on the things learned from being a part of our USA Men’s National Team program since 1975 (including 3 gold and a brof motor learning at BYU for many years. Terry Pettit, NCAA title winner and Nebraska head coach for 22 years, will speak on things learned since authoring his volleyball book “Talent and the Secret Life of Teams,” including his current experiences of being a JOV coach with the NORCO volleyball program.

Cecile Reynaud will chat and share her thoughts learned from 26 years of being the head coach at Florida State University, a current professor in Sport Management, as well as most recently serving as chair of the USAV Athletes Safeguard Commission. Ali Wood Lamberson of our USAV Beach Department will give out the latest Jr. Olympic Beach Volleyball programming ideas, including the ideas learned our international opponents in this past season’s great USAV international youth and junior beach successes. Jason Trepanier, Technical Director of the Ontario Volleyball Association in Canada will share his research and thoughts on “Meaningful Competition” for junior players. USAV staffer Susan Barkley will host a Q&A on best practices for club directors in using the USAV Webpoint system.

A host of other leaders and topics will be offered in the months to come, so keep checking with your Region and their website for the newest USAV programming webinars offered. Relax at home and tune in to learn at little or no cost as we partner in growing the game. Should you have a topic or speaker you wish to hear from, email [john.kessel@usav.org](mailto:john.kessel@usav.org) or post it below in the comment section and we will see if we can add it to the schedule. There is no reason to stand off to the side with your ideas unless you feel a need to keep secrets or profit from what you might share. Remember, by joining USA Volleyball, you are supporting all the members of our volleyball family who ALL deserve and need our help. Work with your RVA and let us know how else we can help you grow the game!

Citius, Altius, Fortius and best wishes during this high school season and upcoming Jr. Olympic Volleyball season.

### **Wounded Warrior Games: May 15, 2010**

This week the Olympic Training Center hosts some 200 disabled athletes from all the branches of the services. I have been working with US Paralympic staff on the sitting volleyball competition, and this week, fter months of preparation, the gym roared to life with teams from Air Force, Marines, Army, Navy – including Coast Guard. The fitting theme is, “*Once on the battlefield, now on the playing field...*” Today, on Armed Forces Day in America, I would like to share some grow the game insights about this amazing group of athletes.

Many of you may not realize that the FIVB is not involved in the sititng game, it is the [WOVD, the World Organization of Volleyball for the Disabled](#) which oversees the programming as a member of the [International Paralympic Committee](#) (the IPC). USA Volleyball meanwhile gives with the help of [US Paralympics](#), hundreds

of thousands of dollars in support, and currently two full time staff members directing the sitting program from grassroots to international competition. If you want to get involved, just contact me at [john.kessel@usav.org](mailto:john.kessel@usav.org), as we would love to have more people helping grow the sport, for the good of all.

I have been doing Paralympic sport for over 15 years. I produced the sitting volleyball venue in the 96 Atlanta Paralympics, having the crowd, and “Blaze” the rising phoenix mascot of those games, participate in between matches, in serving and skill contests. I have been to countless hospitals and military bases, urging and showing anyone willing to give the game a shot, to include it in their programming offerings for the disabled. What happens in that first 15 minutes when someone does sitting volleyball remains one of the best examples of the magic and joyful mystery of play. Physical therapists see their charges sitting, sliding, smiling, focused and intense – and then laughing hard, as they discover the sitting version of our sport, and say...”That is the first time I have seen him laugh like that since I have been working with him...”

I think it is because everyone knows the sport of volleyball, but they do not realize, until they DO it, how the sitting game is a great leveler. The shorter court and net means the ball is on you in an instant, and you have to volley that dang ball up somehow. You discover that, if you have legs, you can kick up a ball to save it, but

can't use those legs too much to move to the right spot – that now becomes your arms and hands' job. This also makes the games more competitive, and these Warrior Games showed that.



While I clearly am biased, the sitting volleyball venue was THE place to be each day, with close contests and amazingly spirited inter-service rivalry. One of the teams that did not make the medal round, lost their first set 7-25, only to keep the crowd thrilled in the second set, losing 28-30 to the eventual

gold medal Marine team. The crowds were so loud the referee corps could not hear the coaches or scorekeepers from just a few feet away. Each service, in the lead or not, yelled as loud as possible to out cheer their opponent. Many sponsors and military and hospital staffs were seeing the game played for the first time, and for these key groups, I think they see why the game is such a great Paralympic sport.

This spirit played out to the maximum at the gold medal match. The Marines came in confident and not having lost a set, the byproduct of a good long training camp that melded them into a solid team. Kari Miller and the Army Three coach asked if I could coach them the morning of the medal round. When a silver medal winning Paralympian and a veteran along with the coach of a Wounded Warrior team asks for help, you clear your schedule and give it. Andy Pai from CAP, a former Marine, and I were honored to do so. What can you accomplish in a couple of hours? I thought I would share my practice objectives here, in case anyone else finds themselves in the same condensed coaching situation....

1. Serve in and free ball, to areas one and two – Setters, lesser experienced as this group is, simply do not set as effectively with balls coming from court areas one and two – as all are trained with the traditional GPS located ball cart angle at zone five.

2. Pass up Dig up - \$5 Wendy's gift certificate for anyone digging or passing a ball "too high" and hitting the ceiling in either gym.

3. Everybody set off and inside – while a perfect set (at the sideline/just off the net) might see a kill level of near 60%, a set that is inside and off the net is killed at the same percentage level. However a ball set too tight and past the antenna is killed at a rate below 20%

4. Spike over, not into the net – Not only are we wanting to put the pressure on our opponent to think and play a ball by making sure it gets over the net, the "heaven to hell" ratio of error space is far bigger in sitting – Hell is the net, just a 1.15m barrier, and Heaven, the gap to hit any ball over when you are lost and confused as a new player on the court – is the remaining 7-11 meters from the top of the net to the ceiling. Aim for heaven when you are lost.

So those points made, we triple peppered, to start the "dig up not back to the opponent" habit, and then served, then did zone four and two pass-set-spiking with James Stuck of the US National Team and a teammate putting up the block to hit around. Serve some more – flat targets of Post it easel board 20x30 in sheets in both zone two corners. Then Army 3 played three USA national team members, Kari Miller included, who did not rotate, as their coach did three-ball wash points to get as many reps as possible in our short time together. It was an intense and spirited training, and then we headed back to the office.

One of the things to ask each junior, youth, and adult program reading this to consider is to at least play some sitting volleyball each season (lesson plans and setup ideas are in the new MiniVolley book, which you can download by [CLICKING HERE](#) and to even reach out to all disabled programs in your area to play and train



sitting volleyball. In Holland, some 3,500 people are members of their sitting volleyball program, but 3,000 of them are able bodied athletes who simply prefer the sitting option of the game, with no jumping and fast rallies. Consider playing family sitting volleyball some evenings, it will help your players overhead passing and floor defense, and bond your team in new ways.

Medal round day found



me announcing one of the semifinals while still taking action photos for future use, and to just capture the wonderful spirit and intensity of every wounded warrior, men and women, competing. Any Pai refereed all three days, and covered as Tech Director the day I flew to University of Central Oklahoma to represent USAV in the World Organization of Volleyball for the Disabled technical inspection for this July's World Championships of Sitting Volleyball. Come on down and join 40 teams from around the world (24 men's team and some 13 women's teams at this time) and see who gains the first three spots for the London Paralympics for both genders. Margie Mara did a marvelous job leading the scorekeepers, which included Matt, son of USAV staffer Kirstin Fracassiini. My intern Keven Johns did a great job as the other first referee and lots of USAV staff showed up for the medal round just to support the athletes. Brig. Gen. Gary H. Cheek was questioned about what he's asking of each of the soldiers competing at the 2010 Warrior Games. His reply was

*"The No. 1 thing I asked all of them to do was to take this flame, this Olympic torch, this spirit it has brought into them ... back to their comrades who are also recovering and moving forward and light that spark in them -- get their comrades back into life and into physical activity, and other things as well. [The] real purpose of these games is to have a greater impact in the programs we're running across all the military services in the future."*

For me, one of the biggest highlights was seeing Chuck again, the above the knee double amputee who is also partially deaf and completely blind. He was my designated server who missed just one serve last summer ([see my Paralympic Sports Club Blog by clicking here](#)). Chuck took 8<sup>th</sup> in his swimming race here, but was the heart and soul of the Marines, sitting in his wheelchair next to the bench and getting told what was happening point by point. Army 3 seemed to have learned something in the morning and beating a tough Air Force team in three to make the gold medal match, then they won the second game in the gold medal match, giving the Marines their first set loss of the games. They were tied 8-8 and then a fellow Marine gave the Semper Fi flag to Chuck in his wheelchair and raced around the gym. Somehow, Chuck's roar could be heard above everyone else's voice, and the Marines went on a 7-1 to victory. I choke up just writing about the service of that young man and his comrades, in every branch.

Forty-three million Americans have served in our Armed Forces over time. Some 650,000 have given the ultimate sacrifice of their lives. These wounded warriors each have given so much as well, their families and fellow servicemen included. The most powerful moment for me came just before Diane French, 1980 women's team Olympian hung medals. The Marine team was engulfed by their supporters and fellow Marines, their chant for their service branch filling the gym...then in a heartbeat, the chant changed to U-S-A, U-S-A!! and the whole gym joined in It is a moment I will never forget, for this is not only about being your best, but is about everyone pitching in together to make Americans the best we can be. together. Thank you all who serve and have served, from all of us at USA Volleyball.

### **The Power of Quotes:** By John Kessel Mar 17, 2010

I have been collecting quotes for all my life. Come into my USAV office or library, and you will see them scattered throughout my walls and shelves, mixed in with the eclectic history of volleyball and life gifts I have received. When new sentences or paragraphs, generated by great thinkers, teachers or writers in sport or life, are discovered, I add them to my collection. Back in 1996, we published the collection, and in early Internet days, began to swap new quotes with friends from around the world. The books went out of print, but I still keep getting requests for that collection.

So with the help of my intern Tom Terrific (aka Therkildsen, just hired this week by USA Triathlon to be their National Events Coordinator, yeah Tom!), we have sorted through the old and new and posted them all in the Grassroots section of the USAV website, under the subpage [Sports Quotes](#). Five different collections - one of proverbs, two parts which are my 1996 collection put in to boxes for easy posting which take up 77 pages, and two of quotes, either long or short ones, gathered from 1997 until now. There are millions of quote pages online now, but since people kept asking for this collection, seemed like we should honor their request, given the power of quotes.

One of the important ways to “use” quotes is to simply have teammates bring a favorite quote to start off each practice, and explain to the team why that particular quote was chosen. One player per practice, and each month you and the team gain better insights into each other. Post them on the team wall spot or web site, and the other family members gain more of that same insight. Easy to do and makes a difference.

I would like to share a few of my favorites, as they guide me through my coaching and parenting life. First, is a quote by Ralph Waldo Emerson that every coach should know by heart.

***"Without ambition one starts nothing. Without work one finishes nothing. The prize will not be sent to you. You have to win it. The man who knows how will always have a job. The man who also knows why will always be his boss. As to methods there may be a million and then some, but principles are few. The man who grasps principles can successfully select his own methods. The man who tries methods, ignoring principles, is sure to have trouble. "***

There is no magic, you have to work to win, and you must focus on principles in coaching, in order to have methods that will stand a chance. I am amazed at how many things coaches do which are not founded on principles, and yet they continue to do those unprincipled habits, because of either tradition, or belief, while ignoring the science of sport. This Emerson quote is found in page 24 of the 1996 quote collection.



Second is one by Dr. Richard Schmidt – which has been found in the IMPACT Manual for decades, but seems to not be understood by those who continue to follow old habits rather than evidence based coaching. In his easy to understand book [Motor Learning and Performance, Principles to Practice](#), (Now in about the 5<sup>th</sup> edition and one of the best “drill books” you can ever buy) he wrote -- ***“Drills and lead-up activities take considerable practice time and do not produce much transfer, so use them sparingly in later practice stages.....It is fruitless to try and train fundamental abilities (e.g. quickness and balance), so concentrate on the***

***fundamental skills instead...”*** This science has been shared with US coaches for over 20 years, yet we still see

coaching not understanding specificity in training, and doing things which are time wasters with little, no, or even negative transfer. My third quote to share is *“Kids don’t care how much you know, until they know how much you care.”* This quote you can find attributed to many people, or said of people, or players and other groups. The key thing is that it really is not how much you know, but how much you care and KNOW about the athletes you are working with, that matters. I have put my limited artistic skills to work with the help of Jay Doty, teammate from long ago, and put some core 30 things you should know about each of your athletes, in to a handy-dandy handout. The kids fill out the “player,” printed front back on a single page, and you then gather and read...and learn about each individual you are working to blend as a team. The information is very important to know, and the athletes will better see how you care about each of them. You can download the front page [HERE](#), and the back page [HERE](#).

Finally a Chinese proverb (found in the new proverb section), which I first heard when spoken by Lang Ping, our Beijing silver medal women’s head coach. She shared this proverb at the 1997 Opening Ceremonies of the US Junior Olympic Volleyball Championships in Albuquerque, New Mexico, when we were both coaching at the University of New Mexico – *“Winning and losing are temporary, friendships last forever.”* Not many may know that less than a year after helping win the 1984 Olympic Gold medal over the USA women, Lang Ping returned to the US and moved into my home and began to learn English, do summer camps and help train the UNM volleyball team. Almost 25 years later, she returned to Beijing, and coached our USA women’s team in a victory over her home nation, and to another silver medal. Take time to get to befriend your tourney opponents, for they share the same passion for our sport – they just come from a different part of town, the state, or the nation. There are some pretty amazing people on the other side of the net, worth getting to know if you just make the effort to reach out.

#### **The Cumulative Effect:** Feb 17, 2010

I have been watching the Winter Olympics as much as my travel and work schedule allows, and have been struck by some of concepts I would like to share. How much everything matters and how important it is to hustle to the very end, and how nations support their national teams and programs.

It should be known in advance that I am much more attracted to the events where competition is simply NOT judged, but won in head to head battles. While every contact is judged in our sport- and the referee thus calls



illegal contacts for each time we touch the ball, making technique important - in the end it remains real competition which is decided by the team who puts up more points on the scoreboard, not by a judge who award you those points.

Hustling to the end can be seen as Apollo Ohno jousts and whirls around the track, and in the final turn, is in fourth place, putting in his full effort - when the randomness of sport strikes, and two competitors crash, and 5 seconds from the end, he flies into winning his 6<sup>th</sup> Olympic medal. Bode

Miller flies at over 90 miles an hour in the men's Downhill ski race - and takes the bronze after a race of over a mile - behind the gold medal winner by .09 seconds in the closest event in alpine history. The snowcross racers leap and turn down the course, starting with 32 racers in qualifying heats until their own version of a final four. Sean Wentworth finds himself in 4<sup>th</sup> place, but continues to give full effort, and a mistake by another American, and his own skills at being Citius, Altius, Fortius - gets him past the other two opponents and he crosses the line ahead of them for his second gold medal.

Everything matters, even if a statistician might state that something is statistically insignificant. Tell that to Picabo Street who won her gold a couple Olympics ago by .01 second in a downhill race that went on 1.3 miles - the difference of less than a foot over that course. To the Olympic and Paralympic cross country ski racers who cover 50 kilometers in over two hours, know that out of those over some 8,000 seconds, each one counts. In Torino, the host nation celebrated as Giorgio di Centa won the 50K in 2:06:11.8 - only 0.8 seconds ahead of the silver medalist, Yevgeny Dementiev of Russia, and 0.9 seconds ahead of the bronze medalist, Mikhail Botvinov of Austria. That may be statistically insignificant, but to those medal winners, it is incredibly significant.

In our sport every point matters too, which is why we teach to train one point at a time, that single important present time event you have control over, not the past or future ones. In 1988, the USA women were playing Peru for the chance to advance to the medal round. As a tie with Peru would be broken by total points scored over the entire tournament - a system known in advance which basically eliminates the need for a playoff game, the USA ladies knew they could only give up 31 points and had to win in three sets. Game one, they won, giving up about 10 points, game two, about the same, so in game three, when Peru scored that crucial 32<sup>nd</sup> point, even though the match was not done, Peru knew they were headed to the medal round.

It is not easy to qualify for the Olympics in volleyball, let alone win a medal. With 220 nations as part of the FIVB (our international federation) only 12 teams get to go each quadrennium to the Olympics. Twelve go and 208 nation's national teams stay home. The importance of working together in our sport, funding the full time training seen in our National Training Centers, so that we are good enough to qualify and be in the Olympics is beyond measure - but it can be seen in our past. Most playing do not remember there was a long stretch of time that America was one of those teams watching. There was no USA team to cheer for and that impacted the growth of our sport in a variety of ways.

From 1969 thru 1983 there was a drought where no USA teams were seen playing in the Olympics. This lack of being on TV at a time when there was no video tapes to watch, no DVR recorders to capture play, no YouTube to see amazing moments, meant you had to watch it live, or basically not at all. The only way we learned was in the photos from Volleyball Magazine, bringing those still photos to life when we took to the court. Karch Kiraly last month continued his giveback to the sport by doing a kids and parent clinic here in town. You can see pictures of the event by [CLICKING HERE](#). On the way over in the car, he spoke of his passion growing for the sport when he was 15, and how he watched every hour of the 1976 Montreal Olympics in order to see any volleyball. Since the USA had been beaten by Cuba in the 1975 NORCECA Zonal, American TV was not showing any volleyball. When the five minutes of amazing Poland upset over Russia in the gold medal match took place, Karch almost missed it by going to the bathroom. Inspired by those few minutes, and the love of the game from just playing with friends and his father, he then went on with his future teammates to help make sure that the USA team was in the Olympics, as it continues to be. Equally important, he continues this effort on behalf of all in the USA Volleyball family to make sure the USA program is at the top of the world, by assistant coaching the National Women's team.

In 2004, many may not realize the USA men won their coveted slot by winning our NORCECA Zone, in an epic battle over Cuba. The final score of set five was 15-13. A two point swing the other way, and you don't see the USA men in the medal round in Athens, and likely, four years later, would not have seen many of those same players win the gold. In 2007 the USA Sitting men's team, in front of 7,000 screaming Brazilian fans, lost 13-15 in the fifth set and did not get to go to the Paralympics.

So everything matters, as luck favors the prepared. The cumulative effect of taking care of the little things, for there are no little things, can be seen in teams which work hard to get more contacts per hour in training. Teams which don't stand in line at a water fountain to drink, but which all drink from their own bottle, and get back on task fast. When one team sprints in to listen to their coach, then sprints back to start back up, and another team walks in - the team who runs is getting more contacts per hour, more opportunities to respond, more learning by doing. Remember, gamelike matters more than you likely realize, so that real transfer occurs and players learn to read the right cues and make the right decisions. I get a lot of reps in partner passing, but the skill being acquired has little or no value to my actual game play. The cumulative effect is powerful, for everything matters.

How important does training using the science of the sport matter, based on evidence and not beliefs? I believe it is best seen in Olympic results. In case not seen before, those reading this blog should know that the National High School Federation shows we have over 400,000 girls playing high school indoor volleyball. With NCAA, NAIA, NJCAA combined, I estimate there are about 10,000 scholarships for girls. I also am sure the best female athletes in high school generally opt to compete in track and field, basketball, volleyball, soccer, softball and swimming - and the total participation numbers for HS girls bears this out. How have the USA indoor women done in the Olympic Games? Three very important medals to be proud of - silver 1984, bronze 1992, and silver 2008.

What about for the men? Here the National HS Federation records we have about 40,000 boys playing in the nation. What sports do the best athletes opt for? Football by far, and of course basketball, and baseball and those sports with professional options, with volleyball quite far down the best athlete pipeline list overall. The stunning reality that too many do not know, is how many scholarships there are for boys in America. The current number is 92. Under 100, compared to 10,000, for the nation. How have the men done in the Olympics? Well, thanks to some tall great people who chose volleyball over other options and were given the time to put in deliberate practice of the decades of their development, the men have won three golds (1984, 1988, and 2008) and a bronze (1992).

The challenge to qualify for 2012 has begun again. Alan and Hugh and their capable staffs are doing volleyball like all the USA Volleyball staff does, 24/7. The support and funding for this effort comes in no small part from USA Volleyball members- juniors and adults, who make up the base and pipeline that flows to the ever important Olympic summit. There are 219 other nations doing their best to reach the top of the podium too. We will share ideas with them, and grow the sport together - but they do not fund our pursuit of excellence. That is what Americans do. Our Olympic Committee (the USOC) is funded not by the government, as in most nations, but by Americans and sponsors. Our USA Volleyball team is the same, funded by Americans and sponsors - through the USOC and USA Volleyball Regions.

We need to celebrate and thank those who allow us to play the sport we love, and deliver the final effort that results in the success of taking part. The founder of the modern Olympics, Baron Pierre de Coubertin said "*The most important thing in the Olympic Games is not winning but taking part; the essential thing in life is not*

*conquering but fighting well.*". These Winter Games, with mother nature throwing weather challenges rarely seen at an event needing snow, has seen the volunteers - especially the course preparers, putting in 70 hour non-stop work loads, just so the competitors can perform. We hear of the years of sacrifice families make so their Olympian can finally compete. The chair of our grassroots Commission, Eric Hodgson, was noting that in watching the curling, while silly looking to many and seemingly inconsequential, how the sweepers are an unsung rung to that sport's success ladder. We wonder How much we take for granted the little things LIKE a perfect pass, which leads to a perfect set which leads to a thunderous kill that gets everyone out of their seats! The attacker is a goddess, the libero dusts off and prepares to do it again. How many DS/Liberos have been NCAA Players of the Year, and yet how would all those OH's and Middles have won without them. Add in the way a real volleyball team betters the ball, making errant passes into nice sets, or taking imperfect sets and attacking them with success, and we see how we should really compete, not complaining but improving that which was given us, and being full of the passion of competition.

Everything matters - and choosing to support USA Volleyball through all levels of regional membership and involvement - including teaching and developing players, coaches and officials, makes a big difference to our National Team success in that same cumulative effect. So for those who grow the game in all the USA Volleyball Regions, HP pipeline included, we thank you for supporting America's team and look forward to qualifying for London, so every American can again be as proud of our teams as we were in Beijing. I will close with a final quote from the Baron de Coubertin for you to consider - *The day when a sportsman stops thinking above all else of the happiness in his own effort and the intoxication of the power and physical balance he derives from it, the day when he lets considerations of vanity or interest take over, on this day his ideal will die.*



### **To Build Up or Tear Down – Lessons In Volleyball IQ: Feb 03, 2010**

Before dawn last Monday morning I was on my laptop, connected to USA Volleyball's office with Office Communicator, when I saw I was getting a call from an unknown number and area code. I answered, and found myself talking to Byron Shewman, head of our Starlings USA program. He had been in Haiti for over a week, first heading down there with a medical team which has since left and he plans to stay longer, and fly back on a military transport somehow.

He wanted USAV's help with sitting volleyball especially for women, as so many Haitians are having amputations from crushed limbs. Too many are getting infections, and he had a kid die in his arms last night. We talked about the horror beyond words, but then moved to looking to build hope and work together, just like we did in starting Starlings. USA Volleyball's Junior National Championships reached out over a decade ago to be the place the Starling Nationals could begin, at very low cost. Now we are looking at how the upcoming World Sitting Championships this July in Edmond, OK, and Starlings Nationals in June in San Diego, CA, could be a place for Haitians to build towards and play in. After all he has done and does around the USA and Mexico, this former USA National Team player is pushing his own limits by now doing all he can in Haiti.

I found myself reflecting on other stories and ideas I use to help players teach themselves better. In the past summer camps I have done, I teach both the coaches AND the players motor skill learning. A good hour or more, guiding them to understand WHY we are doing the games and techniques, and especially the importance of deliberate practice and mindful learning as we call it now. My story is about the math of attention time - for when I have 12 players and a 2 hour workout, how much time can I average with each player giving them individual teaching/attention? Since the answer is 10 minutes, the key is not to just get good during those times (which I would like to think are important) but more importantly to get good at the OTHER 110 minutes I am looking or teaching somewhere else. If we as a team only get good when I am watching you, we will not be very good. So the camp shirt I would wear had the writing "ARE YOU LEARNING STILL?" on the back, to remind them to stay mindful and keep focused even when my back was turned to them.

I also share with teams the story of what it takes to build something up vs. tear it down. Often, I am in the gym, so I start there, asking, "What did it take to build this gym or school?"

The answer is YEARS, from starting fundraising and planning, through months of construction to final payment....PEOPLE - Hundreds of them, from architects, land levelers, excavation crews, concrete pourers, frame builders, roofers, electricians, plumbers, floor layers, designers, painters, heat/air conditioning experts, computer programmers and so many more working in a timeline and together to make it happen... INTELLIGENCE - degrees in all these areas of importance to make sure the stress loads are safe, the wiring is correct, and hundreds of years of accumulated knowledge and training.

Then the final question is...what does it take to tear down this place? The truth is, ONE DAY, using ONE or TWO people, with a wrecker ball and a bulldozer and no diploma in anything, just the knowledge of how to swing or push something to the ground.

The volleyball family, around the world and in America, marvels at how one nation can win three gold and two silver medals in one Olympics/Paralympics, and many come to seek to learn from our federation. All the while, USAV seeks to improve, share best practices, create and share new ideas, and do the hard work through the countless staff and volunteers at the regional level. To that end, I enjoyed spending several days late last month with nearly two hundred other coaches and leaders from around the USA (and three other nations who came over), as coaches listened and shared their ideas on becoming a better teacher, while building our sport. What these growth mindset coaches were doing was growing their own Volleyball IQ, and learning how to better empower players to grow their IQ as well.

Some of the time talk was about bell curves and standard deviation. In volleyball IQ, 50% of any group is below average in intelligence when compared to that group. When we lump all players and coaches in the nation together, the fact is that 50% will be below average in VB IQ. The best impact we can do to help everyone is to share what the top players and coaches know, and share it with those who want to raise their IQ. We know that if our HP Pipeline is strong and broad (as initial ability does not have much of a correlation to final ability in players and coaches) and the players keep working to increase their VB IQ....well, as Bill Walsh so aptly put it [The Score Takes Care of Itself](#) - the title of a great book he wrote that is on my increase my VB IQ reading list, and my just finished blog using that same phrase.

Last month the USA Volleyball Board of Directors announced that beach volleyball will get even more support, and the NCAA announced earlier this month that "Sand" volleyball for women is an official emerging sport.

Some now will likely think USAV is "jumping on the beach bandwagon." Those are the ones whose VB IQ in history is on the low side. They do not know of ...the ways USAV Regions supported grass and beach volleyball in the 1970s with outdoor directors, officiating training, funding of events and more... the fiscal sacrifices made by USAV with the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games to get the IOC to make the beach game in 1996 an Olympic discipline of volleyball... the initial work USAV did to bring the beach game to the college ranks over a decade ago...the way USAV and the USOC supported the pro beach game with millions of dollars through fiscally challenged times from 1999-2001.

When I was team leader in 2000, I watched as the vast majority of the nations competing, had no coaching and limited support, but USAV made sure to get credentials and let the athletes chose coaching support, video taping opponents, setting up extra training times on Bondi beach, and even bringing in replacement athletes to train against and be there should an injury occur late, across the dateline and a day's flight from America. An article today called "[Coach Tickets Denied](#)" show five coaches with seven of the 10 USA Team speed skaters will not be credentialed in Vancouver..." but USAV made sure beach teams got their chosen coach credentialed. The beach department has gone from part time to several full time and now will grow again. We are in our second decade of HP Beach camps, and hosted the first US Junior Olympic Beach Volleyball Championships for boys and girls 11-18 years old and under in 1994. Jumping on a bandwagon is not what a National Governing Body does - and in the case of USA Volleyball, we have been successfully working to grow this discipline far longer than those who like the simple task of tearing things down, will ever know.

John Wooden said something powerful by titling one of his great books "[You Haven't Taught Them if They Haven't Learned](#)." I guess we just need to keep teaching what has been done some, but we are more focused on what we can do today, and lead and plan for the success and growth tomorrow - in large part by helping junior volleyball at all levels. When I learned to play, there was no Junior competition, so we played against and with adults. When juniors were beginning the Regions, the adult players supported the junior programming fiscally. Now, after a decade of costs going up for everything - club fees, gym rentals, airlines, hotels and so much more, for the FIRST time in 10 years the USAV national office is going to get more money from individuals to grow the game even more. Yet some seem to think that is wrong.

Seems like one more chance to teach. There is a YouTube lecture series titled "The Most Important Video You'll Ever See" - the actual title is "[Arithmetic, Population and Energy](#)." In it the professor notes that "The greatest shortcoming of the human race is our inability to understand the exponential function." He guides us all to "Just remember Seventy (70)" as the time for something to double is 70 divided by the percent of growth. So since I have skied all my life, I can relate to his noting that Vail lift tickets have been going up at 7% a year. Thus per the equation you get 10 years for doubling. So....

### **Tix Cost**

\$5	1963 opening of Vail
10	1973
20	1983
40	1993



80 2003

And the forecast at 7% is...

160 2013

320 2023

So there is a cost of living increase annually calculated by the government. Take that annual increase and you can see when a doubling will happen - not just an increase. It is an important fact to know, and I strongly recommend watching the whole lecture. At the volleyball level, when gyms raise rates by \$10 an hour or more, programs grumble and pay it for the many, many hours per team, even though those getting the money do not help our sport grow any more than before. When airlines charge hundreds extra to move a person from one place to another and back, and \$15-25 for one bag to travel one way to a tournament, people and programs pay and the airlines make money but not a penny goes to help grow our sport. It is time to spend more to grow our sport - in all disciplines, indoor, beach, Olympic and Paralympic, even though we do not have a USA pro league (which is a long history topic for another time).

I am fascinated by how another team sport, basketball, (where the NGB is USA Basketball which opts not do memberships, leaving it to the AAU to organize), has decided that the NCAA and the NBA can spend about \$4 million annually to:

*"positively influence all boys and girls who play the game, to continue growing the number of those who do play, and to help all players develop both personally and on the court. The initiative will focus on five central objectives: - **Building strong communities; Educating athletes; Supporting coaches; Developing officials; Events for youth competition.**"*

I wonder, why does the NCAA and NBA need to do this? When you go to Google, and just type in seven letters, "NBA NCAA" ....you immediately get suggested "NBA NCAA Youth Basketball Initiative." Amazing. No wonder they call it iHoops.

USA Volleyball as an NGB does our sport 24/7, and only our sport. People can chose to ignore what has been done and shared by members of the overall USAV family, never look at the USAV website and say nobody helps my group, or you can have that growth mindset and seek to learn from all the information shared in clinics, webinars and the website for players, coaches, officials, parents and fans. I may be preaching to the choir here, for those who read this blog want to help grow the game and thus clearly have a growth mindset. In any case, I hope you all focus on teamwork and cooperation needed in building. Some may opt to ally with those who want to take what USAV develops - but not join USAV, to seek to rip apart things - and call it "choices," to even have a vendetta or share misinformation - and be a warlord in one's backyard, but this does not a nation, nor a sport, build. There are so many other sports and options for kids today, that we all do need to work together to give kids the chance to make our sport their sport.

## Thanks on Thanksgiving: November 26, 2009

On this holiday, I wanted to take just a bit of time to give thanks to everyone in the volleyball family around the world. It has been a challenging November for my own family, as the young man we have been hosting since summer when his family had to move out of state to keep their jobs, an IB senior like my son, lost his father in a vehicle accident. We got him to his family fast, then I caravanned classmates to the services out of state, and it put a new perspective on this year's tryout process and activities.

So rather than just hang with my family, I wanted to take some time today to say thanks to those that come to mind in 2009, for what they are doing, or have done, to grow the game. The size of our nation and sport leadership base means there is no way I can begin to name them all, but in case the randomness of life takes me away too, I wanted to mention some who make our task of growing the game more successful. There are names here few might know at the grassroots level, but should and the guidebook and history section of our website reveal some of these names. Teaching the history of our sport is important at the starting levels certainly, so please join me in giving thanks to for what they have done over the years to bring the game to everyone...



I give thanks to...

my family first, for that is the focus of this day, for putting up with my travel, long hours at work, while doing their own tasks so well it made my job as a single dad so much easier, and for choosing not just volleyball, but other sports to expand my horizons and show me the promise of the next generation.

Michelle Goodall and Eric Hodgson and the other members of my Grassroots Commission, who give me balance, laughs and insights into helping the grubroots grow.

Mike Hulett, Bill Hamiter and Elliot Blake and ALL at UCO who have brought new levels of excellence and year round training to the version of the game played by the disabled.

Laura Ryan, Roger Nepl, Charlie Huebner, Jimi Flowers, Joe Walsh, Sonya Norris, and everyone at US Paralympics who guide this important part of the US Olympic Committee.

Santiago Restrepo and family, for sharing the journey of the amazing Javier and the spirit and strength he taught us all.

Helgi Thorsteinsson, Angelo Squeo and the rest of the staff at the International Volleyball Federation. The work of the FIVB grows our game in 220 different nations, and gives every country the ideas, regulations, expertise and guidance to keep volleyball in the top tier of sport world wide.

Cristobal Marte, Nelson Ramirez and the NORCECA staff who do the work zonally to grow the sport, hosting clinics, competitions and administration support for the over 40 nations in North and Central America and the

Caribbean.

the other National Governing Bodies of sport, like US Swimming, and USA Rowing and 40 others, who share their ideas and best practices with USA Volleyball to make sure everyone involved in Olympic and Pan American Sport have the finest experience possible.

Patti and Stew McDole, who for over 40 years continue to unselfishly give back to our sport in so many ways, and who set the standard for how to bring the science of the game into summer camps in the midwest states that rippled into every state of the union.

Sandy Vivas, who took the Collegiate Volleyball Association to level of the American Volleyball Association, and gave us all an association to belong to and which partners to grow the game in important ways.

Jim Coleman who impacted the sport from top to bottom, and whose legacy lives on in the material shared with our association since his passing.

Erica Hutchinson, Rick Miner, Jan Schnittger, Mike Moran, and other long time Olympic Family members at the OTC who do so much behind the scenes and in their own areas - even if no longer with the OTC, to make the USOC a better organization.

Jon Hastings and Don Patterson, who have spent nearly 30 years making sure volleyball has quality magazine content and important information, indoors and outdoors.

every member of the Armed Forces, every man and woman, who put their lives on the line, where action speaks louder than words. For those who have been injured and continue to serve or compete for America in different ways, I give additional appreciation more than mere words can express.

Tom Jack, who helped put USA Volleyball on the web back in 1993, as one of the first sport organizations, and ensured the tradition of keeping USAV as the leader of the sport online and beyond.

John Tawa, April Chapple, Mike Tully and others who use the information highway we know as the Internet to connect people, share ideas, and grow the game in ways only true collaboration can make happen.

Becky Howard, Al Monaco, Jerry Sherman, Bill Baird, Bob Bender, Bob Lindsay, Don Shondell, Wil Peck, Harold Friermood, E. Douglas Boyden, Viggo Nelson, George Fisher and Harry Wilson - for their years of service as US Volleyball Association/USAV presidents.

Glen Davies, Tom Slaymaker, Jerry Sherman, Hank Van Arsdale - centered in the Heart of America, they led our grassroots growth at a time of limited funds and staff support, not to mention internationally including Glen refereeing Olympic Gold Medal matches in years that the USA teams did not qualify.

Janet Ragan, Mary Axthelm, Chad Tiechert and the hundreds of PE teachers of Wyoming, who take the time to learn how to bring the sport to kids living in the vast open spaces of our least populated state.

Dale Hoffman, who grew the game for years at the helm of the California Beach Volleyball Association, and now, despite living in Alaska, continues to do the same. In our second least populated state, and the lowest in population density with less than one person per square mile.

Andrew Getting, former Peace Corp volunteer who guides so much of Sport Court's outreach and development, and who works to connect and better enable leaders in every sport.

Rick Swan, Joe Harmon, Jeff Gonyea who keep doing all the right things for kids of all ages in USAV's hometown of Colorado Springs, making the Volleyball Shack turn into the Big House and maximize their seven courts in novel ways all can benefit from.

Wendy Sapp and her family for all they do to make my own Rocky Mountain RVA run effectively and keep growing the game.

Kay Rogness and the Front Range Volleyball Club staff and families, who work year round to make the Colorado Crossroads the best qualifier possible, and guiding a club to annual excellence.

Hugh McCutcheon and Karch Kiraly, for taking on the challenge of bringing home a gold medal for our women's side of volleyball, after so much success in the men's side. They will bring more of the science of our sport to the top levels and strengthen an already strong pipeline.

Lang Ping, who has been my "sister" since 1985 when she first came to share our home, and my life in ways I can never repay her, and who quietly and powerfully returned our women's team to the medal stand under the magnifying glass of 1.3 billion countrymen.

Carl McGown, who along with his Gold Medal Coaching clinic program staff, continue to push the limits and grow the knowledge of coaches around the nation. I look forward to returning to work alongside Carl in 2010, doing my small part to add to everyone's expertise at all levels.

Byron Shewman and everyone in the Starlings USA organization. The thousands of kids who might not have a chance to make volleyball their sport, from Navajo reservations to the inner cities of our country, have that chance due to Byron's unending perseverance and compassion for those less fortunate. Despite personal tragedies in this last year, Byron continued to do the right thing and be a role model for all who care about our game.

the Volleyball Festival Staff and the Promise of Good Sports crew - where, under the leadership of Dave and Bernice Epperson, the families of volleyball can strengthen and find the real meaning of why we all do this sport.

Gary Colberg who, along with the multi-faceted Joe Sharpless, created our first Jr. Olympic Volleyball Championships over 30 years ago. Then Gary rose to a new need and created collegiate club opportunities over the last 25 years for men and women, while Joe guided Special Olympics International in how to make volleyball, in both regular and unified forms, one of the biggest and best parts of their World Games.

John Knetzgar for his unending leadership and technical direction of the USA Deaflympic volleyball national

teams in the Far East this year, and every year as the indoor and beach teams excel in international competition. Remember; if you have a deaf volleyball player, or know of one playing, him or her know of the US Deaf Sports Federation and to let John know of this possible USA National team player.

John Kessel, Hugo Award winning science fiction writer from North Carolina, for putting up with confused volleyball people who think I somehow find time to write amazing stories of the future

April Henrich, Sean McCann and Peter Vint and others in the Sport Science department of the USOC, who have spent years working to give our sport the newest ideas in the science of our game.

Bill Briner, who in leading our Sports Medicine and Performance Commission, has help other great sport leaders like Darlene Kluka and Ken Kontor to improve and grow their vehicles for sharing the science of our sport in other ways.

Karen Johnson, who led Diversity Commission for years and years and provided an invaluable voice to the growth of our game on all levels

Terry Pettit for his continuing role in teaching us all the right thing to do and gathering experts outside our sport to make us all better.

the Positive Coaching Alliance, led by Jim Thompson, which works tirelessly to make coaches, parents and athletes honor the game and understand each sport's ROOTS.

the leadership and vision of Doug Beal as not only my mentor over the decades and boss for the last few years, but for taking on the challenge of being the CEO of USA Volleyball. There are many reasons we won the historic 5 medals in Beijing, and it began with the people he brought together 25 years ago for his gold medal, and continues with those he guides and connects to this day all around the world.

each and every one of our 40 Regional Commissioners, and their boards and other volunteers, who have been growing the game since USVBA was created in 1928. As these leaders stand on the shoulders of those who helped grow the game over those eight decades, we have an opportunity to grow in new areas and ways, with the first increase in membership fee funding in a decade. I find it interesting, in that my son wants to go to out of state to school in California to play volleyball, but with the 38% percent increase for next year, making the University of California system's total increase in tuition since 1999 at a mind-boggling 300%, that no longer appears a viable option. What we can do together with the new funding will take our sport much higher at the grassroots level. If you have thoughts on what do best do with these new monies next year, let me know.

the USAV Staff, who bring life, friendship, creative leadership and joy to the place too many just know as "The National Office."

Each and every one of you reading this... For caring enough to learn and grow, while understanding the responsibilities and opportunities to be a teacher of athletes who wish to play this lifetime sport. May you never be an athlete's last coach, no matter what their age..

Happy Thanksgiving to all.

## A Long Month of Champions:

November 15, 2009

This is may be the best volleyball "month" in the year -- from late October in Wyoming to mid-December this year in Florida-- as some 49 states host district, regional and then final State High School Championships, while the NCAA and NAIA see their over 1,500 schools playoff for National Champions at the collegiate level. My alma mater, Colorado College, a program I started as head coach back in 1971 in the old AIAW days, last night just made the Final 8 for NCAA Division III for the first time ever, as the program now run by the spirited Rick Swan adds another milestone in the journey of excellence and success.



I spent my weekend off driving from USA Swimming Diversity Summit events at the Olympic Training Center, to the Big House youth coach training sessions, and back and forth to the Denver Coliseum, where the Colorado State Girls Volleyball Championships have been hosted for many years. The Colorado High School Activities Association (CHSAA) notes that out of their 336 member schools with 230,466 students, more than 57%, or 131,771 students, participate in music, speech, student leadership and athletics. Colorado's participation rate is one of the highest in the country.

About half way between that Denver Coliseum and the Nebraska state border, lies the town of Otis, Colorado. If you search for it online, you find that Yahoo at least considers the town center to be 301 Work St. Otis, CO 80743. You find you can buy a nice house, built in 1925, for \$41,000. Plenty of open space out on the Colorado plains, at the intersection of US highway 34 and State Highway 61, as the population in 2009 is 476, counting only people, not cows.

Last year Otis lost in the finals to back to back state champs Flemming, but with that runner up lesson as freshmen, a group of sophomores who must all live on Work Street, spent the season building an undefeated record - and with all the spirit and work ethic developed so well in small towns around our nation, captured the coveted golden ball over Flemming. If I had time, I would spend the fall watching 1A and 2A volleyball in every state, for the joy and passion those athletes, their coaches and their fans display really shows the heart and soul of this wonderful sport.

This weekend also caused me to again reflect on how Sport Court flooring has been such a huge partner of USA Volleyball in growing the game for all. There now are over a hundred USAV Jr. Olympic Volleyball clubs with their own volleyball dedicated facilities. We host tournaments, qualifiers, and Nationals with 50-100 courts all under one roof. I spent the finals with a great dad and coach, Frank Lavrisha, who has been a coaching Regis University for 23 years , and who also helped found the JOV club known as "Denver Park and Rec" that brings a great deal of diversity to the court.

He and I sat up in the stands centered on the five Sport Courts in the Coliseum, and could read the scores of every one of the five State Divisional titles being played out simultaneously. This summer my daughter and I

had the good fortune to spend time with the Lander HS program, and last weekend the Wyoming State Championships were played in Casper in this same format, for 1A to the 4A level (remember, Wyoming only has 500,000 people in the whole state...). Many other states are doing this same thing, and I reflected back to when my team got lost at the US Open in Hilo, Hawaii, driving around pineapple fields in the days before GPS systems, cell phones and Sport Court centralization, looking for our school gym we were to compete at. Now we all can watch together, college coaches can see dozens if not hundreds of potential recruits, and we can all listen to the symphony of whistles as players and referees perform their unique songs of competition, and the fans provide their own special chorus, depending on what a round ball does bouncing around back and forth over a net.

The Colorado State High School Activities Association staged a great event, from the starting whistles on Friday, where 40 teams began their hopes to final victory, to the parade of champions and crowning of 5 State Champs from the 1A to 5A divisions. What also struck Frank and I were how the first game on every court ended within a minute of one another - having started all at the same time, and how three of the titles which went 3-0 in games, finished within a couple of minutes, so that Otis, then CSCS, then Cheyenne in sequence got their chance to hoist their "Big Gold Volleyball" championship trophy to their fans. Rally scoring has certainly helped us stay more on time, and that is a great thing for growing the game too.

Since the USOC and USAV are in "the Springs" it was great to see the finish of our local teams. 5A Dorehty - taking third after losing a 2-1 lead to Highlands Ranch when outside hitter Kaitlyn Qualls went out with a bad hand injury. A great finish for a team seeded 8<sup>th</sup>. Ponderosa, who Dorehty beat in pool play, won after battling back from tie breaker playoffs; 4A Cheyenne Mountain, now back to back State Champions, while Lewis Palmer made the finals too. Kudos to Dave Barkley and Susan Odenbaugh; 3A Colorado Springs Christian School, making it SIX titles in a row, in a fun match over also undefeated Valley (Club One, for those who have seen their spirited defense and play over the JOV season), featuring great talent and coaching on both sides of the net; 2A Fowler - champions again in the tradition of Vin Mizer and the home of Brittany Hochevar, now with the AVP. They are down the road a bit from the Springs, but it is where I have spent a lot of time and out of the gym, for there is great upland game and waterfowl hunting in the area, and they play like their grizzly mascot in power and hunger to win.

I was talking last week with my boss, Doug Beal, and we reflected on how most in the volleyball family probably don't realize how the USAV staff not only does volleyball as our full time occupation, we are participating in the game at all levels too. In this busy fall, staff members like Takuya Naito and Kristy Cox, come in early and leave early, in order to coach in high school programs, at a high level. Kristy's assists Dorehty High. Tak assists Cheyenne, where my daughter also plays. Margie Mara, Tom Pingel, George Egan, Andy Pai spend many weeknights and weekend officiating at the college or high school and even junior high levels. Doug, Tom, Kerstin Fricassini-Reff, Susan Barkley, Heath and Tori Hoke, and I all have girls and/or boys playing Jr. Olympic Volleyball for various teams. Many other staff members, with or without kids, play on area league teams and up to the US Open in age division play, and compete in doubles tournaments, even alongside our own kids.

Which leads me to another topic related to growing the game, of how more family volleyball needs to happen, from the generational picnics, to organized league play, getting mom or dad to play with sons and daughters. The way the South Pacific Islander culture has entire families sharing and teaching their youngest children, nieces and nephews alike, to play the game with the adults. We need to play more balloon volleyball in the living room with our kids of any age, and get out on the court with our own kids.

I also love the way Puerto Rico has huge family contingents cheering the kids on at Nationals and Festival. Their unified focus on the play of their children is a sight to behold. In Denver, the fans of every school came close, and could be seen by the blocks of school colors, from faces painted to their "State Bound" shirts with team players names listed. When I looked at the Otis crowd, I wondered...who is minding the store, it looks like everyone had to be in Denver!

Congrats to all the State HS and College National Champions crowned or soon to be crowned. The drive home from Denver was in a snowstorm, and took almost three hours on treacherous roads, and watching the play over the two days and nights was worth every slippery mile. Besides, many of the USAV staff walking out in the storm next get to head to sunny Tampa in a month, to speak and work at the the NCAA Final Four/AVCA Convention, so balance will be restored. Oh, and if you have time, contact my USAV cohort Jeff Mosher if you want to get involved in the national office programing working to get Vermont to have girls high school volleyball, or any of the over 25 states to add boys. It only makes sense to have all 50 states offering a sport born in America to be played at the state level, and we can always use the assistance in growing the game.

### Tryouts and Our Deepest Fear: Nov 11, 2009

Tryouts can bring out our deep fears, as the talent pyramid begins its inexorable narrowing. From six elementary schools teams, to a couple or so junior high 7<sup>th</sup> grade teams. From the those junior highs to the one high school program, an onward into the college level. No athlete wants to feel the pain of inadequacy. For boys, it means they are failing in their climb to be king of the hill. For girls it is even worse, for it means they are cut from that network, banished for not being good enough, tall enough, in the eyes not of their peers, but of the adults who are making such selections.

Each athlete already has had practice with this in peer selection of teams, thankfully not a lost experience yet



on the playgrounds at recess and lunch. Anson Dorrance even uses the order of selection of teammates for small sided and full scrimmage games in his competitive cauldron, for peers know better than coaches the true worth of each player to the whole of the team. It is never desired to be the last one chosen, but at least on the playground, you did get picked and everyone played. When it comes to school and Jr. Olympic Clubs, such is too often not the case.

### NO-CUT KIDZ PROGRAMMING

Now we can be a sport of cutting kids - but I am going to take this time to challenge every Junior Olympic Volleyball and School program to come up with ways NOT to cut kids. To be a program that is more focused on what the values of sport can teach us and not in culling kids just to form the "best program" in your region. The best programs, in my humble opinion, embrace diversity not just in height, but in skill levels, and measure



their success in no small part by how many younger players stay with their program, and continue to play after they have left high school. With all sports combined, it has been studied that 5% of high school athletes are still playing the sport they played in high school. Give them a love of the game in your program and you should see them playing adult USAV, Park and Rec, and YMCA play when they leave college.

Here in Colorado Springs several years ago I got with our largest school district and created a way to keep those junior high players who were being cut. We had 7-8<sup>th</sup> grade programs with 24 slots, and over 100 players trying out at a junior high. The leadership of the Athletic Director and key PE teachers, allowed us to create school teams at the #3, #4, #5 and even #6 team level. While the #1 (8<sup>th</sup> grade) and #2 (7<sup>th</sup> grade) teams practiced Monday through Thursday, the #3-6 teams practiced once a week. In some cases, the additional team for that day would simply copy what the coach of the 7<sup>th</sup> grade was doing, training on the third court that was there. For the gyms where only two regulation courts could go up, they divided the second court into two courts which allows for the three teams to train after school. In other cases they might practice two additional teams later, after the #1 and #2 team, with parents helping do the coaching. Then on Saturdays each school would host competition between the other schools, for a morning - with all the #3 teams competing at one school, all the #4s at another, etc. The cost was minimal, the refereeing provided by the players, a school volleyball tshirt/jersey being the key to connecting these players to their important scholastic connections and network. Meanwhile these kids get to play and let the game teach the game, and see what happens on the other end of the season.

A huge reason to not cut is due to the varying talent emergence of a child. Take this quiz you can access by [CLICKING HERE](#) and see what I mean. There are great artists and writers who do not begin to excel until they are over half a century old. Of course the athleticism of our sport lends itself best to the powers of a younger body, but the average age of our national teams are both in the late 20s, a decade after high school. It is part of being committed to a growth mindset, rather than a fixed one, of effort and mastery, over the outcome of being selected by some "coaches" who are looking out for what is best for them, not what is best for that individual athlete. Some programs want only tall players, so if you are cut for "being too short" know that it is not how tall you are, but how good you are - [CLICK HERE](#) for more on that truth.

This reaching out by all of us to those who would have been cut before their talent started to emerge is important on many levels. In this town, just at one high school, half the kids who made the school team as freshman, came from the cut kidz league programming, teams #3-6. The "Big House" facility here in town has also created a program called "BHip" - which serves as an alternative to those cut from their Junior program at all ages or who want a "tweener" program between youth volleyball the the full Jr. Olympic Club experience. [CLICK HERE](#) for more information.

## **OLYMPISM IN THE VOLLEYBALL JOURNEY**

These five points on the "Fundamental Principles of Olympism," come from the Olympic Charter, which can be downloaded by [CLICKING HERE](#). All Junior Olympic Volleyball clubs should know and conduct themselves according to these principles as they are founding concepts to being a Junior Olympic Club - for ANY sport.

1. Olympism is a philosophy of life, exalting and combining in a balanced whole the qualities of body, will and mind. Blending sport with culture and education, Olympism seeks to create a way of life based on the joy of effort, the educational value of good example and respect for universal fundamental ethical principles.

2. The goal of Olympism is to place sport at the service of the harmonious development of man, with a view to promoting a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity.
3. The Olympic Movement is the concerted, organised, universal and permanent action, carried out under the supreme authority of the IOC, of all individuals and entities who are inspired by the values of Olympism. It covers the five continents. It reaches its peak with the bringing together of the world's athletes at the great sports festival, the Olympic Games. Its symbol is five interlaced rings.
4. The practice of sport is a human right. Every individual must have the possibility of practicing sport, without discrimination of any kind and in the Olympic spirit, which requires mutual understanding with a spirit of friendship, solidarity and fair play. The organisation, administration and management of sport must be controlled by independent sports organisations.
5. Any form of discrimination with regard to a country or a person on grounds of race, religion, politics, gender or otherwise is incompatible with belonging to the Olympic Movement.

## FINAL REFLECTIONS ON TRYOUTS

Tryouts teach many lessons, mostly about how actions speak far louder than words. You may have heard from a coach how talented an athlete you are. You may even have a letter from clubs saying that they want you to play for them. Those words mean little for some programs, and a lot for others - it is the integrity of the people delivering the words that you must trust.

**To each parent** - You may wish for your daughter to be playing in college, but know that 400,000 girls are playing high school volleyball, with only 15,000 collegiate varsity slots (and about 8,000 scholarships) available. If you add in the approximately 300 Junior Colleges (and about 3,000 JC scholarships at Di/DII level), you get another 3,600 openings. You may wish for your son to play in college, but know that over 40,000 boys play in high school and there are only 92 grant in aids in the nation for college varsity programs at all levels combined. Just do not forget there is high level club play at the college level, both for the school, and in USAV adult play, along with Park and Rec/YMCA leagues too, for you have helped given your child skills to play a lifetime sport. Read "Gifts for a Volleyball Player" [CLICK HERE](#) to know more ideas on how to help your athlete excel.

**To each coach** - I challenge you to tryout and coach each player in a way that you will *never be a child's last coach*, and to follow with the principle of *preserving the dignity* of each of the athletes you are working with. You can be demanding, but NEVER demeaning, and you should never take away an athlete's hope or trust of the game.

**To each athlete** - You can only control what you can control - your unrelenting hustle on the court, your love of the game and playing, and your attitude and communication while working with any teammate and coach. Oh, and the size of your smile. Whether you make your first choice team or not, you can take what you control - yourself, and continue to become the best volleyball player you can be. A quote that you should know, that has been adapted by other sports but most commonly is attributed to Mia Hamm, is below.

*"Do you remember why you play or has it been too long? Do you play because you've worked so hard to get where you are or is it because you love to be part of a team? Is it because you love the anxiety before the game?"*

*Is it because you don't want to let anyone down or because you don't want to let yourself down? Somewhere behind the athlete you've become, the hours of practice, the coaches who pushed you, the teammates who believe in you, and the fans who cheer for you is the little girl who took that first perfect shot. The little girl who fell in love with the game and never looked back, **PLAY FOR HER.**"*

In the end you must overcome your deepest fear. "They can cut the chain off the door, but they can't make us play" says one of the athletes in the movie "Coach Carter" as they sit at school desks on the court and study their books, since they were not making the school grades they had committed to making in order to play sports. This is a must see movie by the way, and my favorite clip to show, on our deepest fear, is seen by [CLICKING HERE](#).

Marianne Williamson wrote those words in the movie, in a passage about our deepest fear in her book [A Return to Love](#). It is about living up to your fullest potential, and for those who get cut from any team, and for those who are not, these words should be taken to heart.

**Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.  
Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.**

**It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us.  
We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant,  
gorgeous, handsome, talented and fabulous?**

**Actually, who are you not to be?  
You are a child of God.**

**Your playing small does not serve the world.  
There is nothing enlightened about shrinking  
so that other people won't feel insecure around you.  
We are all meant to shine, as children do.**

**We were born to make manifest the glory of God within us.  
It is not just in some; it is in everyone.**

**And, as we let our own light shine, we consciously give  
other people permission to do the same.  
As we are liberated from our fear,  
our presence automatically liberates others.**

So to all of you - I ask that you play for the love the game, and never let someone else's decision take you from having that amazing relationship with this lifetime sport. Best wishes to all in any tryout you are brave enough to take part of and remember the wise words of Elenor Roosevelt long ago *"No one can make you feel inferior*

*without your consent.*" Citius Altius, Fortius all - enjoy the journey, thanks for helping grow our sport and make sure to comment or let us know what you think - [john.kessel@usav.org](mailto:john.kessel@usav.org)

## **Learning the Game Through 9,500 Feet:** By John Kessel Sep 11, 2009

I journeyed back to Aspen, Colorado, for the Motherlode doubles tourney over this past Labor Day weekend, a pilgrimage I have been taking for almost 40 years. It was 1974 when I drove my VW Squareback (now with 525,000 miles but restored and owned by my son Cody) up over the Independence Pass, ears popping as you peak at 12,095 feet. Leon Fell and his staff, and tens of thousands of players over the decades, have made this a magical place to grow the game.

Back then I would just walk up the green covered ski hills to a swale that was level, and throw down my sleeping bag after a long day - and awaken to look down on the Charthouse courts to see if anyone had arrived to start play. In '74, I was lucky enough to win the Men's A. I came back 20 year anniversary, Cody was only 2, and played again with my same partner, Stu McKinlay. I have mountain climbed and biked, fly fished and hunted all over this area, and skied some of the best powder ever. My kids and I have camp out, stayed at a real fort, and explored the amazing Aspen institute, all while first watching me play. Then they began playing in the event themselves, first with me and then with school friends. This year, Cody has come up with a teammate of his from the 18 Open team at JOs this summer - Mitch Beal. There is something about playing this game with a school friend or parent that just makes the game that much more special. There are teams from over 30 states in this event, many who have been competing in it for over a decade - it is just that kind of special volleyball event.

Watching the game teach the game unfolds over the three days. Mitch has played no doubles to speak of, and overhead passes the serve, and on day one had dozens of hand calls. So the kids go 1-3 in pool play, becoming last out and lowest seed in the single elimination tourney on Sunday. The Beals are kind enough to take care of Cody, as I have to get his sister McKenzie to her High School match that Saturday evening, before driving up over the pass at night, arriving after midnight.

Bright and early, we show up first on the courts by the Aspen Skier HS fields. With 14er Castle Peak in the background, the kids surprise themselves and win in three, then Cody asks me to help Mitch and him referee as this is the playoffs and getting serious and they don't know how to ref when it becomes "losers ref." My response is simple....keep winning you guys and you won't have to referee. Ideas are shared by the adult team they had just beaten, mentoring to help the 16 and 17 years old become better, and Doug and I put in our two cents....and they win again... and again... and before you know it, they are in the finals of this 64 team draw.

Those finals are at 10am Monday by the main Open Division men and women's sand courts, complete with music, Jon Lee announcing, and big crowds. So we head down to eat, shop and then get a look at the playing site. After watching the men's open, Mitch wants to play without shirts - Cody thinks it is a brilliant idea to lull their opponents, two strong husky men in their 30s, into a false sense of confidence.

Amid sunny skies and the hullabaloo of center court - another Kessel takes to the court in Aspen 35 years after his dad did the same. The boys put up a nice effort, falling in two, and get a jump on me, as I was 5 years older and more experienced when my win came. The game taught something special in this game, how effort helps

determine a better outcome, the joy of improvement, and how playing doubles helps you work on your weaknesses - fast. It also showed me that spectating makes one far less sore than playing this game. If you find yourself with nothing to do over next Labor Day weekend, plan an adventure in Aspen which includes playing at 9,500 feet. I will bring the oxygen.

### **Top Thirteen Recent New York Times Sports Articles: By John Kessel Sep 01, 2009**

I had [Nurture Shock](#) on my next thing to blog about, but today a note from Carl McGown came in this morning with yet another *New York Times* article that is well worth reading and sharing. This one is about great footwork, great reading, and great racquet speed as a look is taken at the incomparable Roger Federer in tennis, another high speed rebound sport where what matters happens before or at contact, on the OTHER side of the net, not on your side. This is another reason for my exasperation as coaches continue to train in pairs on their side of the net...but I digress, as that was covered in the last blog...

[Federer's Footwork: Artful and Efficient](#)[Federer's Footwork: Artful and Efficient](#)[Federer's Footwork, Artful and Efficient...](#)

The note from Carl got me thinking about all the other great NYT articles I have read in the last few years, and how these too should be shared with those of you caring to change and improve. It also serves as an important reminder that to grow our sport best, we each need to share best ideas and practices, as Carl and I have done for decades. Our sport is too small and too important to keep secrets - we need to get the best ideas into the hands and minds of all teaching the sport, so we all benefit in the end with a stronger pipeline that each of us then tap into. Feel free to comment at the end of this blog, email [john.kessel@usav.org](mailto:john.kessel@usav.org), or pass along the core teaching/change points in this and other blogs and the grassroots button now fully populated on the USA Volleyball homepage.

### **So here is my "Top Thirteen" list of things from the Big Apple's famous newspaper.**

*Note: My hero growing up as a player was Kirk Kilgour, from UCLA, a lefty outside who hammered harder than Thor. My dad and his dad were fraternity brothers at USC after serving in WWII, and Kirk was the first player from America to succeed overseas in the Italian pro league. He also was a great USA National team player. His exploits in the first NCAA Men's National Championships can be viewed in this great Sports Illustrated article about that event, by [CLICKING HERE](#)*

*One day in 1976, something happened to the standard in the gym where he and his Italian team were training, so the coach said go over there and keep active. Over there included a gymnastic vault, and they started to jump over it, men being boys. Kirk, a competitor always, tried to one up his teammates and flip. And missed. And turned himself into a quadriplegic. Kirk said to my kids and me once during one of our many visits with him after the accident, that there are lots of things he could not do since the injury, but he focused on the millions of things he still could do. He head coached at Pepperdine, did the color for the 1984 Olympic volleyball broadcasts with Bob Beattie, and he lived life, in love, until a few years ago when pneumonia nabbed him. The LA Times obit does a nice summary of Kirk... [CLICK HERE TO VIEW](#)*

*For me, he remains one of my heroes, and as often as I can, I use his jersey number to remind me of his strength, wit, competitiveness and spirit of life, thus, my top 13...I hope each of you learn from these others*

*sharing their ideas and then teach what you have learned to others who are helping kids be the best they can be...*

### **#1 Taking Play Seriously**

By *ROBIN MARANTZ HENIG* Published: February 17, 2008

<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9404E7DA1339F934A25751C0A96E9C8B63&scp=2&sq=taking%20play%20seriously&st=cse>

On a drizzly Tuesday night in late January, 200 people came out to hear a psychiatrist talk rhapsodically about play - not just the intense, joyous play of children, but play for all people, at all ages, at all times. (All species too; the lecture featured touching photos of a polar bear and a husky engaging playfully at a snowy outpost in northern Canada.) Stuart Brown, president of the National Institute for Play, was speaking at the New York Public Library's main branch on 42<sup>nd</sup> Street. He created the institute in 1996, after more than 20 years of psychiatric practice and research persuaded him of the dangerous long-term consequences of play deprivation. In a sold-out talk at the library, he and Krista Tippett, host of the public-radio program "Speaking of Faith," discussed the biological and spiritual underpinnings of play. Brown called play part of the "developmental sequencing of becoming a human primate. If you look at what produces learning and memory and well-being, play is as fundamental as any other aspect of life, including sleep and dreams."

### **#2 At M.I.T., Large Lectures Are Going the Way of the Blackboard**

By *SARA RIMER* Published: January 12, 2009

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/13/us/13physics.html>

CAMBRIDGE, Mass. - For as long as anyone can remember, introductory physics at the [Massachusetts Institute of Technology](#) was taught in a vast windowless amphitheater known by its number, 26-100. Squeezed into the rows of hard, folding wooden seats, as many as 300 freshmen anxiously took notes while the professor covered multiple blackboards with mathematical formulas and explained the principles of Newtonian mechanics and electromagnetism.

But now, with physicists across the country pushing for universities to do a better job of teaching science, M.I.T. has made a striking change. The physics department has replaced the traditional large introductory lecture with smaller classes that emphasize hands-on, interactive, collaborative learning. Last fall, after years of experimentation and debate and resistance from students, who initially petitioned against it, the department made the change permanent. Already, attendance is up and the failure rate has dropped by more than 50 percent.

### **#3 Stretching: The Truth**

By *GRETCHEN REYNOLDS* Published: October 31, 2008

[http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/02/sports/playmagazine/112pewarm.html?\\_r=1&ei=5070&emc=eta1&oref=slogin](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/02/sports/playmagazine/112pewarm.html?_r=1&ei=5070&emc=eta1&oref=slogin)

WHEN DUANE KNUDSON, a professor of kinesiology at [California State University](#), Chico, looks around campus at athletes warming up before practice, he sees one dangerous mistake after another. "They're stretching, touching their toes. . . ." He sighs. "It's discouraging."

If you're like most of us, you were taught the importance of warm-up exercises back in grade school, and you've

likely continued with pretty much the same routine ever since. Science, however, has moved on. Researchers now believe that some of the more entrenched elements of many athletes' warm-up regimens are not only a waste of time but actually bad for you. The old presumption that holding a stretch for 20 to 30 seconds - known as static stretching - primes muscles for a workout is dead wrong. It actually weakens them. In a recent study conducted at the [University of Nevada](#), Las Vegas, athletes generated less force from their leg muscles after static stretching than they did after not stretching at all. Other studies have found that this stretching decreases muscle strength by as much as 30 percent. Also, stretching one leg's muscles can reduce strength in the other leg as well, probably because the central nervous system rebels against the movements.

#### **#4 Rays' Maddon Puts Pieces Together**

By [ALAN SCHWARZ](#) Published: August 9, 2008

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/10/sports/baseball/10rays.html?scp=4&sq=maddon+&st=nyt>

The Rays, filled with young talent like third baseman Evan Longoria, center fielder B. J. Upton and a rotation manned by Scott Kazmir, James Shields and Matt Garza, are led by a 54-year-old manager who players insist is younger than they are. Sure, Maddon has adorned the clubhouse with inspirational quotes from the likes of [Albert Camus](#). ("I don't think he ever played here," Upton said.) But players know they have the only manager in the big leagues with a cooler music collection than theirs, and he infuses them with the same free spirit he has carried through three decades in professional baseball.

"He's very calm, quiet and trusting," said Shields, 10-7 with a 3.65 earned run average. "He allows us to police ourselves. Sometimes, you have a manager who yells at you every night, but he doesn't do that. He'll sit you down and talk to you and teach you."

A former economics major at Lafayette College and a briefly professional catcher, Maddon revels in looking at baseball through his own eyes. (And through his now-trademark, black-rimmed glasses that are less [Harry Caray](#) than [Elvis Costello](#), he eagerly notes.) The man who never travels without a book does not always go by baseball's.

True to his Angels roots, Maddon encourages his players to take extra bases aggressively - even at the risk of making the first or third out at third, a longtime baseball no-no. "It's a positive risk," Maddon said. "I don't want my players afraid of making mistakes."

#### **#5 A City Team's Struggle Shows Disparity in Girls' Sports** By

*KATIE THOMAS* Published: June 13, 2009

[http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/14/sports/14girls.html?\\_r=2&hp](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/14/sports/14girls.html?_r=2&hp)

With this team, it's always something. In the suburbs, girls' participation in sports is so commonplace that in many communities, the conversation has shifted from concerns over equal access to worries that some girls are playing too much. But the revolution in girls' sports has largely bypassed the nation's cities, where public school districts short on money often view sports as a luxury rather than an entitlement.

Coaches and organizers of youth sports in cities say that while many immigrant and lower-income parents see the benefit of sports for sons, they often lean on daughters to fill needs in their own hectic lives, like tending to siblings or cleaning the house.

## #6 Federer as Religious Experience

*Top of Form*

By DAVID FOSTER WALLACE Published: August 20, 2006 [Skip to next paragraph](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/08/20/sports/playmagazine/20federer.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=%22federer%20as%20religious%20experience%22&st=cse) Correction Appended  
[http://www.nytimes.com/2006/08/20/sports/playmagazine/20federer.html?\\_r=1&scp=1&sq=%22federer%20as%20religious%20experience%22&st=cse](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/08/20/sports/playmagazine/20federer.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=%22federer%20as%20religious%20experience%22&st=cse)

Almost anyone who loves tennis and follows the men's tour on television has, over the last few years, had what might be termed Federer Moments. These are times, as you watch the young Swiss play, when the jaw drops and eyes protrude and sounds are made that bring spouses in from other rooms to see if you're O.K.....

Interestingly, what is less obscured in TV coverage is Federer's intelligence, since this intelligence often manifests as angle. Federer is able to see, or create, gaps and angles for winners that no one else can envision, and television's perspective is perfect for viewing and reviewing these Federer Moments. What's harder to appreciate on TV is that these spectacular-looking angles and winners are not coming from nowhere - they're often set up several shots ahead, and depend as much on Federer's manipulation of opponents' positions as they do on the pace or placement of the coup de grâce. And understanding how and why Federer is able to move other world-class athletes around this way requires, in turn, a better technical understanding of the modern power-baseline game than TV - again - is set up to provide.

## #7 The Uneven Playing Field

By MICHAEL SOKOLOVE Published: May 11, 2008 Correction Appended

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/11/magazine/11Girls-t.html?scp=2&sq=the+uneven+playing+field&st=nyt>

BY THE TIME JANELLE PIERSON SPRIED ONTO THE FIELD for the start of the Florida high-school soccer playoffs in January, she had competed in hundreds of games since joining her first team at 5. She played soccer year-round - often for two teams at a time when the seasons of her school and club teams overlapped. Like many American children deeply involved in sports, Janelle, a high-school senior, had traveled like a professional athlete since her early teens, routinely flying to out-of-state tournaments. She had given up other sports long ago, quitting basketball and tennis by age 10. There was no time for any of that, and as she put it: "Even if you wanted to keep playing other sports, people would question you. They'd be, like, 'Why do you want to do that?'"

## #8 The No-Stats All-Star

By MICHAEL LEWIS Published: February 13, 2009

He had more or less admitted to me that this part of his job left him cold. 'It's the same thing every day,' he said, as he struggled to explain how a man on the receiving end of the raging love of 18,557 people in a darkened arena could feel nothing. "If you had filet mignon every single night, you'd stop tasting it."

To him the only pleasure in these sounds - the name of his beloved alma mater, the roar of the crowd - was that they marked the end of the worst part of his game day: the 11 minutes between the end of warm-ups and the introductions. Eleven minutes of horsing around and making small talk with players on the other team. All those players making exaggerated gestures of affection toward one another before the game, who don't actually know one another, or even want to. "I hate being out on the floor wasting that time," he said. "I used to try to talk to people, but then I figured out no one actually liked me very much." Instead of engaging in the pretense that



these other professional basketball players actually know and like him, he slips away into the locker room.

*Shane Battier!* And up Shane Battier popped, to the howl of the largest crowd ever to watch a basketball game at the Toyota Center in Houston, and jumped playfully into [Yao Ming](#) (the center "out of China"). Now, finally, came the best part of his day, when he would be, oddly, most scrutinized and least understood.

### **#9 The Behavioral Revolution**

By [DAVID BROOKS](#) Published: October 27, 2008

[http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/28/opinion/28brooks.html?\\_r=2&ref=opinion&ore&oref=slogin](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/28/opinion/28brooks.html?_r=2&ref=opinion&ore&oref=slogin)

Roughly speaking, there are four steps to every decision. First, you perceive a situation. Then you think of possible courses of action. Then you calculate which course is in your best interest. Then you take the action.

[Skip to next paragraph](#) Over the past few centuries, public policy analysts have assumed that step three is the most important. Economic models and entire social science disciplines are premised on the assumption that people are mostly engaged in rationally calculating and maximizing their self-interest.

### **# 10 Cocksure**

by [Malcolm Gladwell](#) July 27, 2009

[http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2009/07/27/090727fa\\_fact\\_gladwell?currentPage=all](http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2009/07/27/090727fa_fact_gladwell?currentPage=all)

*Banks, battles, and the psychology of overconfidence. As we grow older and more experienced, we overrate the accuracy of our judgments.*

In 1996, an investor named Henry de Kwiatkowski sued Bear Stearns for negligence and breach of fiduciary duty. De Kwiatkowski had made-and then lost-hundreds of millions of dollars by betting on the direction of the dollar, and he blamed his bankers for his reversals. The district court ruled in de Kwiatkowski's favor, ultimately awarding him \$164.5 million in damages. But Bear Stearns appealed-successfully-and in William D. Cohan's engrossing account of the fall of Bear Stearns, "House of Cards," the firm's former chairman and C.E.O. Jimmy Cayne tells the story of what happened on the day of the hearing:

### **#11 What Are the Odds a Handy, Quotable Statistic Is Lying? Better Than Even**

By [BARRY GEWEN](#) Published: February 2, 2009

[http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/03/books/03gewen.html?\\_r=1&ref=books](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/03/books/03gewen.html?_r=1&ref=books)

It's hard to resist a book that tells you that most people have more than the average number of feet. Or that researchers have found that Republicans enjoy sex more than Democrats do. Michael Blastland and Andrew Dilnot delight in bringing such facts to our attention - and then in explaining them away.

[Skip to next paragraph](#) [THE NUMBERS GAME](#) *The Commonsense Guide to Understanding Numbers in the News, in Politics, and in Life* By Michael Blastland and Andrew Dilnot 210 pages. Gotham Books.

Because of amputations, birth defects and the like, the average number of feet per person across the human population is slightly fewer than two. As for those randy Republicans, the information that matters is that men

vote Republican more than women, and also say that they enjoy sex more than women say that they do.

"The Numbers Game" grew out of a popular [BBC](#) radio show called "More or Less"; Mr. Blastland is the show's creator, and Mr. Dilnot its former host. Their book appeared in Britain two years ago under the title "The Tiger That Isn't," and though it has been "extensively revised" for its American edition and, more mysteriously, given a new title, it still retains a British orientation.

### **#12 What Life Asks of Us**

By [DAVID BROOKS](#) Published: January 26, 2009

[http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/27/opinion/27brooks.html?\\_r=2&em](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/27/opinion/27brooks.html?_r=2&em)

A few years ago, a faculty committee at Harvard produced a report on the purpose of education. "The aim of a liberal education" the report declared, "is to unsettle presumptions, to defamiliarize the familiar, to reveal what is going on beneath and behind appearances, to disorient young people and to help them to find ways to reorient themselves."

### **#13 Expectations Lose to Reality of Sports Scholarships**

By [BILL PENNINGTON](#) Published: March 10, 2008 Correction Appended

[http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/10/sports/10scholarships.html?pagewanted=1&\\_r=1&sq=athletic scholarships&st=nyt&adxnnl=1&scp=3&adxnnlx=1251817418-HMFwI61v8PRKYxjQb64yfA](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/10/sports/10scholarships.html?pagewanted=1&_r=1&sq=athletic%20scholarships&st=nyt&adxnnl=1&scp=3&adxnnlx=1251817418-HMFwI61v8PRKYxjQb64yfA)

At youth sporting events, the sidelines have become the ritual community meeting place, where families sit in rows of folding chairs aligned like church pews. These congregations are diverse in spirit but unified by one gospel: heaven is your child receiving a college athletic scholarship.

### [Skip to next paragraph](#) **The Scholarship Divide**

*These articles are exploring the chase for N.C.A.A. scholarships, the scarcity of athletic aid, and the challenges facing coaches and scholarship athletes.*

Joanie Milhous, the field hockey coach at Villanova, said she recruited "good, ethical parents as much as good, talented kids." Parents sacrifice weekends and vacations to tournaments and specialty camps, spending thousands each year in this quest for the holy grail. But the expectations of parents and athletes can differ sharply from the financial and cultural realities of college athletics, according to an analysis by The New York Times of previously undisclosed data from the [National Collegiate Athletic Association](#) and interviews with dozens of college officials.

*So there are my top 13. I hope you found time to read the comments from hundreds of others thinking about these topics. Some gems in their responses too. Share yours below or email me at [john.kessel@usav.org](mailto:john.kessel@usav.org) Citius, Altius, Fortius....*

## Paralympic Sports Club – Military Sports Program: By John Kessel Aug 10, 2009

I traveled some this summer doing mostly weekend clinics around the USA primarily for coaches and PE teachers at the youth level. I journeyed from Lander, Wyoming, to Long Island, New York, and places like Phoenix for the newly relocated Volleyball Festival, and

Atlanta for the Boy's Jr. Olympics Volleyball Championships where my son was playing in the 18 Open. The stops that were the most inspiring were at Naval Station Newport, Rhode Island, and Brooke Army Medical Center/Ft Sam in San Antonio, Texas.

At "BAMC" I spoke on developing amazing leaders to all hospital staff, and then was able to take a tour of the [Center for the Intrepid](#). At the Center, over half a million Americans donated to create a state of the art physical rehabilitation facility on the BAMC grounds, just a short walk from the hospital. A pool, a wave pool, rock climbing towers, kayak training and sitting volleyball are just part of the things there. The most amazing thing was a room where some 30 cameras in a full circle videoed the vets as they walked on different surfaces, climbed stairs, etc. to both better fit the prosthetics being used, and to give them feedforward on how to move. They said the one stabilizing system was so good, you could drop a ball point pen on the platform and it would make it stand up on end.



Then I spent a couple of days on base in Newport with over 50 wounded veterans as part of the Paralympic Military Sports program. Every athlete in the program has his or her own powerful story. They swam (it was my last time working with the great swimming Paralympic coach Jimi Flowers who also was there coaching), did track and field, table tennis, and sitting volleyball. We had base personnel playing, and even their children on the court as well, for the sitting game is a great "leveler," allowing everyone to play safely and competitively, as you can see below. With about a third of these wounded warriors in wheelchairs, we play a modified version that lets them get involved, rather than sit and watch. Some great big smiles all around – more than once their physical therapists have commented that these training are the first time they see their charges smile so big.



One of the heroes there was Chuck, who was being escorted by his father. When it came time for Chuck to train and play sitting volleyball, his dad started to push Chuck away in the wheelchair. You see, Chuck is missing both legs....and is partially deaf....and has a "TBI" – a Traumatic Brain Injury....and is blind. I stopped dad and explained that I would like Chuck to be our "designated server" after some training.

While a bit disbelieving, he brought Chuck to the training court and I explained what the plan was and what the court looked like. Then he

started practicing with feedback on his accuracy from his dad and Roger Nepl. In short order, he was doing an underhand serve in

with plenty of success, and brought to the competition court to do his role. In the end, he served some 24 of 25 in, and it could be argued well to blame the error on how one of us lined him up for that serve. We ended up rotating him in to play all the rotations when we played some balloon ball, and he would respond to his teammate's calls for a skill action. I have included some pictures of him playing and inspiring us all.

From a Grow the Game perspective, you might be surprised to know that in the Dutch Sitting Volleyball division, the vast majority of the several thousand members are able bodied and just choose to take it a bit easier on their knees. They help in training the disabled participants, by making things gamelike for all wanting to excel and have fun at the sitting game. With this support, the Dutch men, despite not being from a war zone like the top teams of Bosnia and Iran, competed in the gold medal match of 1996. The Dutch women have medaled in both the 2004 and 2008 Paralympics. So we need everyone's help in spending some time playing the sitting game with any area disabled athletes. Next month in Colorado Springs we will be playing our game as part of the Paralympic Sports Club formed by the city to help disabled kids and adults. You can find out more by visiting [www.usparalympics.org/content/index/5119](http://www.usparalympics.org/content/index/5119) You can also contact Elliot Blake, USAV Coordinator of Sitting Volleyball Development, at [Elliot.blake@usav.org](mailto:Elliot.blake@usav.org), and [CLICK HERE](#) to download a pdf on starting a Paralympic Sports Club.

Now that Bill Hamiter has been hired full time by USAV to head coach both USA National Sitting teams, and Elliot Blake is now in his second year of development, I will be limiting my time in the Paralympic discipline. It has been a wonderful journey, from producing the 1996 Paralympic Sitting Volleyball venue in Atlanta, to helping start the USA Sitting Women's program with Mike Hulett and the bronze and silver medals won in Athens and Beijing. I will be still doing grassroots disabled programs, such as Special Olympics and the Deaflympic programs. I will now have more time to do grassroots programming, especially for youth through our RVAs and Affiliated Organizations. Mike Hulett, our four-time Paralympic Sitting Coach, will also be doing more grassroots programming working with a new facility in the Great Lakes RVA and if time allows, internationally as well, for he is an unparalleled ambassador for our sport, disabled or able-bodied, and for all ages. I know all of you will continue to be even better talent scouts for Bill as he works to enhance our National level Paralympic programs, and assist Elliot in the formation and development of Paralympic Sports Clubs for kids, veterans and all who are able, just disabled. It is the right thing to do, and is part of growing our sport for all.

This past weekend the Olympic Training Center was filled with FLAME (Finding Leaders Among Minorities Everywhere) kids learning leadership through sport, and they were led by Paralympian John Register. At the same time, several dozen wounded veterans competed in the State Games of America in various disciplines all over this city – vying for more than 6,000 gold/silver and bronze medals being award in 31 sports and hundreds of divisions. Volleyball was ranked #8 in total participation this year, and we went over our expected level by almost 50%. I signed up three indoor teams and Jeff did half a dozen grass and beach doubles teams on the morning of the event. Chuck was here in town competing... I saw newspaper photos of him throwing the shot and discus.



Alas, I was too busy running the indoor volleyball venue in my role as Commissioner to get over to his venue to cheer him on. Nonetheless, I am sure he was inspiring others, while pushing his own limits in the spirit of sport. Next time an athlete says “I can’t serve it in...” let him or her know about Chuck...for he only said “Sure, let’s do it”...and with full effort and deliberate practice...did it.

### **Beachroots Volleyball in Vanuatu: Jul 09, 2009**

I have come back to where my grandfather, father and a guy named James Michener once travelled and worked. My grandfather John Fitzgerald, based out of the Tahiti, fighting to eradicate the dreaded Elephantiasis disease from all the thousands of islands, for the World Health Organization and as a parasitologist from UCLA. France gave him the French Legion of Honor medal, their highest award for the work he did. My dad John Delbert, was a captain in the Navy and this was his theater for World War II for his ship. I remember one story that upset him greatly of how two Dutch ships left the convoy in the harbor where I now am today, in hurry to get to their final destination, only to both be sunk by enemy submarines just hours after departing. He had made good friends with the Dutch as the battle to bond IMPACT manual line so well states. Author James Michener wrote his Pulitzer Prize winning book [Tales of the South Pacific](#) in this very town and island I am now working at myself.

In his book Sports in America, written in 1976, Michener writes about our sport...

*In the final three chapters of this book I have been preoccupied with money and violence, and I apologize. I seem to have lost sight of my preeminent criterion, that sports should be fun, but it has never been far from my mind. I should now like to conclude with several short examples of the delight one can find in the sublime nonsense of games. These are the highlights in a lifetime of following sports:*

*Hilarity. The most sheer fun I ever had in sports was playing volleyball, a game I commend highly. I understand that an effort is under way to establish a national league of professional volleyball teams, and if you have ever seen the great women's teams of Japan and Russia or the equally good men's teams of Cuba or East Germany, you know how exciting this playground game, which requires so little equipment, can be.*

*I had learned volleyball in the navy, where all the captains and admirals wanted to be spikers, and I found then that a man who can subdue his own desires and master the art of serving others can make himself invaluable. In choosing sides, the team captain always chose the good spikers on the first and second choice, but then the spikers would grab his arm and whisper, 'Take Michener.' I was never chosen lower than third, because I was needed. I wasn't good, but I was faithful.*

So you know why I take some of my precious vacation days from work, to come to this area and ...well work, for it is part of my heritage, to help these island nations, far from the mountains of Colorado and away from my kids. Two years ago for an FIVB course, I was able to bring both Cody and McKenzie along to Fiji, where I worked 10 days of the 11, while they adventured - going to school, working on a ranch, attending the National HS Track and Field Championships and one day even snorkeling with dear old dad on my one day off. McKenzie said on the flight back, Dad, it did not feel like we were tourists there, it was like we lived there, a nice observation to hear.

This journey took 35 hours, and five flights, on Air New Zealand, Air Fiji and Air Vanuatu - final leg on an old

16 passenger Twin Otter, bouncing through the rain clouds - for it is the start of winter here. I traveled most the journey with Ivan, an Irish dairy farmer who I met in Los Angeles, who happened to be making the same long journey to the same town, but in his case, to get on a yacht there and sail away for 3 weeks of vacation. I learned a lot about dairy farming...

Vanuatu, formerly known as New Hebrides, is a nation of 183 islands and 110 different dialects, spread among the five provinces - each with their own culture. Volleyball and Football are the two biggest sports here, and I am working with Sarah from New Zealand who does a large Women in Sport project, with FIFA support, to see if we can make beach soccer and beach volleyball courts cooperatively. Espiritu Santo, the town/island I am based at has wide roads, complements of the US Armed Forces from 60 years ago. It is known for its great peanuts (served on the root as they come out of the ground) and mandarin oranges. Families must pay for their kids to go to school, and there is a key continue/stop education test given in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. With 80% being rural, public schools are not common, only found in the larger cities. Average monthly wage is \$200, but there are no taxes here, so this is a tax haven for many wealthy, as well as unscrupulous folks from around the world. I am told some 200 Australian Tax police base here, looking to find tax cheats just from their nation. Their national language is a form of phonetic Pidgin English and French. Let me give you a couple of examples from the volleyball book we are using

To show how beach volleyball does not allow open handed tipping they write "You no allow pushum bol long finga" or for the rule of not setting the serve they will read "Yu no save setem wan serve" It is not something I can understand too well when they speak fast, but as you can see, reading it makes general sense.

So what I would propose to all still with me, is to enhance the leave a ball behind program, extending it to Regional Teams ending their season at the RVA Regionals, with each RVA "Adopting" an FIVB nation like Vanuatu - and sending their collection of used, and hopefully good luck signed, volleyballs to the National Federation. The need for volleyballs is the #1 and #2 need....they can make courts, make nets, and play with passion and skill, but the "pikinini" - the kids - need a ball to play. Here, Debbie, the Secretary General of the Beach Volleyball Federation, a former player from Darwin, NT in Australia, has spent the last five years of her life working to grow the game. She knows some Americans who come here often, and in this case, if we just ship the balls to her friends in California, they will bring them the rest of the way. So seems to me to be a good way to inexpensively impact the sport in a hugely positive way in these nations.

The former head of Vanuatu volleyball was former MLB player Troy Neel, who played mostly in Japan, then moved here and made some good things happen I am told. They did a raffle to win a kit house, that still sits on the beach training courts area in Port Vila - which is just a hop over the wall from the national prison. His passport ran out and "Went down the gurgler..." as the Aussies say. His new situation can be found here <http://sports.espn.go.com/mlb/news/story?id=4150634>

William, the head of VVF is here administrating the course and translating at times when the ideas or science gets a bit too multisyllabic and confusing. While power here is 240V, I was pleased to see that my projector works, so we are showing them some great Beijing Olympic footage. When I asked the group how many had access to email, nobody did, let alone a computer, or a TV....so these images are all new - they read the paper and knew we had done well in Beijing, but that was all they had seen.

First full day of the course and what do we get? A full day of rain, including rainbows at time, but sometimes raining so hard it drowns out what we are talking about. So lots of theory and not enough practical, but the

weather is to turn, and we can get on the court more. The courts are saturated so much the tree trunks used as standards fell inward when we tightened up the net, so had to teach them how to make deadman anchors, in addition to making antenna out of bamboo stalks. Tomorrow one of the participants is going to teach us all how to make a ball from Coconut Tree leaves. Looking forward to learning that....

There is a relaxed level of time concern here - they call it Vanuatu time....but that does not work when their teams travel internationally to compete and have to be right on time. So Debbie makes their tournaments follow the saying "Time is Time" so that if it is a 10 am start, that is when they start. I guess month one team arrived 10:03, and they simply were not allowed in the event. Next weekend she said that team was there at 9:30. We started our clinic late as well, and then an attendee came up and a "Contract" for the attendees

- Offem mobile
- Kom long stret taem
- No smoke long B/F
- Ask em plante kwestin
- Sherem ideas

As in, cell phones off, come on time, no smoking allowed (this is a sporting event), ask a lot of questions and share ideas.

One of the reasons for coming here is a friend named Brian Minikin, with the Oceania Olympic Committee who has been a friend for over 30 years since we worked in Australia - Tasmania in fact, on growing the sport. He knows of IOC grants and other ways to help this area, and a woman's beach team here is the top team in any sport internationally, so they deservedly get big press. Debbie Wooster has done a smashing job in growing the beach side of the game in Vanuatu, and tirelessly has worked to find sponsors, build courts, and get their best athletes playing.

My old friend Natalie Cook, 2000 Gold medalists in Beach now is coaching more and helping these two players, who now have 12 month visas to Oz, stay and train with her. That is a BIG part of why we worked over the years to get Beach VB into the Olympic Games - for of the 220 nations who are members of the FIVB, MOST cannot afford to send or train a 12 person indoor team. However, with just two talented international level players, you can be very competitive at a more affordable level.

Steve Anderson, coach for Natalie when she and Kerri Pottharst won the gold, is also both helping train these two ladies and others, and will be back in Port Vila later this week when I go there to run PE Teacher , referee and player trainings before I return home. The spirit of the Vanuatu people is wonderful to see and with the work of these other people, I hope to see World Tour and Olympic Qualification from these talented athletes here in the South Pacific. Time to get to the course and share more ideas, beneath the rainbows that come with the rain...

**Olympism and the New White House Office of Olympic, Paralympic, and Youth Sports:** By John Kessel  
Jun 17, 2009

The White House yesterday announced the forming of the Olympic, Paralympic and Youth Sports office. I sent out news of this last night to some friends and leaders with the correct phrasing in my opinion of the new formation of the Youth, Paralympic and Olympic Sports office. More than a few thought it was a joke at first, but it is real, and important to know more about...

The USOC had an individual Washington DC for years, who mostly problem solved visas for international teams coming in and USA Teams going out. For most other nations, their Olympic team and movement are a government sponsored program. The White House announcement and the USOC response, follow later, but I wanted to bring focus on two things most grassroots people do not know about growing the game through the Olympic and Paralympic movement.

The key thing to come is the process - and there we need to understand Olympism, not the Olympic Games. Most people miss the point and just think Gold Medals. That is why I have spent so much time in teaching new coaches about the Olympic motto of

*Citius, Altius Fortius,*

After all, most reading this are JUNIOR Olympic Volleyball and Beach Volleyball coaches and players. So these three words you MUST know and focus on in becoming the best player you can be. It is not about the gold - for the process of being *Swifter, Higher and Stronger* is good for all humanity and human development. It is about pursuing the "ER" for EACH person, NOT the "EST" of the gold medalist. It is the journey, not the destination. The focus on being BETTER, not BEST is a pathway each and every one of your athletes can follow.

### **What is Olympism?**

Well visit, and indeed spend more time at [www.olympic.org](http://www.olympic.org) and learn about what the International Olympic Committee is focused on. For Olympism specifically you can go to.

<http://www.olympic.org.nz/Article.aspx?ID=2997>

There you see that the idea is to bring both sport into the areas of culture and education, such that Olympism promotes a way of life based on:

*"The balanced development of the body, will and mind*

*The joy found in effort*

*The educational value of being a good role model*

*Respect for universal ethics including tolerance, generosity, unity, friendship, non-discrimination and respect for others. "*



So what is ahead is too soon to be seen. There are several key areas in the announcement below, but the two that I am excerpting for your focus are:

- Recommend federal policies and programs to the President to enhance opportunities and access for youth participation in sport, with particular focus on youth in urban areas
- And work closely with the United States Olympic Committee and national sport governing bodies to increase access and opportunities for youth to participate in sports.

So, just wanted you all as leaders in our sport and in growing the game for others, to know of this historic announcement. Let us know what you think by leaving a comment below or emailing me at [john.kessel@usav.org](mailto:john.kessel@usav.org). Almost time for the Father's Day Tournament in Vail this Sunday, to those of you dads reading this, I hope you all get time to be with your kid or kids doing things you both love as I will be by playing with Cody and McKenzie this weekend in a beautiful part of my home state.... John

## THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE June 16, 2009

### **President Obama Announces New White House Office of Olympic, Paralympic and Youth Sport**

WASHINGTON - Today, President Barack Obama announced the formation of the White House Office of Olympic, Paralympic and Youth Sport.

This permanent White House office will promote the values of the Olympic Movement and encourage increased youth participation in athletics. The primary function of the Office will be to enhance awareness of the Olympic Movement through promotion of its fundamental principles at the federal level.

**President Obama** said, "It is an important goal of my administration to give our nation's children every possible tool they need to grow, learn and succeed in life. A key part of this is increasing access to healthy, constructive activities like sports for our nation's children. Too many American kids - particularly those in urban areas - have no access to organized sporting activities. Sports are an important way to instill values, judgment and teamwork in our nation's kids, and this new office reflects our commitment to giving all our children a chance to thrive. As the International Olympic Committee moves forward with their selection process we hope that this new office can serve as a model for youth involvement worldwide."

#### ***The White House Office of Olympic, Paralympic and Youth Sport will:***

- Recommend federal policies and programs to the President to enhance opportunities and access for youth participation in sport, with particular focus on youth in urban areas

- Foster and encourage youth sporting, educational and cultural events involving Olympic values-based programs and the participation of U.S. Olympians and Paralympians

*The Office will also work in coordination with appropriate executive departments and agencies, including the Departments of Education and Health and Human Services, to:*

- Engage in outreach to state and local government officials, nonprofit organizations and the private sector
- Coordinate federal resources, and act as liaison to, any organizing committee for an Olympic and Paralympic Games hosted in the United States
- And work closely with the United States Olympic Committee and national sport governing bodies to increase access and opportunities for youth to participate in sports.

Then the U.S. Olympic Committee Reaction to President Obama's Announcement of New White House Office of Olympic, Paralympic and Youth Sport

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. - Statement from USOC Acting Chief Executive Officer Stephanie Streeter:

"This is a great day for the Olympic and Paralympic Movement in the United States. President Obama and Ms. Jarrett have shown great leadership and vision today in embracing the Olympic Movement by establishing this office in the White House. We embrace and welcome this high-level White House support and advocacy for the USOC, Chicago 2016 and the goals of the Olympic Movement. The USOC looks forward to working with the Obama Administration in collaboration with our National Governing Bodies, Multisport Organizations and other key partners to promote youth participation in Olympic and Paralympic sport. Together we will create new opportunities for America's youth and instill the values inherent in the Olympic Movement."

**The Loser's Club:** May 27, 2009



One of the things about YouTube is the way contests I would never have had the chance to "see" are now things I can enjoy and learn from. The clip below by a blind piano contestant, who just made the top 12 of this year's Van Cliburn, share today thanks to one of my long time Rec.Sport.Volleyball pals, Ravi. I just sent the email below to the three guys who have worked with the US Association of Blind Athletes over the last 15 years, along with some leaders in the field of deliberate practice, as these performers show the results of such focused practice a very high level.

I often reflect on how we do not let athletes get as good at a sport they might be passionate about, as our culture allows musicians, dancers, and even scientists become focused. What would happen if you told budding scientists, they could only do biology for 3 months, then they had to do math, or physics or some other discipline? How about requiring musicians to have to change instruments each quarter, no more piano for you, you have to play drums now....and now the clarinet... Yes, you are a good ballet dancer, but your three months of training and competing is now up, you got to start listening to country and do line dancing, followed by three months of polka or the option to break dance...then you can return to ballet. We do no such things when youngsters seek to excel in these other areas, but when it comes to sport, we often force players to change by athletic rules. Please understand that I simply am saying, if the kid WANTS to just play volleyball, or any sport, and has a passion for that, I think it is fine to let them play more. Play with or against adults, play doubles, play on sand. The operative word in part is PLAY, letting the games teach the game and the athlete develop without constant supervision (think how much musicians and dancers train on their own, without their instructors).

That is what this summer is about, and why at the clinic I will do Friday June 19<sup>th</sup> here in Colorado, we will give the new outdoor doubles junior players insights into the rules of the outdoor game, and how to ref it as well (for every team has to also referee in the outdoor tourneys), then they will play as many as 20 five minute games against all ages and both genders. Then they get to play in the Mountain Open in Vail the next day...followed by one of my favorite days of the year - Father's Day -- and the Father Daughter/Father Son tournament on the same field of play. Dads serve the dads, kids can serve anyone. Dads can play in the Father Son divisions (18s and 15s) with 2 or more kids, as long as the kids - son or daughter - are the same age (twins you know) or younger. Dads can play in the Father Daughter divisions (18s, 16s,14s,12s) with a second child or more - daughter same age or younger or son 2 years younger or more. Libero subs for these multi-child teams. I expect maybe 100 Father/Child teams to compete this year in Vail, something I started with Leon Fell a few years back that just keeps growing - and other regions now host both Mother/Child doubles events in May, and Father/Child competitions in June. I say go do one this year, just with your club, if not an all city or regional event. It is such a great way to play or start planning now for next year...

From a teaching teacher's /Growing The Game point of view...and the 10,000 hours along with way, this **BRILLIANT** price by Jon N about being a loser is also a **MUST** see, and sadly not seen by that many...I LOVE how others said to him along the way, you can't do this....and how, thru his passion and commitment to his competition, he persevered. PLEASE take 10 min to watch this Loser's Club piece, take notes for the times you need to speak to your players after a loss - and share the message and theme within to all.....

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C5smz7gycqQ&feature=channel>

And while I am at it, if not already watched several times go get "*Searching for Bobby Fischer*" this week and watch it too. The lessons there of having a life, while becoming great at one thing, are wonderfully told thru the movie. One of my top 10 films from a coaching point of view.

Here is my email about the talented blind competitor in this year's Van Cliburn...

**From:** John Kessel  
**Sent:** Wednesday, May 27, 2009 1:53 PM  
**To:** Mark Lucas  
**Cc:** Roger Neppl (USOC); Charlie.Huebner (USOC)

Mark, Charlie and Roger - given your past and current work with the blind, thought you all would enjoy more than most the 10 minutes of Nobuyuki's play in this competition. Personally, every clip of the Van Cliburn competition are worth playing in the background while you work on other things for US Paralympics and beyond...just a few people have seen this on YouTube, but worth making it go viral IMHO -

Nobuyuki Tsujii plays Chopin Twelve Etudes, Op.10 during the preliminary round of the 13th Van Cliburn International Piano Competition on May 23, 2009.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bDtT5sSu5VQ&feature=related>

To learn more about the competition - in just 3 minutes, try this link

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=38lyMSJspQo&feature=channel>

**Disable Sports and You:** Mar 18, 2009

Today thru Sunday the USA Sitting Men and Women's teams will be training and competing at the Colorado Crossroads against Canada. Come by and meet these four wonderful teams if you are in Denver. This morning Fred Wendelboe, long time USAV leader, forwarded me a link to a great story about a golfer who has Cerebral Palsy. It brought to mind how vast our nation is, and how amazing stories like DJ Gregory's remain hidden. If I fall, I fall....you learn from your mistakes...this man last year walked all 44 tourneys in 45 weeks, 3256 holes, 900 miles. Kudos to DJ who left his footprints all across a sport, I strongly encourage you and your team to watch it at:

<http://sports.espn.go.com/broadband/video/clip?id=3696478&categoryid=null>

Since producing the 1996 Paralympic Sitting Volleyball Venue in Atlanta I have been inspired by the athletes who represent the USA in all the amazing disciplines offered - from Blind Sports - Tandem Biking and Goalball, to our own sitting and standing versions of volleyball. You get a change of perspective in life when you work in disabled sports. My request is two fold:

1. You are our talent scouts, please keep looking
2. Your team will benefit from experiencing sitting volleyball

As HIPPA laws provide a higher level of privacy, and deaf and blind children are now regularly being mainstreamed into regular schools, it has become more and more difficult for us to find new athletes who also qualify for Paralympic and Deaflympic competition. The Paralympic Military Sports programming headed up by long time USAV Board member Roger Neppel, has brought hope, smiles and talent to those returning injured. Just like this powerful disabled golf video story shared, our nation is so large, great ideas, opportunities and inspiration are too often not known about. So take a moment to download this [chart of sports and disability](#).



When the women won the Paralympic bronze medal in Athens in 2004, most volleyball fans not only did not see it, but did not realize that half our line up was high school players who had been training hard for just a couple of years. Those same key players returned to step up to a Silver medal in Beijing, yet the starting line up still included Heather Erickson, a 15 year old high school player out of North Carolina who was statistically the best blocker in the world event in Egypt in advance of our success in China. The next USA Paralympian may not be playing

high school volleyball, but is a Park and Rec or YMCA League player you see when you go officiate, play, or just are watching. Let them know of the opportunities they have.

Getting your players to empathize and be "disabled" for a warm up or two, simply means having two people sit in chairs to make the "standards, and stringing a rope down the middle of a regulation vb court, just like you see in the picture. You can even have the net up. This allows for three courts to be created, so up to 36 kids can play with the endlines and 3 meter lines being the court sidelines now, and the sidelines are the 4.5 meter per side endlines. This is off regulation by .5 meters, but who cares. Play! There are just really four main rule differences, seen below. The rest of the Olympic/USAV rules are what's used, without change. A skill set poster showing the subtle differences of playing on the floor can be found by [clicking here](#).

1. Your feet can be in the court/over the lines, but your behind must be behind the line
2. You can block the serve
3. The net is about 1.1 meter high, while the court is 6m wide by 10 total meters long

Your behind has to stay on the floor with one cheek at least when you block or attack or play a ball. No "air butts".

Next week I will be doing a webinar course for Blaze Sports on Sitting Volleyball Programming. Elliott Blake, USAV staffer at University of Central Oklahoma in charge of developing the grassroots Disabled Volleyball programming will join Jeff Jones, Director of Education at Blaze Sports out of Atlanta for a 1 hour session. If you have the time and interest, join us, by signing up here - space is limited. Here is what Jeff said about it:

<https://www2.gotomeeting.com/register/365289032>

*BlazeSports America will be hosting a webinar/conference call on competitive opportunities in the sport of*

*Sitting Volleyball. BlazeSports America and the US Paralympics are very pleased to partner with USA Volleyball to bring you this informative webinar. Anyone can "Get Down" with Sitting Volleyball. By utilizing the existing resources within your community, you can organize a group of athletes with and without disabilities into a formidable team. The webinar on this Paralympic sport will provide you with the information necessary to teach the basic skills of the game, knowledge of the rules governing the game, and some of the best practices currently in place to develop your own grassroots program. Additionally, you will learn about the necessity to identify disabled athletes who could make an immediate impact on the national teams, and how to refer them into the elite athlete pipeline.*

I must also note that a whole group of amazing USA athletes will have their own 'lympics" - the Deaflympics take place a year after the Olympics, as a 30 plus sport world competition for those who are deaf. Take another moment to download this chart of Deaf Sports opportunity by clicking here. Now go out and find those next USA players for all these programs, and have fun playing with your team too!

### **Volleyball Stars to the End:** Feb 11, 2009

As the volleyball family grows, so do the numbers of inspirational stories, and of tragic losses. This past week I have received three emails regarding the passing of talented Jr. Olympic volleyball players: One an accidental suicide, another who fought valiantly to the end with cancer, and a third, a Starlings USA player/coach, who was killed Sunday by a drunk driver.

In the randomness of life, these deaths are just a statistic...in the circle of life, our passing is a certainty. Other volleyball stars whose light was dimmed early, yet who fought their illness with power and grace both on and off the court, include Shayla and Andi (#54), whose journeys have been shared with thousands of supporters. For the loved ones of these children who discovered the joys of volleyball, the loss is immeasurable, as they did not have time to complete their circle. Whenever such painful stories come to light, I first read A.E Houseman's "To an Athlete Dying Young" The stories of two of these young talents, are shared below, to remind us how each day is special, and to be thankful for all we have in these days and times.

The time you won your town the race  
We chaired you through the market-place;  
Man and boy stood cheering by,  
And home we brought you shoulder-high.

To-day, the road all runners come,  
Shoulder-high we bring you home,  
And set you at your threshold down,  
Townsmen of a stiller town.

Smart lad, to slip betimes away  
From fields where glory does not stay  
And early though the laurel grows  
It withers quicker than the rose.

Eyes the shady light has shut  
Cannot see the record cut,  
And silence sounds no worse than cheers  
After earth has stopped the ears:

Now you will not swell the rout  
Of lads that wore their honours out,  
Runners whom renown outran  
And the name died before the man.

So set, before its echoes fade,  
The fleet foot on the sill of shade,  
And hold to the low lintel up  
The still-defended challenge-cup.

And round that early-laurelled head  
Will flock to gaze the strengthless dead,  
And find unwithered on its curls  
The garland briefer than a girl's.



### **Turning Five Medals in to More Participants:** January 26, 2009

Greetings Volleyball Family - The tremendous success of our teams in Beijing, including the Paralympic Sitting Women's team winning a silver medal last month, now opens this chance to share ideas with everyone on growing our sport together. This weekend, the Youth & Junior Olympic Volleyball Division and the Regional Operations Divisions close out their decades of work as the new USAV Board of Directors and structures begin. One of the changes is to increase grassroots communication and idea sharing on things that grow the game, for youth and seniors, and all versions in between. This blog is one place to exchange thoughts. We will be using MS Sharepoint to allow the commissions and leadership to more easily collaborate. We have sought to get as many medal winning athletes to share their stories in these next months, in person. The fact is currently all but two of the 24 indoor players are playing overseas on professional teams. We will be challenged to solve in some other way. We have medal celebration t-shirts/hoodies available already at <http://www.teamusa.org/USA-Volleyball/Shop.aspx> and <http://www.em2sports.com/>. A thirty minute highlight video of journeys to the medal stand in August is in final production and will be available to USA Volleyball donors as a premium item. If you have any other ideas, let me know as we give every idea great attention and consideration. For now, back to meetings here in Colorado Springs... John

**USOC Seminar on Development, Enhancement, and Sustainability of Expert Performance in Sport:**  
Jan 26, 2009

Starting tomorrow, a USOC Seminar I have been looking forward to for months, is finally happening. Take a look at this schedule! For those who have taken IMPACT, the names Schmidt and Ericsson have been seen for over 20 years throughout the motor skill section of the manual. The title sums up what I expect to be a great two days. The chance to see Hugh McCutcheon again, post Beijing, is also something we are looking forward to. More to come on this, including info about a webinar on the topic with any luck, in a later post.

Development, Enhancement and Sustainability of Expert Performance in Sport November 13 & 14, 2008  
Olympic Training Center- Colorado Springs

**THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 13 – WEST WING CONFERENCE CENTER**

8:00- 8:30 Welcome

8:30-10:00 Development of Skill in High-Level Performances- K. Anders Ericsson, PhD

*Dr. Ericsson's current research concerns the structure and acquisition of expert performance and in particular how expert performers acquire and maintain their superior performance by extended deliberate practice. Editor of the groundbreaking book- Expert Performance in Sport.*

10:30- Noon Feedback Theory—How the Coach Provides Information Peter Vint, PhD

*Peter is currently working on the development of perceptual skill measurement and training programs, development of guidelines for delivering feedback during training and competition, and making current and emerging technologies more accessible and usable for coaches and athletes.*

1:30-3:00 Acquisition of Motor Skills Dick Schmidt, PhD

*For over 30 years, Dick Schmidt has been known as one of the research leaders in motor behavior. In 1975, his Schema theory started the discussion on practice variables like block practice v. random practice.*

3:30-5:00 Addressing the Fear-Survival Instinct in Competitive Sport utilizing EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing)- Jim Bauman, PhD

*Jim will be providing a basic understanding of how the human brain has evolved and, in our sport world, processes external stimuli (training versus competitive situation) as either threatening or not threatening.*

**FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 14- WEST WING CONFERENCE CENTER**

8:00-9:30 Detect, Interpret and Act on Environmental Cues for Decision Making- It can be measured! Mark Williams PhD



*With projects looking into expert performance and visual perception; Anticipation and decision-making skill in sport and other domains; Development of perceptual-cognitive training programs; Deliberate practice theory and the development of expert performers stress, Dr Williams provides practical application for coaches in this two-part session.*

10:00- 11:30 Effective Practices and Instruction - Mark Williams

11:30-12:30 Panel Discussion Guy Baker-Head Coach of the Silver Medalists in Women's Water Polo, Hugh McCutcheon- Head Coach of the Gold Medalists in Men's Volleyball, K. Anders Ericsson, Peter Vint, Dick Schmidt, Jim Bauman, Mark Williams

### **Growing the Game in Oklahoma: Jan 26, 2009**

Today's must read is by none other than Malcom Gladwell again - an excellent new article in the New Yorker on effective teaching and "predicting" success that you can access it [here on their website](#).

I have lots of travel these next few weeks...Washington DC and the NCAA Division I Women's Volleyball Championship in Omaha to wind up December.

It will be hard to top the last three days when I was in Edmond, Oklahoma, on campus at the University of Central Oklahoma. UCO is a Paralympic training site and home for both our USA men's and women's sitting national teams.

Mark Herrin was kind enough to show me some new development ideas for expanding the sitting team program training area, and even building new sand courts which would be along the river, lighted and convertible into a stage, much like Athens 2004 was designed.

Rowing, with the new world class channel they now have there, is also growing, and I hope that the Neah Bay nation, might be able to blend both their volleyball skills and oarsmanship someday, when the Smithsonian Native American Museum there is finished.

I had a chance to meet with my former intern, Eric Duda, now a starter on the Pan Am Silver medal men's team. He and two of the three USA women there participated in a two day CAP course, with sitting volleyball emphasis. Katie Holloway and Gina Davis both played and learned with the other nearly 60 coaches there sharing ideas with Bill Hamiter, the USA men's sitting team coach, who was the other CAP Cadre instructor.

I got to meet most the Oklahoma RVA board, work with Shaun's neat boys teams, ages ranging from 9 to 17, and even watch the OU-Mizzou football game in a Sooner red house of family and fans.

Some of the coaches have written about the "paradigm shift" they experienced taking the course. From new ideas in Motor Skill learning, to new drills and training ideas. It was a full two days of becoming better teachers of volleyball. My biggest hope is that the coaches there learned new ways to make sure that they will never be a child's last coach.



or have your grandmother hear about it? In this day and age of smart phone videos, very little is not getting recorded. This coach's actions shows what could happen again in volleyball. [Click here](#) for the video.

Cascade Failure... Thanks to Carl McGown, a look at the statistics and perceptions of streaks and more in baseball. [Click here](#)

The Psychology of Choking - [Click here](#)

Kinetic Typography: This is an interesting form of storytelling...so here are my favorites...[Video One](#) - [Video Two](#)

Who's on first - [Click here for Video](#)

Monty Python witch - [Click here for Video](#)

Rollin Justin the Robot and Friends: So how long until a rebounding volleyball version is available to use as a sub. The pitching robot sets much like a beginner, short of the mark... [Video One](#) - [Video Two](#) - [Video Three](#)  
Ohio Competitive Sports Balance Issue: A lot of thought and discussion on the topic over the years compiled into this one set of stories done by the Dayton Daily News. Sharing with all in the volleyball family, as your state may be dealing with these issues as budget cuts and programming changes come forward...

[May 3 Dayton Daily News - High Schools to Vote on Competitive Balance Sports Issue](#)

[May 2 Dayton Daily News - OHSAA Boundary Proposal Has Schools Choosing Sides](#)

[May 3 Dayton Daily News - Competitive Balance Proposal Would Give Boost to Poor Districts](#)

[May 4 Dayton Daily News - Many Winning Programs Feel They're Being Punished for Success](#)

[May 5 Dayton Daily News - In DI Football, It Is a Numbers Game](#)

[May 6 Dayton Daily News Blog - Voting and Debate Continues on OHSAA Competitive Balance Proposal](#)

Volleyball Sport for a Lifetime: Thanks to Bill Kauffman at USAV, this link to seniors playing balloon volleyball shows the circle of life from minivolley to seniorvolley...[Click here](#)

Talking Volleyball Animals: OK, can someone please make a volleyball coach/player version of one of these...thanks to Cecile Reynaud for reminding me about how funny the talking animals channel can be...[Click here](#)

Thanks to all for your help in growing the game – especially today's AVCA assistant coaches conference call group, who hopefully learned about some new resources we have at USAV to help them be the best teachers they can be.

**5/3/11**

*Jimi and Melissa*

So I am sitting in the U.S. Olympic Training Center Aquatics 006 room in Colorado Springs, and there is a huge picture of Jimi Flowers and Melissa Stockwell at the Beijing Olympic Natatorium during the 2008 Paralympics. The loss of Jimi to a mountain climbing accident almost two years ago (you may remember in my blog

[“Landslide”](#) ) still is painful to me. You likely saw a minute clip of Melissa during the NCAA Men’s Final Four, during the Hartford “Achieve Without Limits” commercials it ran. Well, these two clips are worth watching, and sharing with your team as the season ends or for summer camps. [Click here](#) for the first video clip and [click here](#) for the second video clip.

### *Potential Through Language*

Dan Coyle sent me this, “on the other end of the spectrum....ID mindset/potential through language.” To read the article, [click here](#).

### *Initial Ability vs. Final Ability*

Ok, 10,000 hours starting like Tiger and this kid is a bit easier to achieve....clever contract move the best part of it is you can see deliberate practice going on at a very early age. Talk about grassroots...Dutch club VVV-Venlo sign 1-year-old child...To see the video and article, [click here](#).

### *Fortune Teller!*

In Celebration of Mother's Day and National Osteoporosis Awareness Month, the National Osteoporosis Council and Best Bones Forever! shared this Origami Fortune Teller game for girls. A fun bone health education game. Check it out by [clicking here](#).

### *So Who is Their Coach?*

Those of you who have seen me speak in person likely have seen some of my “how did you learn to ride a bike” concept and video clips. These four are new ones I have added to the concept and lectures...and again I ask you...so who is their coach? [Video Clip 1](#)...[Video Clip 2](#)...[Video Clip 3](#)...[Video Clip 4](#).

### *Time Lapse of Canadian Volleyball Provincial Championships*

Jason Trepanier was kind enough, and proud enough, to share this time lapse of the Ontario VB Federation Championships, from set up and beyond. A great insight into what it takes to stage a qualifier or other Sport Court/Convention Center event. To view the clip, [click here](#).

Having seen that, for those wondering what the start of each day looks like at a USAV Nationals, this [video](#) I created was in my blog on [100 Years of VB Secrets](#) from last summer, gives you a sense, in less than two minutes.

### *Largest Astroturf Purchase Site - and VOLLEYBALL Courts Galore too!*

If that intrigued you...check out the Spire Institute in Geneva, Ohio, where Norm Potter works and just shared this story... Cody trained there last summer with the men's junior national A2 team, and it is quite a place....[This article](#) is worth the read for sure methinks.

## *Stephanie and Samantha Castleberry – Special Olympic Volleyball Twins*

Last, but not least, is this segment on two very unique Special Olympians from last summer. I really did not do the week Cody and I spent working the Special Olympic National Games enough writing, so wanted to make sure you did not miss these two clips. Steph and Sam may be short, but they make up for it in their attitude, hustle and passion for the game we all love – and they can sign American Sign Language 10x better than I can. To see the video, [click here](#). For an overview of the whole volleyball competition, [click here](#)

### *Deaflympic Men's Training Camp*

Remember all, when you see a deaf volleyball player, signing or just with double hearing aids perhaps, make sure they know about the USA Deaflympic program for men and women. This weekend, the men are coming to town, to the OTC to train and tryout. Check out [this link](#) to learn more about this Affiliated Organization of USA Volleyball.

That's it for this Tuesday, one that closes out a week of Best Practices, NORCECA Board of Administration and Paralympic Leadership Conferencing all in Colorado Springs...next up, the U.S. Men's Deaflympic team hopefuls are here in town training at the OTC all day Saturday and Sunday

Hopefully all of you know about the "[Volleyball Extravaganza](#)" going on this weekend at Penn State. But to be sure, simply click Volleyball Extravaganza in the previous sentence, and hope to see you there!

### **4/26/11**

It's an eclectic Tuesday here, maybe reflecting the week we have in store for us which has included coaching at a qualifier, attending the USOC National Governing Body Best Practices Seminar on Governance, assisting the NORCECA Board of Administration and Executive Committee we are hosting here in town, speaking and teaching at the Paralympic Leadership Conference at the U.S. Olympic Training Center, setting up for all the clinics at next week's NCAA Men's Volleyball Championship at Penn State, and lots more... So let's start with this week's tips and links

### **VOLLEYBALL EXTRAVAGANZA at Penn State May 5-7**

Let all your friends know about the Volleyball Extravaganza next Thursday thru Saturday at Penn State. Boys' high school tourney with nearly 50 teams, USA World University Games Men's Team training and exhibition match...Coaches' clinic with folks like Karch and Neville speaking...boys' player clinic with the WUG team guys on each court as a teammate...Parent clinic and a youth sports educator volleyball clinic that I am doing...AND the NCAA Men's Volleyball Championship! Find out more at this link...<http://www.teamusa.org/USA-Volleyball/Features/2011/April/05/USAV-Partners-with-Penn-State-on-Extravaganza.aspx>

10,000 Hours of Deliberate Practice

With the Talent Code, Outliers and more, someone is going to spend the next six years of their life seeing if they go from novice to pro in golf. That they are doing blocked and not random training from what I can tell, makes me think it will not be reached, but an interesting idea nonetheless... [Click here](#).

### Teams Take Over your Mind

Ravi from Rec.Sport.Volleyball (that is a trip down memory lane for those who have been online for about 20 years or more), shared this great read on being a fan and the mental side of sport... [Click here](#).

### A Good Teacher and a Game

So I keep talking about learning volleyball by playing the game, not drilling it or watching it...this clip I likely will reference again – showing a good teacher and the way he uses a game to teach... [Click here](#).

### Best Bones Forever

BBF has a poster in our grassroots poster section, and the group just shared this link to a blog they felt worth monitoring, for those working with girls. [Click here](#).

### [Tinashé](#) - Zambezi

So if you have seen my blog you know how music is important to me and my kids/teams. Playing for Change [www.playingforchange.org](http://www.playingforchange.org) is an example of that, and this artist, Tinashe, certainly captures that same spirit and there nearly 40 clips on his tinashetv YouTube channel. – my son Cody shared it first with me, so now I am with you. [Click here](#).

### 4/19/11

Just back from a great clinic on the east coast with the WEVA Region that held in conjunction with the Molten Division III Men's Invitational Volleyball Championship, won by Nazareth on its home court. They did a GREAT job of having a first- to eighth-grade boys' and girls' player clinic in which the kids hit first and pass-set-hit right away. After learning to improve their serve, they had a 10-court/20-team round robin competition of 3-5 minute matches and everyone playing everyone. Well done Kyle Salisbury and John Hughes.

### **Inspirational Activist for the Disabled**

With the Paralympic Leadership Conference starting next week – I am presenting each day on the value of play and on leadership ideas – felt this TED clip, 15:34 long, to be mandatory viewing for all coaches, club directors, parents and players. Take a break right now and watch it...

[http://www.ted.com/talks/caroline\\_casey\\_looking\\_past\\_limits.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/caroline_casey_looking_past_limits.html)

### **Magic Motor Programs**

Scottie Zucco from Hawaii shared this great link. He writes *“I watched a documentary called Make Believe (it’s running regularly on Showtime). It’s about the biggest teen magic tournament of the year. You’ll be amazed at the work ethic of these off-beat & quirky teens that spend HOURS practicing their ‘slight of hand.’ Talk about work ethic and mastering complex motor movements!! Here’s the trailer:”*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yXbHVZngatw>

### **New USAV Court Signs Available**

In color, both 11x17 and 8.5x11 sizes, numbered 1-70, just print the page range you want and have at it. These were developed by my son Cody, with help from Bill Kauffman and make any OUTDOOR or indoor court easy to number and find. Tyvek ones will be coming soon to all RVAs as well, but you can just go to the grassroots/best practices button on the USAV website at any time and easily number your courts in black and white or color.

<http://www.teamusa.org/USA-Volleyball/Grassroots/Best-Practices.aspx>

### **Developing Your Sports IQ**

Jason T up in Canada reminded me about a friend’s blog that I have bookmarked but have not yet shared in my tips. JT wrote *“So far what I have seen has been great. I know that you guys like to learn from other sports, so check out this website...”*

<http://developyourballiq.com>

### **Oltre la Rete**

Doriano Rabotti, in his Italian newspaper Volleyball blog “Oltre la Rete” (Over the Net) took note of our State Department NORCECA clinic I directed last week. He shared some kind words, and also reached out to share sympathy to Stacy Sykora. Since he found a rare picture of me sitting down, thought others might like to test their use of Google Translate or Yahoo Babelfish and see what he had to say. A lot of his blogs are great volleyball reading and worth checking out.

[http://club.quotidiano.net/rabotti/quei\\_fenomeni\\_sconosciuti\\_in\\_panchina\\_3](http://club.quotidiano.net/rabotti/quei_fenomeni_sconosciuti_in_panchina_3)

### **Sports Psychology in AB**

Athletic Business Magazine had a nice article on the increasing use of Sports Psychology by younger athletes – saying “more athletes using sports psychology to gain competitive edge” – Check it out here:

<http://athleticbusiness.com/articles/lexisnexis.aspx?lnarticleid=1399754967&Intopicid=136030023>

### **Cool Volley**

Last, but not by any means least, the FIVB has followed up to the Minivolley program and shares the new “Cool Volleyball” program that simply does just two on two competition. The option of doubles we like a lot, as it gives the most contacts per hour for kids – and is what makes young players learn fastest – while the game still teaches the game. Head over to the FIVB website now and download the book – English now, and soon to follow up in Spanish and French....

[http://www.fivb.org/EN/Development/Cool\\_Volley.asp](http://www.fivb.org/EN/Development/Cool_Volley.asp)

Gosh, the indoor season is winding down. Setting up some outdoor courts in the grass and teaching my 14ers the rules and subtleties of the doubles game - while increasing their contacts per hour. Happy Easter all....

**4/5/11 and 4/12/11**

The Human Planet

When I travel like this, to have a group of coaches singing happy birthday to their fellow coaches in French, English AND Spanish, the humanity that volleyball brings together always empowers me while astounding me. This clip is a must watch I think for that very same reason, one done by the BBC on the Human Planet, noting the most remarkable species of all living in the wildest places on Earth....

[http://www.youtube.com/watch\\_popup?v=2HiUMIOz4UQ&vq=large](http://www.youtube.com/watch_popup?v=2HiUMIOz4UQ&vq=large)

FLAME

*Finding Leaders Among Minorities Everywhere* – a U.S. Olympic Committee program that has a lot of impact on the participants - takes place this summer yet again...and has applications due April 29 this year. My bet is your program might have a deserving applicant. I say go here and find out more, even if you don't have such a leader-in-development.

<http://www.teamusa.org/resources/usoc-programs/f-l-a-m-e>

Why are Some Better at Getting Better?

Carl McGown passed along this great ESPN story on how not all that needs to be measured can be measured...

<http://sports.espn.go.com/nfl/draft2011/news/story?id=6299428>

Disabled Pensmanship Award Winner

Simply good news and inspiring for all athletes, parents and coaches...

<http://www.aolnews.com/2011/04/07/nicholas-maxim-maine-fifth-grader-born-without-hands-wins-penm/>



## Places Humans Compete

Thanks to Denise Sheldon, this very stunning set of photos of stadiums around the world says a lot about our species too...

[http://twistedifter.com/2011/02/aerial-photos-stadiums-worldwide/?utm\\_source=sut&utm\\_medium=link&utm\\_campaign=sut](http://twistedifter.com/2011/02/aerial-photos-stadiums-worldwide/?utm_source=sut&utm_medium=link&utm_campaign=sut)

## WOVD Volleyball World Cup

As development director for the World Volleyball for the Disabled, I spend time helping grow the sitting AND standing games when possible. The standing game is no longer a Paralympic sport option – after 20 years it was eliminated from the games in 2004 and we are still fighting to get it back. So the WOVD keeps up the international option and here is where the 2011 World Cup info can be found...

<http://2011volleyballworldcup.org/>

## Mike Hebert Letter from Lindsey Berg

When I returned from playing professionally in Italy in 1983, I found myself at the University of New Mexico, as Mike Hebert had left the program to coach at the University of Minnesota. The very first woman's player from Japan to come play NCAA volleyball in the USA, Nao Ikeda, was a player at Hitachi who I discovered while teaching at an FIVB Minivolleyball International Symposium in Tokyo in 1985. After Nao graduated she began to give back to the sport by coaching and wisely joined Mike at Minnesota for over a decade. Mike wrote a great book worth reading on our sport, and many have benefited from his wisdom... So this letter on Volleywood touches me on many levels, as Mike has Parkinsons, but it never has him....

<http://www.volleywood.net/interviews/causes/to-mike-from-lindsey/>

## Early vs. Late Specialization

Our Canadian volleyball family member Jason Trepanier shared this well written piece looking at when children might specialize in a sport. Yesterday I joined nine other USAV staffers at a USOC lunch honoring Bonnie Blair. Her presentation was pretty special, and she sure started early, like at 2...but all along the way she kept saying... I LOVE TO SKATE... (see this clip of Bonnie talking about risk and passion <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QyktivHyvJI&feature=related>) – that was so easy to see in her love of her sport. Here now is the specialization link...

<http://www.sportsscientists.com/2011/04/specialization-training-volume-and.html>

Thanks for your help in growing the game....John

3/29/11

Open Source Volleyball – Chuck Rey has a very good blog worth bookmarking, and recently wrote about some of the reasons USA Volleyball is such a strong National Governing Body and national program. Check it out by [clicking here!](#)

Fearful to Coach – Jahrae Hampton, a coach up in Denver who has worked hard to learn to be the best coach he can be and help grow the game, shares some insights into his process of learning to be the best coach, without having really played the game. I have enjoyed spending time one-on-one with Jahrae at various times of late, and I think you will enjoy his thoughts on this topic. too. [Click here](#) to read his CAP II article and download a concussion fact [poster](#).

Concussion Info from the CDC – A lot of helpful resources and even USAV branded information is out there to help programs and clubs. Here are some recent links to new and perhaps never seen material.

- Concussion: A Must Read for Young Athletes
- Concussion: A Must Read for Young Athletes [fact sheet](#)
- *New*—Parent/Athlete Information sheet on concussion that can be used by schools, leagues, and states for parents and athletes to read and sign before the first practice.

Other heads-up resources:

[Concussion in Sports](#)

[Take the Online Training for Youth Sports Coaches](#)

[Resources for High School Sports](#)

[Resources for Youth Sports](#)

[Resources for School Professionals](#)

[Resources for Health Care Professionals](#)

Freestyle Soccer – A recent email from Peter Vint at the USOC about a New York Times story on a soccer prompts me to share my collection of Freestyle soccer links. Some of you who have attended a clinic I have done might have seen these used to tease volleyball coaches about “ball control” (along with a rhythmic gymnastics clip from worlds a couple of years ago...) – Here are my favorites, two older Nike clips from 2006 which are edited well, one Red Bull classic, and a couple of kids. Good stuff about talent development and deliberate practice to be sure...

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9DqO7zxP2SE>

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6dyM9SoB\\_-Y](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6dyM9SoB_-Y)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8jIKG6NEpjc&NR=1&feature=fvwp>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hyD9UC0BGoM>

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=74\\_Q26HEQNQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=74_Q26HEQNQ)

The Hartford and US Paralympics - The Hartford has sponsored U.S. Paralympic athletes for more than 16 years and became the Official Disability Insurance Sponsor of U.S. Paralympics in 2003. Most their top staff and

leadership have come to the OTC and competed in sitting volleyball. They have a new “*Achieve Without Limits campaign*” which honors and supports athletes; features ads, and uses social media – indeed they pledge to donate \$1 (up to half a million dollars) for every Hartford Facebook page 'Like' or twitter “Share” to U.S. Paralympics. Go to <http://www.facebook.com/TheHartford> to like or twitter @HartfordAchive to share. Earth Hour – So lots of interesting things flow into my email box. This one ([click here](#)) was a neat trip around our world. We can also be thankful that volleyball is a low impact sport, not needing all that much, compared to say golf or ice hockey, to make happen as a competitive sport.

### **3/22/11: Fooled by Randomness**

Readers of this blog may tire of how often I keep reminding us that by choosing sport as a way to develop leadership and character, that we must not forget that the outcome is out of our control, no matter how hard we work. We are now in “March Madness,” and this reality coaches and teams live in roars loud and clear in our brother team sport of basketball. Think of all the experts and talking heads who “know” the game – from those in the media who get paid big bucks to express it, to those in your office who submit it via the office bracket pool. Over at ESPN.com, despite 4.78 million entries, no one correctly picked every game through two rounds of ESPN.com's [Tournament Challenge](#), and only four picked 15 of the 16 teams still alive. In fact, there were 6,776 brackets that managed to go 0-for-16. So again, parents, coaches and players, I remind you to relax and enjoy the effort, hustle and spirited play, and know that winning and losing is temporary, but friendships last forever.

In the REAL first round of 64 on Thursday and Friday (not that “first round” of 4 teams that pigtail in, no offense to VCU's success or CU who deserved to be in also) it is just 32 match ups, but the odds of having a perfect bracket thru the first two rounds, according to the website [www.bookofodds.com](http://www.bookofodds.com) (this website is currently down, in the meantime, check out <http://www.xconomy.com/boston/2009/10/14/book-of-odds-comes-out-of-stealth-to-make-intuitive-sense-of-statistics-but-can-it-sell-ads/>) – a must visit by the way, are just 1 in 13,460,000. If you follow the optimal strategy of always picking the higher seed to win, your odds of filing a perfect March Madness bracket are just 1 in 35,360,000,000—almost 18 times worse than your odds of being killed by a waterspout in a year (1 in 1,988,000,000)

[http://espn.go.com/blog/collegebasketballnation/post/\\_/id/8528/brackets-by-the-numbers-2](http://espn.go.com/blog/collegebasketballnation/post/_/id/8528/brackets-by-the-numbers-2)

### **Controlled Chaos**

Like Oregon football showed and we discussed this past season, you can get into gamelike shape in training – and get better at skills without as much “conditioning.” Here is another example of getting deliberate practice and in shape with specificity in sport....

[http://espn.go.com/blog/bigeast/post/\\_/id/18292/cincinnati-getting-in-shape-in-a-hurry](http://espn.go.com/blog/bigeast/post/_/id/18292/cincinnati-getting-in-shape-in-a-hurry)

### **What Sport Means in America**

The U.S. Anti-Doping Agency (USADA) based here in Colorado Springs shares a press release regarding the findings of a groundbreaking research study, designed to measure Americans’ attitudes and beliefs about sport and the impact sport has on values and culture in America.

[http://www.usada.org/files/active/resources/press\\_releases/Press%20Release-Outreach-Education-Research.pdf](http://www.usada.org/files/active/resources/press_releases/Press%20Release-Outreach-Education-Research.pdf)

Some highlights that tie into growing the game together include:

- Parents overwhelmingly cite personal and social values when describing their hopes for their children in playing sport.
- Nearly 90 percent of U.S. adults agree that well-known athletes have a responsibility to be positive role models for young people, and by wide margins agree that the personal conduct of well-known athletes is as important as their athletic accomplishments.
- Coaches rank as the No. 1 positive influence on today's youth involved in sport.
- Americans rank the use of performance-enhancing drugs as the most serious problem facing sport today, closely followed by issues such as the focus on money, and the criminal behavior of well-known athletes.
- Two-thirds of Americans agree that sport overemphasizes the importance of winning.

The Executive Summary is at [www.USADA.org/outreach-research](http://www.USADA.org/outreach-research).

### One on One Competition

My 14ers often play a fast warm up tournament of 1 vs 1 over the ribbon. When you only have one friend who is around and wants to get better at sport – you play 1 vs. 1, in hoops, races and other sports. William G. Morgan you might recall created volleyball over 115 years ago, with rules that STARTED with the game being played one against one. For a great example of this game, and the learning that can go on from such play, go to DAY 20 of the EAS funded website where one guy is playing 30 sports in 30 days in 30 different places, thanks to Jeff Steffen over at US Paralympics for the tip. I also suggest you check out a relative to our sport; this video is a trailer of the unstoppable tour: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=km5KKgq\\_S6g](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=km5KKgq_S6g)

### Choosing the Right Words

This cartoonist must have ready my blog on Choosing the Right Words....

[http://comics.com/natural\\_selection/2011-03-19/](http://comics.com/natural_selection/2011-03-19/)

Good Luck my Friend!

Thanks to Jason Trepanier up in Canada, this interesting Harvard Biz Review article is one worth being a positive parent, teammate and coach about...

<http://web.hbr.org/email/archive/dailystat.php?date=031811>

**3/15/11**

### Master Class

US Olympic Committee High Performance Director Peter Vint did a FANTASTIC webinar for USAV coaches called “On the Edge of Human Achievement” – You can find the webinar on your USAV RVA website for viewing. In the 90 minutes he shared with the coaches, he spoke about some of the great “master class” episodes, including one where the master said, I just keep making mistakes. So, for all coaches on the Citius, Altius, Fortius path, he shared this link this past week, so you all can learn from other masters of their domains...

[http://www.oprah.com/own-master-class/master-class-episodes.html?FB=fb\\_master\\_030911\\_1](http://www.oprah.com/own-master-class/master-class-episodes.html?FB=fb_master_030911_1)

### How to Respond to the Mistakes of Officials

Jimmy Peden, commissioner of the Palmetto RVA, passed along to his region's coaches this GREAT life lesson

for coaches of all sports, in how Mike Rice handled the mistakes of officials in a crucial championship match. It is a must read and a must emulate reaction...

[http://www.nj.com/rutgersbasketball/index.ssf/2011/03/dalessandro\\_rutgers\\_coach\\_mike.html](http://www.nj.com/rutgersbasketball/index.ssf/2011/03/dalessandro_rutgers_coach_mike.html)

### **USOC FLAME Program in 18<sup>th</sup> Year**

Since you reading this blog are likely to be coaching youth leaders, I wanted to make sure you all know about this annual opportunity for the minorities who might be in your program. The 2011 Finding Leaders Among Minorities Everywhere (F.L.A.M.E.) program is coordinated by the wonderful Erica Hutchinson with the US Olympic Committee in the summer at the Olympic Training Center here in Colorado Springs.

<http://www.teamusa.org/About-the-USOC/Resources/Programs/FLAME.aspx>

### **This Week's Bedside Book**

[Moonwalking with Einstein...](#)

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/08/books/08book.html?emc=eta1> and a related article that preceded the book itself...I bought two copies so I can share...

“Secrets of a Mind Gamer” <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2011/02/20/magazine/mind-secrets.html>

### **Spike Jump Training Secret #403 – Use a Car**

A coaching friend reminded me of how our sport's techniques are used in other sports...in clip of the NBA dunk contest won by Blake Griffin, amidst the choir and the car which took event staging to another level, you will see one darn good spike approach used, double arm lift and all, to reach his defining moment. It takes place in slow motion about 2:15 into the clip. Show your volleyballwannabe basketball playing tall kids this clip...

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EnXHiSQ-rGk>

### **Losses off the Court**

Last year the loss of young volleyball player Taylor Storch right after Crossroads, was a blow to the volleyball family. This weekend we had another blow to our family, the loss of John Armuth. John made a difference in our sport, and we are all mourning his passing – a video tribute will be shared after this Tuesday's services – USAV's Tom Pingel and his wife Theresa, are flying out to be with the Circle City and Hoosier Region volleyball family and friends to remember John.

[http://www.jewellrittmanfamily.com/sitemaker/sites/Jewell1/obit.cgi?user=1386\\_JArmuth18](http://www.jewellrittmanfamily.com/sitemaker/sites/Jewell1/obit.cgi?user=1386_JArmuth18)

The past year for the Storch's have been one of impacting lives through organ donation awareness, not just locally, but around the world. Steve Hutchinson, Taylor's junior volleyball coach, keeps me posted and this fall shared a powerfully emotional moment, now seen in many links to when Tara (Taylor's mom), listens to her daughters heart... <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1316917/Taylor-Storch-Mother-hears-daughters-heart-beat-inside-chest-grateful-donee.html> Steve let me know that Tara recently appeared on the Ellen Show. We know you are busy, but please take the time to watch this 4 minute video. It was one of Taylor's wishes that she appear on the Ellen Show.

<http://ellen.warnerbros.com/videos/?autoplay=true&mediaKey=7f87f20d-23ac-42e4-a1d3-270f1aa09ec4>

## Quote of the Week

My son is reading Gates of Fire: An Epic Novel of the Battle of Thermopylae by Steven Pressfield. He is also a non-paid intern for me in his “gap” year before attending Princeton. So last week he came into my office and read this passage, which reminded me of many of the volleyball teams I have both been on and coached, as 300 Spartans were being chosen to defend a small pass against a force of multiple millions of Persians...

*"But most startling and controversial was the election of Alexandros. At twenty he would be the youngest line warrior and one of only a dozen, including his agoge -mate Ariston, without experience of battle. There is a proverb in Lakedaemon (their home city), 'the reed beside the staff', whose meaning is that a chain is made stronger by its possession of one unproven link. The tender hamstring that drives the wrestler to compensate with skill and cunning, the lisp that the orator extends his brilliance to overcome. The Three Hundred, Leonidas felt, would fight best not as a company of individual champions, but as sort of army in miniature, of young and old, green and seasoned."*

3/8/11

**Nightstand Book of the week – Seth Godin’s Lynchpin** . GO Make something happen is his mantra of sorts...favorite quote of many *"Please stop waiting for a map. We reward those who draw maps, not those who follow them."* His blog is <http://sethgodin.typepad.com/> and well worth the frequent read, as the guy is prolific in ideas and sharing them.

**Our favorite talent guide Dan Coyle’s most recent blog on speed first is a great read.** Lots of good ideas – sample excerpt I enjoyed: *“At one point in his journey, Foer hit a ceiling. No matter what he tried, he couldn’t memorize a deck of cards any faster. He then sought out an expert (who in a parallel familiar to Talent Code readers, turns out to be Dr. Anders Ericsson). The ever-resourceful Ericsson gives Foer some surprising advice: speed up your practice. Force yourself to go too fast. Force yourself to make mistakes. Analyze those mistakes, find your weak points, and fix them.”* So is his writing on places of crumminess... So go read it today... [www.thetalentcode.com](http://www.thetalentcode.com)

**Carl McGown kindly shared this great read from ESPNsports on Alex Rodriguez and Pete Rose**  
<http://sports.espn.go.com/espn/eticket/story?page=roseandarod>

I love this excerpt most of all... *The first question A-Rod asked was, "How'd you get all them hits?" And Rose's ensuing dissertation, alarmingly, had nothing to do with studying videotape. As a mesmerized A-Rod listened, mouth agape, Rose told him he got 4,256 career hits without watching a single frame of film. He said he never hit off a tee, barely lifted a weight and had an offseason program that consisted of playing full-court basketball. He told A-Rod every game was a "four at-bat war," that he was a "grinder," that he remembered every pitch a pitcher ever threw him. He told him he didn't buy into this notion of "hitting inside the ball or outside the ball," that his only goal was to hit the thing hard someplace.*

**Japanese Precision Walking** – Go about a minute and a half in...then prepare to be astounded and entertained, I sure was...talk about a skill we all know and do raised to a higher level and speed through deliberate practice...

**Motor Learning Cartoon?** - Words have little meaning to beginners in motor skill learning...or is this specificity in training? [http://comics.com/reality\\_check/2011-03-05/](http://comics.com/reality_check/2011-03-05/)

# Essential Addendum

## To Win the Gold

**TEACH ME HOW TO HELP YOU LEARN BETTER** - In the art of coaching, I have many colors and different

paintbrushes on my pallet that I can use to help you learn to be your best. It is just that each of you are unique, and for us to excel, I should not treat, nor teach each of you the same. I will be consistent with each of you, but not the same. I am there for you in every practice not for hammering you with constant feedback, but letting you learn. I will summarize my

feedback at times, but anytime you want to ask a technique or tactic question, I will always listen. Day or night, on the court, by phone, or even email! It is what you learn, not what I know, that matters. It is our role to help you become a player who is all you can be -- without us -- for you are the athlete on the court of competition, and we cannot think for

you as you play. You will always be your best coach, for you are with yourself 24 hours a day...

**COMMUNICATE** - Talk and listen with your teammate and any staff helping you become your best. Share information you think will help us be our best. Silence equals acceptance, so speak out if you do not accept it. When off the court, read books and watch movies that can give you a new idea or inspiration to be great. I will share my personal list with you at a later time. If you have a problem, all energies will go towards the solution.

**KNOW YOUR ROLE** - In beach this is much clearer. In the indoor game, it is more complex. In all cases, you need to understand and perform your role, just as much as you need to perform technical skills. We have a GREAT staff assembled to help you be your best...so use us. Who is on the court will be determined by on the court competition when the points are tallied.

**SUCCESS IS A JOURNEY, NOT A DESTINATION** - You get better one play at a time. Certainly touching the ball yourself helps you learn the most, but each contact, by your teammates as well, can be a joy and a learning experience. We all can see Scott Fortune kill the overpass for the Seoul Gold Medal match point...and should be able to see Eric Sato's jump serve that set it up. We have such a great sport to celebrate in, rally by rally. Enjoy this time as an elite athlete. It is exciting to be playing volleyball, especially at this level. Have fun, heck see if you can tell me a new joke, for after many years online, I think I have received them all. Smile, it takes fewer muscles, and it makes you stronger.

**BE A POWERFUL PRESENCE** - Be yourself, and be proud. If you gripe at calls, turn your back on teammate errors, hang your head or kick a ball, get frustrated outwardly, it gives energy to your opponents and weakens you and the team. Forget your mistakes and focus on what you can control...the upcoming play. Focus on what to do, not your errors, and always and only let them see that you are powerful and confident.

**BETTER WHAT WAS GIVEN TO YOU** - I remember Marv Dunphy summing up why he thought we won the gold medal in the Seoul Olympics. He felt at that time, just hours after the success, that it was due to playing

better team defense and bettering the ball. It is your duty and focus as a teammate to make the ball you got better, no matter how difficult the incoming ball is. Every ball can and must be played! In our three contacts, we can improve the bad pass, if we are setting, kill the ball off of a wayward set. Bettering the ball happens not just on the court, but off. If you have ideas that might work in other areas of your development, share them, in order to make that also better for the next person.

**RELENTLESS PURSUIT** - For those of you who know my far side, you will understand then my two rules in this key area of pushing yourself on the court.

Rule #1, Go for EVERY ball.

Rule #2, If the ball is too far away to reach, see Rule #1.

And a corollary to this high effort is: Winners never fear risking to lose.

**SHARE YOUR SECRETS** - The best thing about our Prep for Sydney meetings in Chicago and Sydney, was the chance to share our ideas with other Olympic bound coaches and support staff. I will be passing these along to others, starting with the Paralympic and Olympic staffs, as part of the team around the team we have here. If you have an idea that you think might help you or the team programming be better, share it, for unlike items, when you share ideas, you still have yours, while adding new ones to our tools to be our best. Pass them along to me at [john.kessel@usav.org](mailto:john.kessel@usav.org). I will be sharing more with you later, but for now, it is back to learning, er, I mean work. This is something I wrote and sent to all my USA Olympic Team Hopefuls for Sydney back in 2000 when I was Team Leader for the Olympic Beach Teams. Most players in the pipeline wanting to reach this level would benefit from following this same information..

**THE COACH WHO CARES, WINS** - Reflections on what the team, and the team around the team, need to do to win the gold...We just ended a long 5 days in the gym and classrooms of the Olympic Training Center. This session was a national seminar on Critical Thinking on Athleticism and Athlete Development. As always, it was not the actual lectures that help me think the most, but the sharing with all those caring, passionate fellow teachers who call themselves coaches, in the dining hall or lodging site hallways. I want to share some of my thoughts with you, as I believe they will help you succeed on the court in preparation towards your Olympics/Paralympics whether it be in Sydney, or just your personal best.

**TRUST IS NUMBER ONE** - I have total trust in you and your passion towards victory. Think and be responsible. I believe you never make a mistake on purpose, but know that many mistakes will be made. I see your errors GOOD things, that show me you are doing things you have not done before, pushing your limits, and understand that errors will be made along that journey.

**THERE IS ONLY ONE GOLD MEDAL** - This is our holy grail, and every team in our championships is seeking that same medal. Now, I must define what I believe winning is. In this team sport of volleyball, beach included, one person cannot win the game by his or herself. It is a team sport, so the winning is out of just one player's control. So, winning is always, ALWAYS going to be defined by me as doing all you can to be the best



you can be. John Wooden's classic Pyramid of Success has at its peak, the statement. "Success is peace of mind which is a direct result of self satisfaction in knowing you did your best to become the best that you are capable of becoming." If you do this...the winning on the court will be more likely. Should you play your best, and lose in the point column, what more can we ask for of you? Nothing...for you won. By the way, I am asking you to catch Monty Python and the Holy Grail in the next few months, and be like the black knight, who, sans arms or legs, wants to fight his opponent by biting him...

**CITIUS, ALTIUS, FORTIUS** - As Team leader of the Sydney Olympic Beach team, I am coaching in a part of the sport that allows no coaching by the current rules. I also am staff liaison to our Paralympic teams, working hard to help them succeed, even though I will not be there for the competition. For all eight teams headed to Sydney, the Olympic Motto guides our efforts as staff and players. Swifter, Higher, Stronger. So to win, we must push ourselves, giving all we can for as long as we can, and extending ourselves.

**COMPETE WITH YOURSELF** - Demand more from yourself than from your teammate. This is the sign of a serious and true competitor. This is how you will become the best you can be, and thus help USA win a gold. To excel, focus on yourself first. No matter how small or unimportant it may seem, look for ways to be better when you leave training than when you walked in, whether it be the weight room, training room, physical testing, or the court. By competing as hard as you personally can, you will also help those around you be better. "If it is meant to be, it is up to me."

**MAKE SURE TO GET REST** - One of the key items I learned from the Prep for Sydney meetings for head coaches was realization that there is no such word as "Overtraining. " To be great you must train very hard sometimes. What you also must make sure you get is enough rest and recovery, for you are training hard. Everything you are doing en route to a gold medal is important, significant, and meaningful. As the distractions of the Olympics mount, it is vital to get enough good rest.

**BE A TRUE TEAMMATE** - One who is responsible for yourself, to your team's obligations and to your personal and team goals. You, no one else, are accountable for ALL your actions. Be honest and trustworthy to yourself, your teammates and the entire team staff. Ask when you have questions.

### **It's Not Where You Are, It's Who You Are**

This started as an email I sent to the top five USA Team battling to qualify as the two 2000 [men's, women's, both?] Beach Volleyball Teams. As the Olympic Team Leader in a sport that just now is allowing coaches, I enjoyed the challenge of preparing and forming teams from individuals and changing partnerships and to give the players all they needed to succeed on the sand in Sydney. I have used that experience to help kids playing volleyball who have inquired about how to deal with problem coaches and to assist those seeking to excel under any coach.

Originally, I titled this article "How to Excel Under Any Coach." On a trip to Alaska to attend the Eskimo Olympics ([www.weio.org](http://www.weio.org)) and work with kids attending schools of such limited population they must play co-ed to field a team, I remembered Marv Dunphy's great line which now titles the article. A natural sub-title could be "It's not how tall you are; it's how tall you play," as skill, speed, awareness, and anticipation will beat height any time. The article summarizes what kids should be learning from fun on the court or field, in practices and games. Some thoughts are volleyball specific, but the majority relate to all sports.

Let me reflect on what you need to do to achieve your best performance. Some of these thoughts should help you approach your athletic potential. As a coach, I burn with the desire to help an athlete accelerate the development of a personal philosophy. The ideas which follow accumulated during decades of helping players achieve personal excellence.

The Olympic motto "Citius, Altius, Fortius" guides our efforts as staff and athletes. "Swifter, Higher, Stronger." To win, we must push ourselves, giving all we can for as long as we can, and then, if possible, beyond. The motto does not translate as "Swiftest, Highest, Strongest" even though the medals are awarded for those attributes. Rather, Olympism is the pursuit of excellence in yourself and of personal improvement every day, on and off the court. Remember this about your pursuit, "If it is meant to be, it is up to me...."

While there have been many people, experiences, and books from whom or which I have learned, John Wooden taught me most. A new book, "The Ultimate Guide to Life, Leadership, Friendship, and Love," (by Neville Johnson) describes and illustrates the ideas of John Wooden and his pyramid of success. Buy or borrow a copy of this book! It contains guidance which would help any person, athlete or not, become the best he or she can be. Marv Dunphy and Doug Beal, both Olympic Gold Medal coaches, also have contributed significantly to my education. As Marv once noted, "It is not where you are, it is who YOU are; it is not how big you are, it is how good or how great you are."

The following axioms summarize two generations of lessons for how to be a winner in life:

**THERE IS ONLY ONE CHAMPION** - This is our holy grail, and every team in our championship division is seeking that same trophy. Now, we must define what winning is. In this team sport of volleyball, one person cannot win the game by his or herself. It is a team sport, so the winning is out of just one player's control. So, winning is always, ALWAYS going to be defined as doing all you can to be the best you can be. John Wooden's classic Pyramid of Success has at its peak, the statement. "Success is peace of mind which is a direct result of self satisfaction in knowing you did your best to become the best that you are capable of becoming." If you do this...the winning on the court will be more likely. Should you play your best, and lose in the point column, what more can you ask of yourself? Nothing...for you won. ..to quote George Moriarity, "Giving all, it seems to me, is not so far from victory."

**TEACH OTHERS TO TEACH YOURSELF** - If you coach, you will be a better player. This is true at any age level, so seek out and create time to coach others less skilled and/or experienced than you are. In Japan, the after school elementary school practices I worked with were 45 minutes of games and practice for the 7-10 year olds,

who were coached by the 10-12 year olds under the watchful eye of the adult head coach, then 45 more minutes where the head coach trained these 10-12 year olds once they were done coaching. Make players coaching others a part of your programming, not just in camps but in your own practices. Grow the game and your game by coaching others.

**COMPETE WITH YOURSELF** - Demand more from yourself than from your teammate. This is the sign of a serious and true competitor. This is how you will become the best you can be, and thus help USA win a gold. To excel, focus on yourself first. No matter how small or unimportant it may seem, look for ways to be better when you leave training than when you walked in, whether it be the weight room, training room, physical testing, or the court. By competing as hard as you personally can, you will also help those around you be better. Gold Medalist Dan Jansen said " I do not try to be better than anyone else, I try to be better than myself."

**TALENT IS A JOB, NOT A GIFT** - If you have talent, you can be good without working hard, but to be great, you must work hard. Volleyball is a hard sport to learn, so do not expect it to be easy, for it takes years to be great. People see talent in two ways, One group sees that talent is to be developed through hard work, while others see it being something you either have or do not. Those athletes who know that skill takes time, will practice longer/have patience thru tough times. Research shows that higher performance happens with those athletes who expect to have to work long and hard to develop their talent. Superstars, like Karch, Jordan, Gretzky Woods, share an intensity and drive to constantly improve their talents. Karch's coaches and teammates describe him as the hardest worker in the gym/on the sand. You have to BE, before you can DO, and DO before you can HAVE.

**LEARN EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE - STAY IN CONTROL** - These same superstars share the ability to stay in control, despite the great pressures they encountered, using their emotions effectively. They stay focused, and efficient, the mental discipline, to act decisively when it counts. Karch would stay on the court in the sand during time outs, staring at the opponent's empty court, while one teammate called Jordan, the Predator. Controlling frustration, anger, fear, and even confidence is an athlete's responsibility, not that of the coach. Develop responses that

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en route to a gold medal is important, significant, and meaningful. As the distractions mount towards the end of a long season, it is vital to get enough good rest. At the same time, remember the words of Jerry West - "You can't get much done in life if you only work on the days you feel good, for work beats talent, unless talent works."

**BE A TRUE TEAMMATE** - One who is responsible for yourself, to your team's obligations and to your personal and team goals. You, no one else, are accountable for ALL your actions. Be honest and trustworthy to yourself, your teammates and the entire team staff. Ask when you have questions. You need to make sure that you are all pulling on the SAME end of the rope....together and strong.

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time as an elite athlete. It is exciting to be playing volleyball, especially at this level. Have fun and smile, it takes fewer muscles, and it makes you stronger.

**PLAY SINGLES IN THE GARAGE** - It is important to learn to play this game over a net. In the winter, you can still string up a rope, and play one on one with that one friend, or sibling, who shares your love of playing this game. Play one on two if someone else shows up, or even doubles, using a beach ball or a real ball. If you can, put up a net or just a rope for even a small distance in the backyard, and play these small sided games on smaller than normal courts. Learn to read and anticipate what an opponent is preparing to do before they send it over the net.

**FOCUS ON WHAT YOU CAN CONTROL** - A setter cannot control the passer, or the hitter, a passer cannot control the server. You cannot even control what your teammates say, think, or do. You can only control yourself, so focus on what YOU can do.

**FOCUS POINT BY POINT** - In a related way, every match has three parts, a past, present and future. You cannot control the past, even that last rally. Nor can you control the future (if you can, get into the stock market, make millions then give it back to volleyball please). So by focusing on the point at hand, playing one point at a time, you eliminate two-thirds of the worries many players have cluttering their heads as they play. What do you do NOW.

**IF YOU WANT TO BE BETTER YOU MAY HAVE TO CHANGE** - These changes may cause you to slide backwards for a bit of time. Pay close attention to the small successes you achieve by making these changes. Turn your wounds into wisdom, and hey, remember...50% of the teams playing today in 220 nations around the world - lose. The key is to keep pushing forward.

**BE A POWERFUL PRESENCE** - Be yourself, and be proud. If you gripe at calls, turn your back on teammate errors, hang your head or kick a ball, get frustrated outwardly, it gives energy to your opponents and weakens you and the team. Forget your mistakes and focus on what you can control...the upcoming play. Focus on what to do, not your errors, and always and only let them see that you are powerful and confident. Never let anyone out hustle you, even if they outscore you. As Bill Neville oft says, play like junkyard dawgs...

**BETTER WHAT WAS GIVEN TO YOU**- I remember Marv Dunphy summing up why he thought we won the gold medal in the Seoul Olympics. He felt at that time, just hours after the success, that it was due to playing better team defense and bettering the ball. It is your duty and focus as a teammate to make the ball you got better, no matter how difficult the incoming ball is. Every ball can and must be played! In our three contacts, we can improve the bad pass, if we are setting, kill the ball off of a wayward set. Bettering the ball happens not just on the court, but off. If you have ideas that might work in other areas of your development, share them, in order to make that also better for the next person.

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Rule #1, Go for EVERY ball.

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And a corollary to this high effort is: Winners never fear risking to lose.

**WATCH THOSE BETTER THAN YOU** - Watch videotapes of the Olympics, and NCAA Championships. Go watch levels of play higher than you compete in -the 18 and unders if a Junior Olympian, or collegiate matches, and the National Team any time you can catch them on TV or in person. Watch one player who you want to be like as they do the whole rally, by not focusing on the ball, but their actions before, during and after the rally, before during and after each contact. What are they looking at and learning to read? Why did they move to that spot before ball was hit and not some other place? There is much more learned by what is done before the ball is touched, that you need to develop too.

**SHARE YOUR SECRETS** - The best thing about our Prep for Sydney meetings in Chicago and Sydney, was the chance to share our ideas with other Olympic bound coaches and support staff. I will be passing these along to others, starting with the Paralympic and Olympic staffs, as part of the team around the team we have here. If you have an idea that you think might help you or the team programming be better, share it, for unlike items, when you share ideas, you still have yours, while adding new ones to our tools to be our best. Pass them along to me at [john.kessel@usav.org](mailto:john.kessel@usav.org). I will be sharing more with you later, but for now, it is back to learning, er, I mean work. Check out the Kessel Family Tales at [www.john.kessel.tripod.com](http://www.john.kessel.tripod.com) for parenting and laffs...

## **From Positive to Perfection**

There is a new principle which I would ask all coaches and players to incorporate in their training, something that goes against the traditional way of training as well as the easier options currently being done. After almost 40 years of coaching, I have seen the very beneficial and successful impact of focusing on this concept at every age – from youth to Olympic team. The title says it all – to first teach positive errors on the path to perfection, in every training.

This change in culture will likely take time, as the options are more gamelike and thus more difficult than the non-game like traditions currently being used, but changing can make for significant and rapid improvement, especially at the younger levels. The concept here is to teach our kids to make mistakes that are better than those traditionally being developed. The intent is give developing players a margin of error, rather than a small point of perfection. A grey area over the bright light of the perfect contact, a space/area/side/flight or whatever that is OK, rather than the black holes of similar but far more rally ending contacts. Give them room to err as they learn perfection. Let me share with you the most common examples:

### **Spiking**

The Tradition is let kids do wall spiking. Coaches speak of how it is done to develop wrist snap, and more. So if you become the Olympic gold medalist in wall spiking – what do you see happen when you as a world class wall spikers hit over a net? Yep, you are conditioned to hit into the net, into the block, heck, even under the net, with the habits you have formed.

**The New Tradition** – Put up a “net” on the wall at both men’s and women’s heights and teach the new tradition of playing games against the wall over that stripe. We used colored duct tape, giving each court and side a new color for the colorfulness of it. Set to yourself then hit against the wall over the tape, and repeat. Play one on one cooperatively to see how many dig to self, set to self, hit over the line three contacts you can make happen with a teammate.

Why positive over negative? - You want your players to hit the ball over the net, and make the opponents think and your teammates in practice learn - “In or out?” You want to give yourself a chance to hit off the blockers

hands and out of bounds. When you hit over the net, you get tape shots that clear the net, and teach teammates that vital read and react skill. When you hit into the net, none of these important things can happen. Hitting into the net is a very negative error, hitting over the net and out is positive and should be taught from the start.

## Passing

The Tradition is to pair up and partner pass. So if you become the Olympic Gold medalists at partner passing – what do you see happen when these world class partner passers actually serve receive? Ask any beginning coach, for they know as they see the first hit going back to where it came from, while they plead “Three hits, three hits, pass it to the setter...” Ask any setter, for they know when they see the ball being served to zones four and five that they must move from their setter target slot, forward, as the passers don’t pass over to them, but instead pass straight ahead. This bad habit is further promoted by wall passing, which is simply a disguised form of partner passing. Once again, I want to get even better than my Olympic Gold medal pair passing partner, I will go train by myself to get better (a good thing!), and pass thousands of balls against the wall. I now am the world’s best at putting the ball straight back to where it came from.

**The New Tradition** – From the start, the athletes need to see the ball coming from OVER the net. That said, you can err by passing off target but towards your teammates or you can pass away from the setter and away from your teammates. The good mistake is to err towards your other five friends, and not err by passing to the other court or fans.

The second positive error you want to make in passing is to pass UP first. The target is always the setter spot, but if you err up, the setter can run and still get to the ball, or another teammate can play it, even if your error is well off the setter target spot. Err low, and everyone whirls as the worm burning shot flies by below their knees, and someone says “Nice try...” This goes hand in glove with where the setter target should be, which is suggested to be 2 meters off the net, perhaps three meters for true beginners. This way you can err with your pass by two meters and the ball is still on your side and playable.

## Serving

**The Tradition** - Like spiking, tradition sees focus on the negative error when you serve into the net. The other team could be wax statues on the court and they will get the point. We must learn to serve every error over the net, and at least get a chance to knock over a wax statue player, and get a point. Serve into the net, everyone knows it failed to clear; serve long and there are officials and line judges who have called a ball in, even when it was slightly out. In training, when you serve out, your teammates learn – In? Out? – an important decision and read. When you serve out long, your opponents will sometimes still pass the ball, and your error is no longer an error. Playing in the wind, I have never seen a ball blow up and over the net from being served too low. I have however seen the wind blow the ball back into the court, an ace virtually every time.

**The New Tradition** - In addition to serving over and not into the net, have your players RUN into the court to their designated backrow defense court position after every serve. That is what you want them to do in the game, so why not do the same in practice....

## Setting

**The Tradition** - I remember learning to back set, standing in a straight line, and finally successfully sending the ball back over my head to my partner directly behind me. Should you become the Olympic Gold medalist at back setting in a line, when I get into the game, I will face where the ball comes from, out in the court beyond the 3 meter line most often, then fire up the habit my coach taught me, and launch the ball over the net behind me. The tradition is for the setter to stand right at the net, hand up, waving the famous “right here” motion. As noted in passing above, if you stand this close, you then have half of your almost perfect passes – one meter off target is all – to the setter, flying over the net to the opponents. Tradition also has us setting the ball right next to the net, and setting the ball high to first teach hitters how to hit.

**The New Traditions** - Start setting your very first sets on angles, while standing further away from the net, and setting at the 3 meter line. Young players might consider doing this whole triangle of pass off the setter’s toss-set off the net-hit over the net to occur even further off the net, say starting six meters back. As the players improve, or as good players warm up, you move your sets to be closer to the net, but never any closer than a meter off the net – as we must give the hitter room to swing through, to safely land off the centerline ankle spraining area (as we learn how to jump, read the set and adjust to the variances), and so that the hitter does not have a wall of hands inches away from their contact point, but instead has lots of space and angles to move past the block to the right, left or even over the block. For younger players, the NET is a huge block to clear, when they are set too near. Teaching in this new way, the back set first should be set to the 3 meter line and as their skills develop, they can put the ball two meters off the net, then finally one meter off the net, but never over the net as their shoulders might want the ball to go.

The three positive vs. negative concepts for setting are:

Better too high than too low (time to adjust)

Better too far off the net, than too tight to the net (room to swing and safer)

Better too far inside the court, rather than outside the antenna (you still have the whole court to hit and land safer)

## Digging

The Tradition is to partner pepper, as coaches go on and on how it “teaches ball control and warms up their arms...” So....back to the Olympic Gold Medal standard – two of your players practice it so much and for so long they become the world’s best at partner pepper, and what do you have? You have two players who are the world’s best at digging a spiked ball straight back to where it came from... the best at hitting down (as in into the net), and directly at a player (rather than at spaces and away from a vertical target)...two players who, the better they get at pepper, the less they have to move (where great diggers can move more and more on the court), and



much more. For the purposes of this article, the first two negative errors are the biggest concern. For when a player is taught to dig a ball coming in at no more than 2/3rd full speed, and to dig it back to the attacker, you can imagine where the ball is likely to go when an opponent is hitting a full game speed. As a lefty, I wish I had a dollar for every ball I spiked cross court from zone two, and watched it fly back over my head, while watching the setter spinning his wheels trying to cross the entire court and hearing that setter yelling “Help! Help!” as the ball was dug straight back to their zone four. It looks ok when a hit comes from zone four cross court to be dug straight back to their zone two, so the setter has a chance, but it is still a hidden negative error.

The New Traditions - Teach your players from the very beginning to make the positive error first and always if they err, by digging the ball up to themselves. Now when someone hits at game speed, the ball simply goes up higher on their side of the net. No low worm burners fly by. Indeed, it is better to dig a ball too high, rather than too low, so on slow balls, we teach adding to these slower flying volleyballs by popping the ball up high, giving one’s teammates time to get to the ball. At the same time you want to learn to dig the ball towards a target on your side, but never over the net. So alternating pepper, where the hitter moves forward to be the setter /target half way between where they hit from and the ball is being dug, is a good option. So is three person pepper, where the players weave and move, create positive habits of digging the ball up half way in front of them or to one or the other side to their 3rd partner who is the setter at that moment, and never back to the hitter,

## **Blocking**

The Tradition is to block standing on a platform, or block a coach who is on a hitting box, or “shadow” block. Let’s imagine you and I become the world’s best shadow blockers. What are we learning to do? To jump at the same time as the hitter, to not penetrate over the net, to block the ball, and to block in front of the hitter. So when we get in the game, we jump too early, (for the ball takes time to go from the hitter to our spot at the net, and the further back they hit from the later we must jump), we touch the net (as there is no one stopping our pressing but ourselves now), we don’t know how to penetrate over the net, we watch the ball for timing (as it is the only thing moving), and we fail to take the favorite shot of every hitter around the world – the cross court hammer.

The New Traditions – Simply block live hitters, learning to watch the intelligent thing, the hitter, and not the air filled empty volleyball. The negative error is to net, or get tooled, the positive error is to not block a hitter who you think does not deserve a block (or where the set is not good enough for an aggressive attack to be mounted), or have your block be late, so you deflect the ball up, or to have to dig a ball since it was not blocked. Blockers must learn to watch the attacker as early as possible, preferably while they are starting or just into their approach. The only way to time a hitter is to practice blocking live hitters, hitting from all over the court.

## **Other Skills**

Now, there are coaching negative errors as well - Disgust when they hit the back wall or out long, disappointment when the ball is passed off the net or set well of the net, frustration with “for gosh sake just hit it in!” statements when the players are being aggressive as they learn mastery and hitting the ball, are errors that bring a team to the negative side of the game. You must show consistency in practice and game reaction – you have to focus on mastery – not the performance, and praise the effort and learning along the way, despite the outcome.

I give a player a Wendy's Frosty for anytime a ball below a player's waist is dug up "too high" and hit the ceiling. We still get to play it of course, reading the rafter bounce and chasing it down. The point is, digging up too high is what we want all players to do in stress, so their teammates have time to get to the ball instead of watching it fly by and say, "gosh, good effort..." I have hung black sheets over the net not for the fun game of "blind" volleyball, but to make my point that, when you are lost in space, whirling and confused on the court and but having to send the third contact over the net, make the good mistake and hit into the light. That is the space from 7-8 feet off the floor (i.e. the top of the net) to the ceiling...and it is NOT the "black hole" from the top of the net down to the floor. When you are confused, hit the ball into the light above the black hole, as it is 2-5 times bigger of a space than from the net down. Even if you hit out, you make them think, but you never will win if you hit lots of balls into the black hole.

Another reason for these positive errors to be the training focus at practice is that the players will practice at home alone or with a friend. They will get tens of thousands of contacts against a wall or back and forth to a partner. From this common "bad miss" promoting training, when they walk into the gym, and we have a net and four or more players, it is time to work on the gamelike perfection we seek, while making everything a good miss, should we err.

## **ACL Saver**

If I still have you this far into this article, I have one final tradition changing request to make. That is to help teach the players to use their non-dominant hand to attack, each and every practice, even if only for 1-2 minutes a training. Why? To save kids' ACLs, their anterior cruciate ligaments.

The most common knee injury to right handed players is to their left knee. This occurs when a player who only knows how to use their right hand in spiking, jumps to hit balls in games and drills from the number four "outside hitter" position, the most common attack in volleyball. When a player misjudges the ball, and the setter makes the negative error of setting past the antenna, the hitter will lean over to their left to get into a position in the air to hit the ball with their right hand. They then land, and "bam" in one error, their left knee cannot take the stress of landing off balance and they pop their ACL. I hope you take time to develop each player's non-dominant hand, not necessarily to powerfully attack the ball, but at least to be able to cut a ball outside their body to the other side of their body, the shot they will need to use to save a ball past the antenna, into the opponent's court, without hitting the antenna. This same non-dominant hand need exists for lefties too, just from zone two, which would be cut across their body to zone two on the other side.

It is interesting to me, that when I work with other sport programs, the expectation is clear that the athletes should be able to use both their right and left hands. In basketball, you must know how to dribble and even shoot with both hands; in soccer you must know how to do the same with both feet. In lacrosse, if you only can shoot right, you will never be any good. Yet in volleyball, we expect the player to hit the ball with their dominant hand no

matter how off balance that might make the player.

Please help teach your players how to use their non-dominant hand in play. Play short court warm ups and only allow non-dominant serves and attacks. Point out when they are getting near too far of a lean to their opposite side, and how they can use their other arm to stay more balanced in landing. It only takes one error in judgment to get injured in any sport – and for our game, we need to give them more tools to deal with the random, chaotic, angle changing, variable ball flights and speeds that come from rebounding the ball in such a crowded court space.

**Perception, anticipation and reading** – the elements of being a savvy game player, can be taught through play. All the research notes that it is best to teach the whole, rather than the part/progressions, as the game teaches the game. Decision making and learning to win – it comes best through game play – small team size to full six vs. six, but always game play with the decisions of “what is best here” being made each time. Unstructured play helps problem solve new situations as well – thus your players never want monarch of the court games to end – and the wise coach helps create fun and varied scoring games to strengthen that passion to play. It really is simple, a volleyball player plays; if you want your athletes to become great volleyball players, play the game.

### **Kessel’s Handy Guide to Ruining Volleyball Players**

The guidelines herein are possibly known by you as a committed coach, but are not properly enforced. These guidelines and suggestions will insure that you, your ego, and its desire to win will take precedence over any individual or team development situation.

#### **PRACTICE**

1. Design all drills to be controlled by the coach, never by the athletes.
2. The longer the warm up without handling volleyballs in game-like ways, the better.
3. Make sure to condition the players thoroughly before they begin skill training so they "learn to play tired."
4. Be committed to training until it hurts.
5. Never let any players think for themselves, always tell them what to do rather than waiting or helping them figure out the answer.
6. Make sure to always tell the player what he or she did wrong.
7. Never show what you want, if one thousand words will do. All explanations should be as wordy as possible to demonstrate your vast knowledge of the game.
8. The longer the line in a drill, the more they get a chance to stand around and watch and compare themselves to the others, thus learning who is good.

9. Keep your feedback as unspecific as possible: "That's it, Nice try, Good job," etc, so that they don't know what you are thinking.
10. If they fail to do what you want in a skill, physically punish them with pushups, sit ups, running, etc., so they will be certain to do the skill correctly the next time.
11. Be as judgmental as possible, as you know the difference between a mistake and the perfection you demand.
12. Punish personally and often, taking revenge so you'll feel better, but never provide an alternative to the undesired behavior.
13. Be as inconsistent as possible.
14. Teach volleyball the way it is supposed to be taught, on the chalkboard.
15. Never let the athletes influence you, as you must retain control.
16. What you say and what you do should not match. For example, do not permit your players to drink alcohol, but make sure you do often as you are of age.
17. Swear without using actual swear words, to emphasize your powerful command of the English language.
18. Be rigid, ensuring that practice is sacrosanct, rather than let players attend school functions for leadership acknowledgement or homecoming activities of any sort.
19. Fire up players by threatening to demote them to a non-starter role or down to the JV team if already on varsity, so they know your omnipotence.
20. Since they can't toss, a skill that took you hours to learn, ensure they never throw in any drill.

## MATCH PLAY

1. During streaks of poor skill performance, point out the way the game is played. For example, if players are not passing well to the setter, call a time out and let them know that "we need a pass."
2. The officials, who must be perfect, need you to demonstrate in body language and/or vocalization when they have not called a contact by your personal standard of judgment.
3. Having ensured overtraining in practice, demand better game-level performance than that in practice.
4. Make sure to bawl players out about their mistakes, win or lose. It is better to do this in front of a whole gym full of spectators, rather than in the locker room, or worse, one on one in private.
5. If they lose badly, deny them the traditional post-match occasion so they will play better next time.

6. When you discover that a player who has been motivated enough to make every practice is actually not motivated, point out your plan to put someone in who "wants to play."
7. When a player misses a shot, makes other similar unforgivable errors, or exhibits other human-like traits, do the following:
  - A. Substitute them immediately.
  - B. Grab them physically and, at minimum, shake them up a little bit.
  - C. Sit them on the bench, as far away from you as possible, and ignore them - so they will learn.
8. When possible, leap off the bench, cross the court and berate the official from up close, rather than throwing your tantrum from far away on the bench. The more you can put yourself as coach in the limelight, and take away from the players playing, the better.
9. Rejoice in your being the locus of all control and answers, each time a player errs, when the mistake is followed by a wrenching head twist to the bench where you sit, so they can find a solution.
10. Keep on course to coach by fear, for these competitions are where players can show best their timidity and concern of your wrath.
11. Enhance, encourage and allow infighting when the players are going through a down cycle in their play.
12. Motivate by threats, such as "If you lose, you run," or "We will practice after midnight if you lose."
13. In pre-match warmups, make sure you the coach set or toss all the balls for spiking, rather than the setter. You need the practice tossing and the setter is likely very nervous and will appreciate the chance to watch.
14. Tell your players every time where to serve, never let them learn to choose their own spots of weakness.

## OFF-THE-COURT LIFE

This may take care of itself if you can commit to training four hours or more than the Olympic team does.

1. Class assignment - The time to study is a very low priority, after training, weights, chalk talks, team travel, etc. Athletes are to train, not also to be good students.
2. Penalize players for doing homework, studying or attending labs, instead of practicing.
3. Make sure to increase training time AND intensity, rather than reducing time and increasing intensity, during the hardest parts of the school semester.

4. Members of the opposite sex are the enemy, set an 8 p.m. curfew.
5. Keep them away from corruptive parents who might influence their own child.
6. Show your players only the gyms and transportation options of the world, never the culture, history and unique aspects of the area that you are visiting.
7. When possible, leave your players alone in new environments, so they can learn to "take care of themselves." This is especially true with younger players, where you should ensure that any chaperones, in addition to coaches, should disappear.
8. Only focus on volleyball, never do other things where players might be able to demonstrate competency, maybe even being better than you at something.

Remember, ruining an athlete, especially those motivated to play at this higher level of competition, requires diligence, miscommunication, and a total lack of understanding. Make sure not to go to any clinics, especially your National Governing Body's Coaching Courses, events, since you already know so much. For that matter, make sure not to help in any committees either... indeed, why are you even reading this coaching information article? Good luck, and be sure not to change, since it worked when you were a player, there is no reason to think things might have improved.



**USA** *Volleyball*®



## JOHN L. KESSEL -- Bibliography

Since 1985 John has been working for the National Governing Body of the sport, USA Volleyball (USAV), now as Director of Sport Development. He serves as the staff liaison for Disabled Programs, USA Deaflympic Teams, Starlings USA, National Parks and Recreation Assoc., the YMCA and over 30 other Affiliated Organizations working with USAV. He is Secretary of the NORCECA Technical, Coaches and Development Commission, and World Organization for the Disabled Director of Development. He was Team Leader for the 2000 USA Olympic Beach Volleyball Teams in Sydney, which brought home one gold medal, and for the 2004 USA Paralympic Women's Sitting Volleyball Team in Athens, which came home with the bronze medal. In 1995, *Volleyball Magazine's* special Centennial issue named him one of the 50 most important people in the sport in the past 100 years.

He has been coaching since 1971 at the collegiate level or above, including Women's U.S. Open titles in 1986 & 87. A sought after international lecturer, he has conducted seminars in all 50 states, and in over 30 nations, in such diverse nations as China, Denmark, Bolivia, Barbados, France, Germany, Egypt, England, Italy, Japan, Iceland, Puerto Rico, Samoa, Canada, Guatemala, Venezuela, Greece, Israel, Australia, Jamaica, New Zealand, Holland, England, Belize, Trinidad Tobago, Ireland, Tonga, Belgium, Haiti, Vanuatu, Costa Rica, Fiji and El Salvador. He is also a busy author, with over half a dozen USAV books, including the IMPACT coaching manual, the Jr. Olympic Volleyball Program Guide, and most recently the Minivolley 4 Youth, Youth Coloring Book, and countless articles. His blog called "Growing the Game Together" is the second most popular blog of the hundreds found on the US Olympic Committee's Team USA website and he promotes the "Grassroots" Button on the USAV website with material, posters, and information for clubs, schools, coaches, parents, players, and officials. He has received many awards, including USA Volleyball's Honorable Mention in 1978 and 1986, the Harry Wilson Distinguished International Service in 2004, the George Fisher Leader in Volleyball in 2006 and in 2007 was named a Sport Ethics Fellow by the Institute for International Sport.

From 1982 to 1990 he was Director and Coaches' Coach of the Albuquerque Junior Olympic Volleyball Program. For a month in the summer of 1991, he was one of four featured speakers at the first ever International Youth Volleyball Coaches Symposium in Olympia, Greece, attended by over 50 nations, and he repeated that role in the International Volleyball in the Schools Seminar in Canada in summer of 1995 and in Canada in 2007. That same year he was the principal speaker at the Centennial Advanced Teaching and Coaching Seminar in Beijing, China. He was on staff for both the 1984 and 1988 Olympics, and served as producer for both the 1996 Centennial Olympics for indoor volleyball in Atlanta, and subsequently producer and announcer for the 1996 Paralympics in Sitting and Standing volleyball. For 1999-2000 he was director of the U.S. Olympic Challenge Series, the Olympic qualifying series, which included an FIVB World Tour Grand Slam stop in Chicago with \$400,000 in prize money for that one stop alone. He also served as head coach/team leader for the 1999 and 2003 USA Pan Am Games Beach teams, with a silver medal, and 4th and 5th place finishes in the four events. In 2004 and 2005, he directed the National High Performance Beach Camp, and worked his 10th US Jr. Olympic Beach Volleyball Championships for USA Volleyball in Hermosa Beach, along with the AVP and AVPNext program.

For over a decade he served as one of 8 members of the International Volleyball Federation's Technical Commission, as Secretary, and he remains a FIVB Level IV Instructor. Since 2001 he has served on the NORCECA Technical and Coaches Commission, developing clinics and the "Leave a Ball Behind" Program to

enhance zonal volleyball growth, and directed a two year State Department Sports United Grant to assist coaches in six NORCECA nations in 2011-12. He helped run the World Sitting Volleyball Championships in 2010, is was voted in as Director of the World Organization of Volleyball for the Disabled (WOVD) Development Commission for 2012-2016, and will serve on Jury at the London 2012 Paralympics for Sitting Volleyball. He pioneered USA Volleyball on the Internet, helping Tom Jack develop the original site, one of the first 1,000 websites listed on Yahoo, and still contributes the usenet group Rec.Sport.Volleyball. From 1987 to 1991 he was the tournament director for the U.S. Jr. Olympic Volleyball Championships and began the U.S. Junior Olympic Beach Volleyball Championships in 1993, directing them until 2000. He also designed and directed the Nike VolleyVan program with 4 years of daily clinics in the lower 48 states, and currently directs the MVP project, working to get a “Million Volleyball Participants connected to USA Volleyball. For that, he has developed a series of CDs, with animated drills, skill posters, videos and dozens of articles for growing the game for – JO Girls, JO Boys, Youth, Disabled, Beach, and NIRSA programs.

As a player he has participated in 16 U.S. Open Championships, and was a 7 time Regional Champion. He also has played professionally with the Denver Comets in the old International Volleyball Association, and a year in Italy for the Alessandria Volleyball Club. Recently he competed for the Time Lords in the 55 & over division, 36 years after his first US Open in 1973. In 2004, he finished in the USA Outdoor National Championships, in the top 15 of the Men’s BB, playing with his son, Cody, and has won several King of the Mountain Father Son Doubles tournaments in Colorado. He returned to Junior Olympic coaching when his children wanted to play, and his daughter McKenzie’s 13 and under team in the Stellar VBC won the Bronze medal at the 2007 US Jr. Olympics in Minneapolis, MN. She was a member of Cheyenne Mountain High School’s volleyball team which won state titles in 2008-2011 and will play volleyball for Bowdoin College 2012-2016. He coached his son Cody’s 2010 Palmer High School team in the Colorado State Boys HS league. Cody was a member of the 2010 USA Junior National Training team, and started as a freshman for Princeton’s men’s varsity program. John also has coached lacrosse for the Cheyenne Mtn LAX Boys and Girls teams since 2000.

His main goal is to help make coaches more efficient, positive and creative, no matter what level - 7 year olds in an elementary school program or National team players and programs. He challenges old ways of thinking and help coaches create what they need, while having fun in the process. John has a BA in Biology and Economics received from The Colorado College in 1974, and is a single dad, raising his kids alone since 1996, His pastimes beside volleyball include fly-fishing, writing, skiing, lacrosse, upland game hunting, deep-sea fishing and travel. John can be reached at USA Volleyball – 719.228.6800 and [john.kessel@usav.org](mailto:john.kessel@usav.org)





**Current Activities:**

International Volleyball Federation Level IV/Course Instructor (since 1986) [www.fivb.org](http://www.fivb.org)

Director, World Organization of Volleyball for the Disabled (WOVD) Development Commission – [www.wovd.info](http://www.wovd.info)

Secretary, NORCECA Technical, Coaches and Development Commission, 2000-2012.

Jury member, London 2012 Paralympics –Sitting Volleyball Competition.

USA Volleyball Director of Sport Development - Staff liaison to the USA Deaf National Volleyball Teams and the World Organization for Disabled Volleyball, Special Olympics International, National Parks and Recreation Assoc., Positive Coaching Alliance, Girl Scouts USA Sports, Starlings USA, YMCA/YWCA, and many other national volleyball programs (including the Leave a Ball Behind program), and the USAV Diversity, Grassroots, Sports Medicine and Performance, and Disabled Volleyball Commissions [www.usavolleyball.org](http://www.usavolleyball.org)

Author of The Coach's Encyclopedia, the Coaches Guide to Beginning Volleyball Programs, The Junior Olympic Volleyball Program Guidebook, Collegiate Recruiting Guide, IMPACT Manual, IMPACT Plus Manual, Summer Camps Success, Thoughts & Quotes for Coaches, Kessel's Krazy Kollection, Places to Play, Minivolley 4 Youth, USAV Boys/NIRSA/Youth/Beach/Disabled/Girls Development CDs, and more.

USOC/US Paralympics – Sponsor Trainings, Olympic University lecturer, Symposium speaker for Developing Amazing Leaders (2007-12), Paralympic Military Sports Outreach training for coaches and players, Tournament Director – Wounded Warrior Games (2010-2012) Director U.S. State Department Sports United Grant for Dominican Republic, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua, Barbados and Trinidad Tobago.

USAV Blog on Growing the Game <http://www.teamusa.org/USA-Volleyball/Grassroots/Grow-The-Game-Blog.aspx> - 2nd most popular blog on the US Olympic Committee Team USA website for the last 4 years.

USA Coaches Accreditation Program Level III Charter Cadre Instructor since 1988.

Positive Coaching Alliance Double Goal Coach Instructor – [www.positivecoach.org](http://www.positivecoach.org)

Parents for Good Sports Fellow and National Instructor [www.parentsforgoodsports.org](http://www.parentsforgoodsports.org)

Clinician for the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, Native American Sports Council, National Parks and Recreation Association, AAHPERD Regional & National Sessions, Boys and Girls Clubs of America, Boys Scouts of America, National High School Federation, AVCA, YMCA, YWCA, USA Disabled Sports, Athletic Business Convention, Gold Medal Squared, Positive Coaching Alliance Against the Grain, Character Counts Youth Summit, Girl Scouts USA, NCAA National Youth Sports Program, Police Athletic League, USA Volleyball/US Olympic Committee national clinics, USAFA National Character and Leadership Symposium, Olympic University Lecturer on Listening and Change topics.

Head Coach - USA National Development Camps -18 years USAV Regional Official, since 1975

Member of Mensa, AAPERD, National Strength Coaches Association, American Volleyball Coaches Association