

Growing the Game Together Players & Parents Edition



USA Volleyball®

***Insights and thoughts on the science, facts,
and principles of Sport and Volleyball***

By - John Kessel

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What Can a Player Control? February 03, 2012

This week my son Cody is playing in his first ever college matches for Princeton. He has been touching base lately about his concerns about playing at this next level, which will be played against California teams like UCSD (who Princeton has not defeated in over 11 years) Long Beach and Cal Baptist. He has a great roommate; coaches and teammates; schoolmates and teachers. He just wants to become the best player he can be, having been raised in the backyard of Citius, Altius, Fortius and the Olympic Training Center (OTC) of his hometown. He also has been personally impacted by the power of Paralympians, Special Olympians and Wounded Warriors, and wants to make sure he lives his life even somewhat approaching the passion, strength, and will to strive that they exhibit. His sister has the same drive, which of late has been tempered by the challenges of mono that hit her early this month, but she has recovered enough to miss even more school (having caught up to her classload), and I flew her out to watch her brother start his college career. So this top ten list is written to Cody, and his sister McKenzie, their teammates, and for all those players in our global volleyball family seeking to grow and become the best player they can possibly be. It's my checklist of things to focus on, as they are things you CAN control, rather than wasting time, energy or focus on things that are out of your control – like the outcome or the conduct of your opponents, the officials, fans and countless other things...

YOU CAN CONTROL YOUR.....

EFFORT – By choosing the team sport of volleyball, you have chosen to give up being able to control the outcome. You can, however completely control your effort, in practice and the match – As I tell every team I coach...I don't care if we win or lose, but nobody is going to outthrustle us.

SERVE – There are six basic skills in our sport of a lifetime, but only one that is in your control. The serve. Serve it in, and over the net. If this guy can shoot this many hoops in a row, you can control the toss to yourself – make it consistent – and then put it over and in, time after time after time. Re-read this blog, and share with your teammates. http://www.teamusa.org/USA_Volleyball/Features/2011/January/17/Top-Ten-Serving-Secrets.aspx

COMMUNICATION – Both self-talk and the way you talk to your teammates. Speak only in the positive, never the negative. Eliminate words like don't, can't, won't, try, but, and others that weaken you and your team, and be relentlessly positive. And since you are a Kessel, throw in some humor too, as life is to be enjoyed, never feared.

MOTIVATION – Keep watching the best. I am jealous, in a good way, of YouTube, as when I was learning, you could not record things – you had to watch it live, and take pictures. (I know you can't take pictures when you play but take lots of pictures, as your grandparents taught you). Study the best, and become yourself. Keep reading the best books and surrounding yourself with the best quotes.

CONDITIONING & DIET – It's homework, as Anson Dorrance wisely puts it, and yet it is in your control all the time. As part of effort, you should run during practice, not walk. When you have a choice of stairs or

elevator, chose the stairs, and run them if your bookload allows, just like your sister does up the famous Manitou Incline here. Play doubles in the sand as often as you can (I know there is a court right outside your dorm, what a great opportunity, once the snow is gone). Eat healthy, and choose good things to eat, but we know that ice cream is worth rewarding yourself for – just remember to always distinguish treats, from habits, in what you regularly eat.

LEARNING – You know from so many IMPACT clinics and time with Carl McGown, how we learn motor skills fastest. You know that means the chaos of randomness, and even playing half your time below your average, on the journey of raising that average. The puppy dog syndrome* is not going to fool you, so celebrate even below average performance with the reality of getting better – you may fail but you are NEVER a failure, it is just part of the process of learning. Work hard when your coach is watching you, and work harder when he is not. Be creative, and “try stuff” and know that when you do new things you have never done before, you will err. Just work hard to make sure they are positive errors, on the path to error free play, rather than negative ones.

ATTITUDE – attitude, attitude. Sometimes there may be nothing more important, and nothing much more to say, other than for players to read my article “My Favorite Player” by clicking http://www.teamusa.org/~media/USA_Volleyball/Documents/Resources/MyFavoritePlayer60108.pdf Remember, you win, regardless of the score, with PEOPLE, not a volleyball, and those who keep a positive, problem solving, love of the game, win, regardless of the scoreboard.

LEADERSHIP – After decades of sharing being a Bronco fan, we have had the pleasure of seeing a quarterback teach the lesson of believing in your team every day. Being from Denver makes watching Tim Tebow a bit more special but in the end, it is his belief in his teammates, which we all can do and control. You have always been the first to acknowledge your teammates after a kill, both setter and the passer, for you know it takes a TEAM to reach the point of being able to score most points. Keep building, teaching, and supporting every teammate, with compassion and passion, and be a leader both on and off the court – Here is a video clip done by some kids your age which speaks to some of this...
http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=MR_Y4Svf41k

GOALS - Personal and team. One win or loss does not change your control of your goals, if you set them realistically, and do things every day to reach them. Set them and work on them, for you control the goals you seek to reach. Set them for practice, matches, and in daily life - just remembering that most goals are steps to final, larger goals. Like they say about how do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time...

DELIBERATE PRACTICE – Remember the lesson of your handwriting, something you “practice” daily but I still cannot read. It is not enough to practice, you MUST practice focused in those precious two hours with your teammates and be asking yourself, was that a good or bad error and how should I do it better the next time. You can control your dedication and commitment to practicing with full focus. As that one OTC quote says, when you are in the gym, be in the gym. We call this sometimes mindful practice, or deliberate practice. Since you get measured every game, point by point, it is important to set individual practice goals and SCORE a lot of your training, For in practice, and in every game you play the ONLY point you really have a chance to "control" is the next one. Not the last one, it's done. Not two points from now, that is the future. This NEXT point with a right here, right now focus. It is this kind of mindful, one point at a time focus that helps you succeed. In closing, know for historical reference that the first match had the outcome of a 3-1 loss, all but one game close. He had his sister texting that he played amazing, and a dad, who could not be there because of work, smiling and proud that he did so much with the things he can control. A second match was not close, but the third, the Tigers won in a 5 set thriller, defeating an always well coached and hard playing UC San Diego Triton team 24-26/23-25/28-26/25-21/15-8. My favorite line from Cody’s email is excerpted here “*Last night was so*

fun with the team, everyone was high off of life (especially our senior captain Scott who had never won in his home state) and we are still talking about the match and all the great plays we made and how we can continue to win in conference play.” For those wanting to follow Princeton, they have a Facebook page and then the

school website is at

http://www.goprincetontigers.com/SportSelect.dbml?DB_OEM_ID=10600&SPID=4220&SPSID=46484

For the coaches who read this blog, make sure to take time to teach these top ten topics so your players focus on what they can control. For the players reading this, hope this is a good start to giving you more power to perform on the court, as you focus on those things in your control, and not the countless things which are not... comments post below, questions or more email john.kessel@usav.org



**this is the term is use for kids who do not think they are getting better over time. Your volleyball development is like the growth of a puppy, yours or someone else's. If you own it, you do not see the changes, but those who come by once every couple of weeks or more, will always say...wow, I can't believe how much your dog has grown – and you look at it and think...looks the same to me. As coaches we need to use video to record players actions at the start of the season, and then show them how much they have improved along the way, as they don't believe it most the time. Same for parents, but that is a different story...lol. Beside is a picture of Cody hitting by an old friend, Stan Liu, who had not seen Cody for several years, and is kind enough to share this shot. His website, www.stanliuphotography.com shows his skill as a photographer, and I thank him for being there, since I could not be...*

From 21,000 Teams to 816: May 17, 2012

Last week, as part of the Olympic qualification process, our USA Men keep our historic streak alive, by qualifying for their eighth straight Olympic competition. There, as I wrote in the blog "From 220 to 12" the

members nations of the FIVB, our international federation that USA Volleyball was one of 12 founding members back in 1947, train and develop on a four year cycle to simply be part of the most important championship of our sport. By my calculations, 220 teams fighting for 12 spots is a 5.4 percent chance to get in.

As of today, there are over 213,000 junior girls playing in USA Volleyball sanctioned competitions from all 50 states in 40 Regional Volleyball Associations. When we first hosted the US Junior Olympic Volleyball Championships, in 1980, there were 2,288 Junior girls competing (and 446 boys), and the event, needing no qualification but open to all wanting to play, started with under 100 teams. Since then, to help grow the game around the nation, these USAV Junior Championships have been held in 26 different cities. As our numbers of junior members has grown over the decades, the event has had to change from an all comers event to one teams must qualify for, through their RVA Regional events or one of the National Qualifying tournaments spaced all around the USA.

This year's USAV National Junior Girls championship is limited to a total of 816 teams. If you average 10 players on a roster of those 213,000 junior girls who are USAV members, that means there are over 21,300 teams are eligible to compete in the National Championships. By those same calculations seen above for Olympic qualification chances, your junior team has a 3.8 percent chance to get in, about 50 percent harder to qualify than our Olympic teams!

My daughter's high school won state again this year, and the vast majority of USAV junior players also play with their school teams. Here in Colorado. There are 337 high schools competing in five classifications. The schools compete in leagues, tournaments and districts and regionals and in the end, over two great days of competition, eight teams who qualify battle to be state champs in those five groups. So 40 teams make the Championships, out of 337, an 11.9 percent chance for teams in Colorado to "Make State..." Congrats to all teams who did, but also to all those school teams who push those who do qualify to play in State.

Fortunately there are USAV clubs and programs for teams that just want to play locally, or just regionally, but every USAV team no matter how young, is part of the overall pipeline to our decades of Olympic success. It is also a good thing that for the over 20,000 teams who do not make the USAV Jr. National Championships, there are still "all-comer" multi day, season ending events. Right now, if you wanted to, you can form a team and "qualify" for the USAV sanctioned Volleyball Festival, a wonderful event in about its 30th year in Phoenix, AZ. You can do the same and head to Orlando and play in the AAU event there. There are other great USAV sanctioned season ending events, such as the "Third Coast" in Austin Texas, the "Summer Soiree" in Anaheim, CA and the Asics Championships in Chicago, IL, and maybe more? (post the info in the comments section if I missed you!) Then there is the Starlings Nationals, in San Diego, CA, a USAV sanctioned and supported program for economically disadvantaged kids – featuring great teams from the Navajo Nation and all over America. These events are certainly easier to plan for, as you know you are in, once you pay the entry fee – and the chance of getting in? Well I don't need my calculator for that, it is 100 percent!

Qualifying for the best tournament in the world takes years of training, and millions of dollars over the four years of National Team Program training – and a substantial part of your USAV membership fees which come to the national office (in total about \$20 per member each year), are used to support our USA National Men's and Women's National teams – in not just indoor, but beach, and sitting volleyball, and most recently for the Deaflympics. Each one of these programs medaled in 2008, and we could be penny wise, but pound foolish in not doing our best to support them, but that is not what USA Volleyball has been doing. We just hosted the NORCECA Olympic Qualifier at a substantial cost – to give our men's team home court advantage to qualify. The other nations we played get huge government support to compete, but not our USA teams – it comes from the USAV members, fans, USOC, and sponsor support. To not have a USA team in the Olympics with the national impact the event has on those who do not know how great our sport is, would negatively impact all of those in the volleyball family. So THANK YOU to those who join USA Volleyball, know that you are part of the pipeline, in helping ensure the best players are supported to compete against the world.

Qualifying for the US Junior Nationals is also not without cost, but it is the journey, not the destination that is what is so worth the cost. The team travel builds memories that last a lifetime, as do the practices and off court

experiences – not just the competitions. Our game is the ultimate TEAM sport and when you add in playing doubles in the summer, to work on your weakness -- See my classic article [“Play Better Indoors by Playing Outdoors”](#) addressing that concept -- it is clear how valuable the USAV junior program is to developing safe (thanks IMPACT training, mandatory background checks and our work helping develop the [USOC SafeSport.org](#) website) and marvelous experiences – win or lose.

Right now there are some 12 & under aged members of USA Volleyball who will become part of our 2020 and 2024 National teams, and with the financial support given, once again qualify to be in the Olympics , Paralympics, and Deaflympics in the decade to come. There are also kids who do not know about the special nature and values in our sport – and USAV has joined with the Partnership for a Healthy America to work with our regions and clubs to get many more new kids to experience our game. Take a look at the other Olympic Sports we are partners with in the [“Let’s Move “](#) – a total of 1.7 million youth are expected to give ten variations sport, including those found in volleyball, a go. We look forward to growing the game together and watching our future National Team members and their teammates who help them get there, thrive.

More ideas will be coming this summer as we develop programs to help bring new members in, and enhance the experience of current members, starting with making sure you watch and cheer on our Olympians and Paralympians in London. I will be there working the Paralympics as part of my duties as Director of Development for the World Organization for Volleyball Disabled (WOVD). In fact, I just finished a special Development CD for helping teams in Africa grow the disabled options of volleyball which will be used in a continent wide clinic by other WOVD staff later this month. If you send a stamped self addressed padded envelope to me at USA Volleyball (4065 Sinton Rd, Colorado Springs CO 80907), I would be happy to share it with you. That way you can learn more about what we do to help others both in our nation and around the world in volleyball as, thanks to your support and membership, we can do the right thing for others less fortunate than we are...

Thoughts? Share a comment below, browse the other Growing the Game Together blogs for lots more info or email me at john.kessel@usav.org.

Post Script: A trip down memory lane of the cities USAV has held our USA Volleyball Junior National Championships in for girls:

1980 Davis, CA --- 1981 Omaha, NE --- 1982 Santa Barbara, CA --- 1983 Los Angeles, CA --- 1984 Kingston, RI --- 1985 St. Joseph, MO --- 1986 St. Paul, MN --- 1987 Albuquerque, NM --- 1988 Ft. Collins, CO ---- 1989 Toledo, OH --- 1990 Albuquerque, NM --- 1991 Tampa, FL --- 1992 Albuquerque, NM --- 1993 Kansas City, MO --- 1994 Austin, TX --- 1995 Orlando, FL --- 1996 San Jose, CA --- 1997 Denver, CO --- 1998 Dallas, TX -- - 1999 New Orleans, LA --- 2000 Louisville, KY --- 2001 Salt Lake City, UT --- 2002 Salt Lake City, UT --- 2003 Atlanta, GA --- 2004 Houston, TX --- 2005 Salt Lake City, UT --- 2006 Atlanta, GA --- 2007 Minneapolis, MN --- 2008 Dallas, TX ---- 2009 Miami, FL --- 2010 Reno, NV ---- 2011 Atlanta, GA --- 2012 Columbus, OH

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 2nd 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 advanced 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 as 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 armswings 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 - 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://www.teamusa.org/USA-Volleyball/Features/2012/December/21/Holiday-Gifts-for-Volleyball-Leaders-and-Athletes-2012-Edition.aspx> 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 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.*

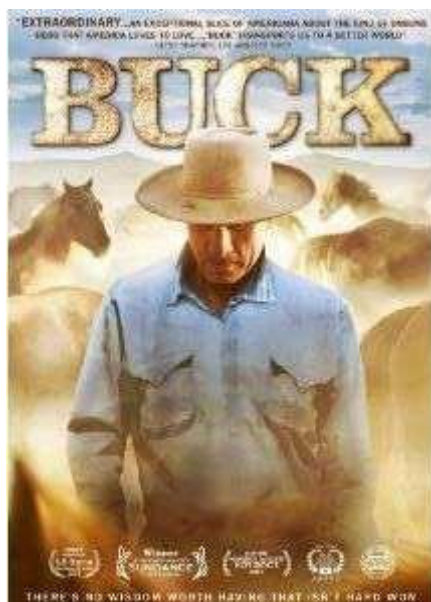
Now THAT is a humbling reality check, to have your dog be pulling rank on you after years of training... Again, when you talk to all these K-9 specialist and others, you find that the training of these dogs who serve, sniffing out bombs or getting things for their masters, is always done positively, 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 coverand 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...

Soluitur 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. Best wishes on and off the court as this season progresses.



International Guest Blog - Power Cup & 10 000 Hours of Making Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: June 14, 2011

This special international edition guest blog comes to us from Lauri Aatos Hakala. As a collegiate men's player at BYU under the great Carl McGown, he was a great student of the game. Now he is naturally moving into being an equally skilled coach, and, after several years playing professionally back in his native Finland, he is now assisting Marv Dunphy at Pepperdine. We send many late nite emails back and forth on how to become a better teacher and include the facts and science of motor learning and all aspects of coaching volleyball. This story he wrote special for the junior coaches and leaders of USA Volleyball, sharing what they do well in Finland and weaving in the 10,000 hours and Goethe... We also wanted to invite USAV Junior clubs to consider adventuring to the Power Cup next summer!

As a volleyball enthusiast and a fan of USA Volleyball, I approached John Kessel in hopes of growing the game in my native Finland. Besides still being a volleyball player myself, I also write a coaching blog and hold a position at the Finnish Volleyball Federation... And like many national federations, we have two primary goals: 1. To get more people to play the sport. 2. To get more players and coaches get better and understand what getting better really is, and how it is done.

We are nation of just 5 million people (or about the size of Minnesota) but our volleyball community faces many of the same challenges as our American friends. Both national federations want to increase the numbers kids who play this wonderful sport, and both are competing with a number of other sports for them. In Finland we are losing this battle to ice hockey and floor ball mainly because we lack something that USA Volleyball has: A science based system for developing better coaches, and thus taking better care of our young.

Over here in the great white north of Europe, we aren't very good at letting the game teach the game (yet.) Many of the coaches from around the world are just parents who understandably have little time to prepare for practices, so not every one can be highly educated teacher or student of the game. Still, it is astonishing how by doing things the hard way most parents don't even let their kids simply enjoy the sport and *play*. I know this is a problem in many places in the U.S. also, but trust me, we have got you beat in traditional non-gamelike drills.

We dont even have to go into detail with the science of motor learning or exercise physiology to understand, that the best way to learn how to play volleyball is by playing. In Finland most coaches like their players to hit balls off of tables too, or pepper for hours on end, but there is one exception. There is a short period of time- four days long- when not a single kid in the country has to do a drill which doesnt help him or her much as a volleyball player. This is called the *Power Cup*, the world's largest youth volleyball tournament.

Believe it or not, a volleyball midget such as Finland actually organizes such an annual event, bringing together about 1000 teams (boys, girls, mixed), 10 000 young players (ages 6-18) from countries all over the world. (The vast majority of teams still come from Finland.) It is an inspiring sight to see around 300 volleyballs simultaneously up in the air, on just as many courts on a large sand/grass field, where the event is usually held at. The tournament rotates in Finland every year, so that within the past 25 years it has been organized in 19 different cities around the country.

The most important thing, of course, is this: Everyone gets to play (they even have rules that state this in certain categories) and everyone loves to play. *No drills, just games*. Some teams dont even have coaches (they are not required), just the right number of players (min. 4 or 6 depending on the level) and a guardian if they are under 18 years of age. It is also the best possible marketing opportunity for our sport. What kind of mayor wouldnt want over 10 000 people in his or her city ? Besides bringing in revenue, the participants promote the coolest sport on the planet, along with the fairplay spirit, and comradery.

You can find more info on the tournament (in english) under http://translate.google.com/translate?hl=en&sl=fi&u=http://www.lentopalloliitto.fi/powercup/&prev=/search%3Fq%3Dlentopalloliitto%2Bpower%2Bcup%26espv%3D210%26es_sm%3D93

Under the news section there is also an article on Ron Larsen and Rob Browning visiting the event last summer -they were in a near by city helping USA beat Finland in a pair of Men's World League matches, which also took place in June of 2010 (a patriot, I am not going to go any deeper into those defeats, but will note that we also beat USA once in an away match.)

Power Cup is our best effort to fulfill federation's first goal, and to market the sport of volleyball to more and more people. The second goal I mentioned (producing better players and coaches) is something that the latter half of this post deals with.

How do people get better at anything, and in our case, volleyball?

A while back I ran into a collection of quotes which sparked up an interesting discussion with John. A particular quote, that I was surprised to see in that pamphlet of coaching ideas, came from one of my big heroes, Johan Wolfgang von Goethe. We are used to seeing Michael Jordan, John Wooden, and Vince Lombardi on different lists... But a 18th century German Polymath? Not too many coaches even know who he is, let alone quote such a person. His featured citation was this:

"Talent develops in solitude, character in the stormy billows of the world"

This is one of the many interpretations of the original, which I hung up on my wall a few years ago. It goes as follows:

"Es bildet ein Talent sich in der Stille, sich ein Character in dem Strom der Welt."

What initiated the conversation was the fact that Goethe, widely considered a natural genius, talks about *developing* one's skills. Goethe has been one of my favorite writers for a long time, but I recently developed a growing interest in his life.

When I played volleyball for coach Carl McGown (to whom a great many USA coaches and players owe the greatest Thank You) in Hawai'i and Switzerland, he urged me to read more about Anders K. Ericsson's research on 10 000 hours of making an expert, the so-called 10 year rule. In the recent years Ericsson's research has been made more popular by authors such as Geoff Colvin (*Talent is Overrated*), Malcolm Gladwell (*Outliers*), and Dan Coyle (*The Talent Code*) which both Carl and John have recommended every coach to read. Well, after reading them, so do I.

Anyhow, we know that practice makes permanent, and that *deliberate practice* makes you... Well, *better*. We say better, as it is silly to think anything can ever be "perfect"... As the best things are just in constant flux, in *Kaizen*, in continuous improvement. But, Japanese aside, what made Goethe so great? And is there something to be learned from our volleyball perspective?

As mentioned, the common misconception is, that he was born a genius. Some German professors (I studied German for a long time) refer to him as *"Der Eine Goethe"* or roughly *"The One Goethe"* making it clear that he was just the one, the best, the only, and fundamentally different from others. I am not here to claim he wasnt the Shakespeare of Germany, since that is exactly what he was, but how he got there could use a fresh examination.

We know that Goethe was not a mere writer, but a historical figure who is often referred to as the last *Renaissance-Man*. Although he specialized in writing fictional literature, he excelled in various fields including

philosophy, painting and plant homology and morphology (his ideas influenced Darwin a century later.) His work also continues to influence music, poetry, and even movies. Latest example being Nicholas Cage's blockbuster, "*Sourcerer's Apprentice*", the basic idea of which is based on Goethe's ballad "*Zauberlehrling*." Today Goethe's impact is indirect, but during his life time things were different. Even the great Mozart once travelled from Austria to Germany- just to perform a private musical score for the Dichterstürst. So, clearly people held him at high esteem, and clearly Goethe was special.

But where people go wrong, is that he wasn't born with superior innate gifts or talents. Instead, he was lucky, he was in the right place at the right time, and of course, he worked hard. Maybe his motivation to work was his talent? As John Armstrong describes the genius in his book *Love, Life, Goethe*, talent had little to do with his success: "*Goethe's productive genius lay to a very large extent in his capacity for hard work.*"

We already know Tiger Woods was a product of vigorous training that began early, and that Mozart was nurtured in a hard-working, music-oriented environment that was ideal to the development of the young genius. What makes Goethe interesting though, is the aforementioned multitude of skills. Would the 10 year rule suggest, that he had to work hard in each of his fields to get his expertise? In short, yes, although back then there was less competition in who was the greatest in what. Goethe's main interest, as we shall see, was writing. It is where he spent most of his time, totalling far above the hailed 10,000 hours.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe was born in August 28th in 1749. His father, Johann Gaspar, was determined that his children would have the opportunities that he didn't. Goethe was homeschooled (by both his father and private teachers), and from early on he studied languages, literature, and theatre. Goethe went to law school at the age of 16 but left three years later as he found it boring. He had already started writing poems and plays in his free time. After falling ill, recovering and terminating a brief legal career, Goethe wrote his first world famous work *The Sorrows of Young Werther* in 1774. He was only 25 years old at the time.

Clearly this is a young age for writing a master piece, and if you want to calculate any exact hours, things get tricky. Nobody knows how much of his divided time was dedicated to drama, but we do know, that a full time job as a lawyer takes time (and did so even back then.) So one is surely inclined to think, that such an achievement requires the touch of a genius... Not everyone writes a book that becomes part of the world literature when they are only 25. But then again, not everyone is devoted to literature from kindergarten.

Later in life (I'm making this short) Goethe travelled to Italy among other places, but mostly lived in Weimar, which had become the center of culture in the remains of the Holy Roman Empire. In Weimar he was under the protection of Charles Augustus, Grand Duke of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach. The duke was a patron of arts, and summoned many formidable artists and writers to Weimar in a time which made Weimar the most significant "talent hub" in Europe. The duke then funded Goethe's work and gave him a formal position at the ducal court.

The details aside: A lot has been written about Goethe's life, but no matter where we look, he was always at work. And, just as importantly, he was often given the opportunity to focus on writing. He came from a wealthy home and started writing early. He worked hard to get money, but didn't always have to, and later in his life he could dedicate all of his time to writing and poetry. He is quoted talking about inspiration, work ethic, and doing what one loves. He lived to be 82 years old (he passed March 22nd in 1832), which still today, let alone then, is a respectably high age, and left behind a remarkably diverse and broad body of literature.

And... Although he was usually working on multiple projects at once, he wrote his *magnum opus*, the two-part drama *Faust*, for over 60 years. YES. He worked on one book for six decades! No wonder it turned out perhaps the greatest book ever written in German. Just imagine all the goals he set for the book, all the redoing, reworking and perfecting that took place in that time. He had inspiration, fellow writers and artists to rely on

(and to compete with!) and an environment which was oozing appreciation for literary achievements. Goethe was also very patient.

I wonder how good one would get at volleyball, if the same environment, and the same rigorous and mindful effort would be present?

It has been said, though not verified, that Goethe started working on the first version of Faust (labelled as the *Urfaust*) already as a teenager. We know that this project existed on his table around 1772, but nobody knows how actively he worked on it. The first full version of *Faust I* was published in 1808, and *Faust II* came out posthumously in 1832, indeed 60 years later.

A widely quoted man, the following line is also credited to him: "*Man cant just always work, he has to have free time for his spirit.*" Maybe things like this make us think achieving great things came easy for him. But we've seen that hard work and right opportunities are what came easy to him, not achievements themselves.

I am not making a claim that just anyone can be Mozart, or Tiger, or Goethe. But clearly, everyone can get tons better through deliberate practice, and motivation, which often comes easy to those who do what they love. Personally I have been at times struggling between different occupations and what line of study to take. When I am done playing, I now know that I want to be a volleyball coach and help more kids find the sport and get better at it. Perhaps, and hopefully, I will get better at coaching while I m at it... And that I get to coach for a long time.

Thanks for the opportunity to share some thoughts. Good luck to USA Volleyball in all that you do, and thank you for all the wonderful lessons you bring upon your young.

Aloha,

L.A. Hakala

Summer Volleyball Options: May 09, 2011

So with Regionals done for every USAV player, congrats are in order to those advancing on to Nationals, or on to USAV High Performance programming. This blog is for the rest of you who wonder what is best to do this summer....and for those programs which may be playing indoors in a June season-ending event, but know that the options of summer can also help prepare players for Nationals. There are several core options, and I will take a look at each of them to help you with your summer volleyball decisions. The two main principles I look at are:

"Contacts per Dollar" – How much does an option cost vs. how many gamelike contacts you as an individual are getting in the time period.

"Speed First, Accuracy Second" - Why does old age and treachery overcome youth and skill and what can you learn from this older/higher level of play?

1. Play Doubles - This is my first option, for so many reasons. First, you get to TOUCH the ball a lot, and work on your weaknesses, in advance of the next change of seasons to school volleyball. What do I mean by that? Well, let's imagine you have spent the season as a hitter – and partner with a good, but shorter teammate/setter for doubles. What will likely happen is that your opponents, in order to stop you from hitting the third ball which they know you are good at, will serve your partner, and you thus spend the summer working mostly on your setting. You also might have your teammate work to set you up to spike on the second contact, which means you learn to hit balls coming from off the net, and become a better hitter of such imperfect hitting

situations. Meanwhile your setting teammate gets to be a better serve receiver and hitter, and you both get to develop your all around play, being better at all six skills. If your serve needs work, you will get a lot of competitive repetitions, as you don't wait 11 rotations until you serve again, you just have to wait three, before your chance to attack them with your serve happens again.

So you get to work on ALL your skills, and better realize that you are not just a "setter" or a "middle" but you become a "volleyball player..." As I have noted in other blogs – you stop being a "passer," and learn to serve



receive, and stop being a "setter" and learn to run an offense – even if it is a simplified one with just two and not six player options. The value of random training and learning abounds when you play outside. You have to show how simple and compact your serve is, or improve it, by tossing and serving in the wind. You have to deal with windblown sets. You must read while dealing with the sun. The ball is a bit heavier, so you get to strengthen your setting and hitting efforts. You get to cover the WHOLE court, with just a teammate, extending your range and hustle skills in completely gamelike conditions. You play uneven surfaces, grass and beach. You get

gamelike conditioning/jump training when in the sand especially, but simply because one of you hits or blocks every third ball – there just is no better specificity in training for increasing your jump. Let me say that again – the best way to increase your vertical jump is to do spike and block jumps in games and practice.

You learn to stop hitting where you are facing, and how to hit to where your opponents are not. Since you can't open handed tip, you get better at roll shots, how to place them and contact the ball – including hitting effectively when the set is poor and "tipping" (just not open handed) when the set is perfect.

Play Older Players... Play adult divisions, so you get to learn from those hopefully far older than you. Sure you should enter and play in the USA Beach Junior Tour when it comes through your area. Nonetheless, summertime is when you should also seek to be challenging adults – playing in their "B," "BB", "A," "AA" and even Open divisions. There is a junior player in Southern California who last summer achieved her adult "AAA" rating. She was 13. Olympians Mike Dodd and Karch Kiraly reached their "AAA" rating when they were 16 years old. They learned by playing at the faster level of play that comes against young adults, and the craftier level of play that comes from the veterans of the game.

Play Coed....This is another advantage of our sport, being non-contact, both genders can compete with and against one another. Girls, take on a boys team, or even a men's team. Play coed with some strong male players, and your reading, skill and volleyball IQ levels will grow.

PLAY...You can simply put up a rope or a net in your backyard, and invite three other players, junior level or adult, to come over and play. One wise coach in Nebraska has about a half dozen nets up all summer in his large backyard. He puts out a jug of lemonade and ice in the late afternoon, and lets kids play any day they want, with no coaching or tips from him – he goes inside to chat with the parents who might have had to drive their child over. Set up the lemonade and go back inside. For more on this concept, read my article "Play Better Indoors by Playing Outdoors." [CLICK HERE.](#)

Compete.... The USA Beach Junior Tour likely has a stop near you. [Click Here](#) to access the Tour schedule or [CLICK HERE](#) for High Performance Beach Tryout information. Come to Colorado and visit the USA Volleyball main headquarters along with the U.S. Olympic Training Center – visit teamusa.org for more on the Colorado Springs site.

Compete in the National State Games in volleyball – San Diego Aug 4-7, [CLICK HERE](#) for more on that event, or you can play in the Rocky Mountain State Games. They have indoors, beach or grass, so [CLICK HERE](#) to see that end of July competition option, and even consider competing in OTHER sports that you enjoy. Playing at altitude is its own form of gamelike training, including lots of heavy breathing after a long rally.

Check your USAV Region for more local outdoor programming. <http://usavolleyball.org/resources/wanna-play/usav-regions>

Here in Colorado for example, you can find outdoor events here: <http://www.coloradovolleyballtournaments.com/>

2. Get on a Summer League team. Here many options abound. Certainly playing the six-person game with your school teammates in a team camp, “High School Summer League,” or simply “Open Gym” are options worth pursuing. However, if you can get on a four-person adult team, or even a six-person team, you will gain the advantage of “playing up” and learning from their wisdom and often faster level of play. Indoors or outdoors, this again is a chance to play with or against adults. It is also a chance to play with your mom and/or dad – something that is special about our game but which is much harder to make happen in the school year due to training and homework loads.

3. Attend a Summer Camp – Click on www.volleyballcampguide.com. Choosing from the wide variety of options and camp costs, can be perplexing, so we have put together some good info on this partner site, and Chuck Rey has a good blog on the topic too, “.....” found by [CLICKING HERE](#). The other option of value is to TEACH at summer camps. This June and July, son and daughter will be coaching summer camps in California, Wyoming, Colorado and Canada. That which you teach, you learn. Simple as that. Check out this article for more: [“You will be a Better Player if you Coach”](#)

4. Take a Break – For some, depending on the intensity and length of the indoor program you have been a part of, this option is also one to consider. Go swimming, mountain biking, camping, boating. Catch up on your laundry, REALLY clean your room (since you had no time for spring cleaning), help in the garden....and just take a break from trying to keep a ball off the floor/put a ball down on the floor.



So, hope to see you enjoying your summer break, while still enjoying the chances to play the summer brings. As always, thanks for coaching and let us know what other ideas you might have in making the summer a chance to grow your game and the game for all.

Change of Seasons: April 27, 2011

So dear team, our club season has come to an end, including my time to be in practice and competition guiding your development and training. It is time for you to coach yourself, figuring things out implicitly, with a little bit of guided discovery from a crafty mentor as a partner or opponent. Maybe attend a USAV High Performance summer camp and/or college summer camp or two, and play as much doubles with a passionate partner as you can. Then your school season will begin with the same interest of your parents, but the increased challenge of your classmates watching you perform.

I believe you are ready...Why?

You know how to serve better – With the help of the radar gun, simplified motion and deliberate practice, you are hammering volleyballs over 60 feet cross court with very few errors. You know how to serve the spaces and make the ball float, jumper or not. Your toss is low and consistent, and if you miss, it's usually out long, not into the net or wide.

You know how to serve receive better - Sure your old pair “ball control” partner passing habits creep in sometimes, but by and large, you know that the ball is to be passed up, five or more feet off the net and keep your arms at an angle to make that happen – not passing too tight or over the net. From speed ball, through monarch of the court, to serving and always passing those serves during the “serving” segments, you saw thousands of serves come flying OVER the net, not tossed or passed to you from in front of the net, and are better at reading and moving to all those different serves.

You know where and how to dig, and keep getting better at reading -- You are not afraid of the floor, and you are understanding that coaches want two players to read and save a ball together, rather than have nobody going for it, and letting the ball hit the floor. Keep up the three-person pepper so your habits and reactions never dig the ball back to a partner, but instead dig it halfway to that attacker. If you are in pairs, keep digging the incoming ball up, not back to your partner. Coaches at every level want diggers who only know how to dig up to their other five teammates and never over the net to the opponents to reload. Sure, digging (and even passing) balls over the net on your first contact might fall for a point against weaker opponents, and have fans cheering too, but the team and coaches seek those who read and dig up, not over the net.

You know how to spike better -- You know how to not hit the way you are facing – and do it by jumping in the right spot and time, no matter what kind of set you have received because you have pass-set-hit so many times. You make most your hitting mistakes OVER the net, thanks in part to playing over the ribbon, speed ball, monarch of the court and spiking over the net height wall stripe. Sure you still have the habit of hitting down that comes with traditional wall wrist snap spike training and pepper from before, but those errors are diminishing. The habit is still there, for one never “replaces” a habit, they just do more of the right thing more and more until the motor program you tap into is almost always the better choice or error, the good mistake if you err, every time. You also know better how to acknowledge that when as a hitter you get to pound a quickset, or any set you get to crush, that we turn to our setter and then the passer and thank them for the chance to terminate.

You ALL know how to set better -- We did not spend time letting only one setter develop this season, while the rest of you spiked and did other skills. You ALL learned how to set a hittable ball, and about half of you learned more on how to run an offense. When you spiked, then set, then chased after the ball, I understand that there was a lot of randomness and variability you were dealing with, both in front and back sets. As we had short, medium and tall setters, even more variability was being experienced. You never hit off of a consistent, albeit very 'un-game-like,' toss by me.

You learned to be crafty and skilled free ball attackers -- Unlike in hitting, I did toss to you some, but only for you each to hit aggressively over on a “free” ball. You got really good at that, something more to be proud of, for you will score points at the next level a lot with your successful and tactical play

You block better – You blocked thousands of live attacks this season, learning what it takes to stay out of the net nearly every single time. You increased your knowledge of WHEN and WHERE to jump with short, medium and taller attackers, no matter if they were off the net, inside, or hitting a “perfect” set. You blocked hundreds of balls, and...you made your opponents change their attack, even if you did not touch the ball every time – you got them to hit out, tip into the net and hit a less favorable or powerful shot. Sure enough, some bounced funny and off of you or ran along the net like a squirrel on a power line, and fell on our side. The thing is, you regrouped and let such bad breaks not affect you, but focused on your next block or play knowing such things are just part of the randomness of the game and that your time to squirrel an attack, over the net of course, would come.

You have run a 6-3, 6-2, and 5-1 in competition – Your next team might have a different serve receive pattern than ours, but you know to let the setter get it, running through even if needed, unless the setter yells early for help. Our setters know how to hit, and with all of you hitting, you know how to hit middle and right side, not just “the outside.” You likely will go to a 5-1 offense when you hit the school season, as most coaches don’t have the luxury of having three or more talented setters, but we did...and that is how we trained for the next level.

Continue to focus on what you can control – your hustle, your attitude, your serve. To some of you, this also means stop spending time with the Angry birds, and the “Yeahbut” birds. When your next coach gives you a tip, or suggests a solution to a problem you might have shown on the court – getting angry or saying “Yeah, but...” is not the right response. Listen – it is information, not criticism, if your coach cares about you. Your next coach might not know regression to the mean as well as you, and yank you out if you make repeated errors. They might be louder than me in a time out, or talk too much about something you already know well, but just misjudged is all, or they might yammer about technique when you just mis-timed the ball unintentionally. They might even yell a lot at you from the sidelines as you perform, unlike dance, music, or tennis teachers. Nevertheless, this is your new coach, and you will learn new things from him or her, for they have insights and ideas that will click with you, and help you get better.

You know, it is easy to be a commentator, or even a blogger...telling what happened, even though the pros you see on television, let alone the fans in the stands, are accurate in their predictions maybe half the time is all. Ignore the spectators who tell you “We need a pass”... “For gosh sakes just get it in...” and “Stop screwing up,” etc. They are not playing, you are. Remember my dear team, you have chosen volleyball – which simply is far harder to do than the sport of basketfootbaseball. They get to hold on to the ball, catch and throw it. You never can, except to get ready to serve. Imagine what our game would be like if you got four chances to score a point...or strikes and balls before the server actually got to ace the passer...or simply could hold onto the ball for a few seconds when you were a bit confused as to what to do next. Nope, that’s not going to happen. Every contact of every rally you are challenged by physics to keep the ball off the floor and, to time your moment of contact off of your body to deflect it on the next correct flight path – you are like a fighter pilot in skill demands, before computers came into play, having to shoot down a ball in flight – every time you dig, pass, set, spike or block. You are way more than an ace player when you fly all over the court – you are astounding, acrobatic, amazing athletes.

Spend your time ahead focused on your form as much as you do your skills. Spend time learning more about the mental game that is played on that court between your ears. Keep developing a coachable and true team attitude – getting the farthest ball when having to collect up the balls... running in every time a coach calls you

in...paying attention to your coach in any talk or time out...cheering your teammates on when you are on the bench, rather than worrying about your playing time...and bettering the ball every chance you get, rather than complaining about a teammate error. Play doubles when time, friendships and weather allows. Your season to strive for is ahead, not past – no one gets good resting on their laurels, and new starting spots are waiting for those who DO things, not complain. And while achievements are great, you also began to contribute back to our game, by coaching younger players during your own practices. That which you teach, you learn, and there are lots of younger players who were given the gift of being able to be taught by you as you learned. You also gave back to the kids in Haiti, working the Haiti Street booth and helping those kids from afar through both their bracelets made and giving them volleyballs for the Leave a Ball Behind Program. By giving, you get so much more.

So at your next stop along the Citius, Altius, Fortius path... dig and pass it up, serve it hard and flat over, swing fast and quick, set it off net and hittable, keep anticipating and reading, and out hustle and play your game. I wish I could say with all that you will be winning, or playing error-free, but while we seek that through all the deliberate practicing done, losses and errors will happen. Indeed, this next step up, the balls will come faster, the shots more varied and your reading and timing will be challenged – the joy of PLAYING should not be threatened by the fact that mistakes – even streaks of errors, will occur. It happens to every player on their journey, so take a deep breath and strive to contact the next ball, the only one you can control, as best you can. And smile. I am, as it was a special season with special players, who are going to make a difference on each and every team lucky enough to have you as the next change of seasons comes....

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://www.teamusa.org/USA-Volleyball/Grassroots/Players>. 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 if you have other thoughts to share.



Stats for Parents and Players: February 23, 2011

I oft speak of the impact a *Discover* magazine article long ago had on me, on how we are fooled by randomness, in helping me be a better parent and coach. A short TED.com clip on why we need to teach our kids stats over calculus – as my daughter struggles to decide between taking 2 semester of AP calc next year or not – is well worth the 4 minute viewing.

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

My son is a passionate volleyball player who also has worked hard in school, and will be attending Princeton next fall to play, learn and grow. Unlike his dad, he is above average in intelligence. Long ago I would see him get exasperated at fellow

students who were not on his level in smarts, so we had our first “Stats” talk. It went something like this...

Everyone in America, indeed, the world, has some level of smarts. Put together in total, there will be an average – which falls at 50 percent. So in the USA, using an easy number of 300 million folks and incorporating the science of mathematics, 150 million of those people simply will have to be at or below average in their smarts. That is a lot of places poor decisions might be made or errors, compared to you, should you just be average in smarts. You, son, are above average in smarts. It does not matter how high above average you are, it just means even more of the people you meet, well, they will make more mistakes and poor decisions than you. If someone in the top 10 percent of smarts, 9 out of 10 people they cross paths with in day to day life, are likely to make more errors and all. If you let yourself get frustrated to the point of incapacitating yourself, or spending 90% of your time being exasperated, you will not achieve much in life. It is what it is...and so focus on what you can control and work through the errors and challenges that might befall you because of others.

The thing is that the SAME thing is happening every day in every volleyball gym in the world, including my 2x a week teaching our Team Colorado 14ers. At one end, while we have some overall above average, passionate kids playing, on any roster, half the kids will be above average and half below. Those who can RAISE their skill average, which is in each player’s control by training hard and practicing DELIBERATELY will more likely start over those who do not.

More importantly is how we see our children playing in tournaments or even in practice if we watch. We get fooled by randomness, and we suffer from the “Puppy Dog Syndrome.” The latter is where, since we are watching every point/practice, we fail to see the growth happening – just like people with a puppy do not “see” it growing. Then a friend comes by once a month or so and every time it is “look at how big your dog is!” The

former is REALLY important to understand as parents, and goes back to the same stats we need to remember regarding average intelligence.

Each of my players has a personal average and – in each practice and each tournament, they will play

ABOVE their average half the time and

BELOW their average HALF the time.

Again, it is what it is. This is the science of how this random, chaotic game is played. What I see in too many parents, and players, is a form of panic or disappointment in their child's performance, or the team, or even the club, when things are happening in the lower half of the learning process, the "below average" performance. Chill! Let it flow. Relax, it is just part of the game and of learning. There is no need to yell at them to "work harder" if they are working hard. No reason to be disappointed in their performance – for if you are as a parent, well, you too will spend at least half your time watching, being frustrated and disappointed.

One of the key ideas of practice is to make sure that "the first time" happens there, not in a competition. Good coaches and players embrace the chaos of competition. They create challenges and adversity, guiding and letting the players problem solve these situations which might happen in play. Changing setters, playing new positions, making sure players are well rounded and able to perform all skill sets (not just a specialist) are all things EVERY player should experience. The point is to get players comfortable with the chaos, and the changes in the game flow that present themselves every set of every match. Volleyball is a game of high speed rebound chess, and each player needs to know how to solve the problems caused by the changes in events, not turn to the coach for the answer, because they have dealt with it in training first.

While I am at it, please recall (mentioned before in this blog) that in the last 115 years of recorded volleyball play throughout the world, that HALF THE TEAMS ARE LOSERS! So if you think losing means you are a loser, you are in for a miserable ride. We – players, coaches and parents alike – MUST take the long range view and focus on mastery over outcome. Support your child's effort and hustle, even when they are playing in their 50 percent of the time below average zone! It is like the line my teams hear so often they may be sick of it – and that I have put in this and my previous blog... "I don't care if we win or lose today, but NOBODY is going to out hustle us." Even there, I must remind myself and know, that their hustle levels will be below average half the time! My job? To raise their AVERAGE hustle level to be so high, other teams, even when hustling well above average, are not hustling as well as most our 50 percent below average. We do NOT want to "excel at being average" as Agnes notes here....

<http://comics.com/agnes/2011-02-20/>

Referees also have an average, and they will be making mistakes too, albeit not on purpose. Just know they too will referee half their judgment times below their average. Again, like players, they want to reduce their standard deviation and raise their personal average level of making judgments – something that comes only by refereeing...doing it.

Sidebar – To be the best teacher you can be, you need to understand what I mean by standard deviation, bell curves and average. [Click here to get better informed.](#)

Illusory Superiority

Studies show that just about ALL people will say they themselves are above average in smarts - even though that is statistically impossible. This is known as "[Illusory Superiority](#)," though it is more fun to call it the Lake Woebegone effect – after the fictional town Garrison Keillor has created where "all the children are above average."

The same is likely true for parents about their kids and their child's volleyball skills, and at an extreme end, you see a clip like this one my son created.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0V8fxnfA2Zo>

So the point is...skill performance will ebb and flow, with 50 percent of the time being spent in below average performance for each player. Practice is for RAISING each player's personal average, even if in tournaments, they will be performing below their average half the time – when you look at it OVER time. Sure they will have wonderful streaks of success, but also frustrating streaks of failure. It is all part of the learning process and...your support in both cases should be consistent and with LONG range development paramount. Take a look back at this blog – "[Stuff Happens](#)" and gain more insight into this process, and relax and enjoy the ride – it is over faster than you may realize and it WILL be one of peaks and valleys, not some smooth highway up to the stars....If the first time you experience it is not really the first time, as you have handled it in practice, you are on your way to embracing the chaos of citius, altius, fortius. All the while focusing on one point at a time to get better and raise your average through mindful, deliberate training in this right here, right now world of competition, even when performance is below average, as it most certainly will be. Just stop comparing yourself to others and become the best you can be...

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 them 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 endline...and give your team points that will make a difference.



Thoughts on Warming Up - Practice & Pre-Match: December 09, 2010

I am a month into coaching my 14 team, I call them the Fourteeners, after our 52 highest 14,000 foot plus mountain peaks we have here in Colorado, including the snow shrouded one right out the USA Volleyball office window known as Pikes Peak. I figured I would simply share what I wrote my team, BOTH players AND parents as we want to keep them ALL in the loop, and Chris, who asked a classic question or two on warm up, so you can see where the rubber meets the road in the ideas being put forth in this blog..

To My Fourteener Players (and Parents)

OK 14ers, tonite we are missing two, due to Christmas Concerts, so to help them know what we will all do for each of our 9 matches on Sunday, here is an email I just sent to a coach asking how best to warm up. I decided to kill two birds with one email....

We will practice this several times tonite so we know what we are doing Sunday and can just get right on the court and do it. See you later tonite. – John

To: Coach

From: John Kessel

Sent: Thursday, December 09, 2010 9:30 AM

Cc: Cody Kessel

Subject: RE: Warming up thoughts

Thanks for the kind words. More importantly thanks for caring enough to seek and learn.

I call warm up by the recess rule – in that you sit 2 hours then go full bore for 15 min, no problem. So we warm up by playing small sided games. The butterfly “drill” is a good start the practice warm up option too, but a lot of 1v1, 1v1 plus 1 and 2v 2 small sided games are the BEST way to warm up, as players need to learn how to play the ball OVER then net when inside the 3 meter line area...we Americans are good off the net, but the closer we get, the more we fight the net if we do not play over it/inside the 3 meter line games. In normal “pepper” the closer you get to your partner, the more you tap/hit it down. In REALITY the closer you get to your opponent, the more you have to hit UP and OVER the net that keeps looming larger and larger... That is a skill, and I even do a run forward warm up where the teammate tips very short/near the net over the rope/net, and the partner must run forward, get low and "J" stroke the ball UP or even BACKWARDS away from the net. The tradition is to run forward and put it over (or into) the net. The athletes need to know how to charge the net and still put it up HIGH and OFF the net as a skill set.

Now, if you want to two person pepper, you MUST do DIG TO YOURSELF pepper, or alternating (where you move forward and back to be the player in the middle who sets then moves back to dig) pepper. Dig to yourself (then set then hit) is how I teach playing against a wall as well, which is a warm up option too, especially if you are the first one on the court. The wall has a “net” from duct tape at 7’4” (download and review the [Minivolley book](#) for more on this), which you hit/serve the ball over the stripe, then when it rebounds, you dig to yourself, set yourself, then hit over the stripe – and repeat. We simply must teach young kids the habit/reaction of digging UP first, NEVER back to a spiker... see the grassroots article “[From Positive to Perfection](#)” where I argue for teaching good mistakes first, not how we do now where we are teaching negative errors first and all the time.... My team is about to play their first tourney Sunday, so tonite’s practice will be learning our PRE MATCH warm up. We go 2-4-4 here, so this is what we will do:

2 MINUTES SHARED COURT

Players in 3 person pepper weave. I have nine so that works great. If you had 10, you could weave with 3 groups, one of 4 persons. What is 3 person weave? Let me see if I can X draw it

A ---- B --- C is how the three start. A hits/serves OVER B to C, who digs/passes to B, who sets back to C. C then hits over B and then SWITCHES with B, as B becomes digger/passer and C the Setter/Target/Net.

A --- C --- B

Of course when C hit over B, A digs, now to C, who sets A, who hits over C and C and A switch. And on and on...

C --- A --- B

So that is moving AND never digging back to the hitter, both core concepts for REAL defense.

I have also had a parent stand at the endline, holding a rope attached to the net which is our own "warm up net" for two min or more, and we weave pepper over that rope/net. Might do that Sunday too...it helps them hit OVER the 7'4" barrier they will encounter all their volleyball lives (unless they play coed, and have to deal with an 8 foot net).

4 MINUTES ON TIME

We set up front/back and hit a) 1 min 3 meter line, b) then 2 min off the net then c) serve 1 min. What is "front/back"?

Players overhead pass balls to right or left side, players pass then hit (P/H) then move to set, then chase ball and then OHP... On my team of 14s, I am teaching EVERY player to set at this point of the season - running a 6-6 or a 6-3, so they hit, then set, then chase/enter ball OVER the net. If you have designated setters, you hit then chase, and switch the two setters half way so they both FRONT and BACK set. Too much of our training in the USA is front-front - so we are good at hitting zone four, and blocking it, and weak at zone 2/backsets and blocking that area too.

OHP line

_____ net _____

S S

P/H P/H P/H

Rest waiting to pick a front or back set option to P/H

We can set backrow A/pipe/D, then set outside or middle and back sets. Kids pick each line as they wish, but must hit some back sets.

4 MIN OFF TIME

With the new rules, when we are off, we scout 1-2 min to see if any player is lefty or goofy footed, then we circle up to cheer and dance. If you can warm up somewhere off the court on your non-court time, we do a player controlled modified butterfly/circle drill, where the players serve/hit, to two passer/diggers side by side (not in a line) who pass/dig to setters who set and then the player jumps and tips it or jumps and catches it, before moving to the serving/hitting line which is 15 feet further than the setters – NOT in the same "line" like 95% of the coaches do....

We might also just play tennis for 3 min then serve 1 min – see my blog "[Tennis Anyone](#)" for more on that. Hope this helps. Keep up the great teaching. I am copying my son, who is interning for me this year before he goes to Princeton to play varsity volleyball there – to see what we can do to get a section for THE NEW COACH – it makes sense to put core/key things there all in one place, even if we need to do new writing. This email, for example could do it, especially if we have flash video embedded to show what I am writing about.

Here is an abstract of the article for reference.

John

THACKER, S. B., J. GILCHRIST, D. F. STROUP, and C. D. KIMSEY, JR. The Impact of Stretching on Sports Injury Risk: A Systematic Review of the Literature. Med. Sci. Sports Exerc., Vol. 36, No. 3, pp. 371-378, 2004. Purpose: We conducted a systematic review to assess the evidence for the effectiveness of stretching as a tool to prevent injuries in sports and to make recommendations for research and prevention.

Methods: Without language limitations, we searched electronic data bases, including MEDLINE (1966-2002), Current Contents (1997-2002), Biomedical Collection (1993-1999), the Cochrane Library, and SPORTDiscus, and then identified citations from papers retrieved and contacted experts in the field. Meta-analysis was limited to randomized trials or cohort studies for interventions that included stretching. Studies were excluded that lacked controls, in which stretching could not be assessed independently, or where studies did not include subjects in sporting or fitness activities. All articles were screened initially by one author. Six of 361 identified articles compared stretching with other methods to prevent injury. Data were abstracted by one author and then reviewed independently by three others. Data quality was assessed independently by three authors using a previously standardized instrument, and reviewers met to reconcile substantive differences in interpretation. We calculated weighted pooled odds ratios based on an intention-to-treat analysis as well as subgroup analyses by quality score and study design.

Results: Stretching was not significantly associated with a reduction in total injuries (OR = 0.93, CI 0.78-1.11) and similar findings were seen in the subgroup analyses.

From: A Coach

Sent: Monday, December 06, 2010 6:01 PM

To: John Kessel

Subject: Warming up thoughts

Hi John,

Thank you so much for your writing on your blog and your teaching in the Impact classes. It never fails to excite me invigorate me, and challenge me when I read or hear your teachings.

I was searching for recommendations on warming up before practices as I try to change the habits of all the teams in my club and am having a hard time finding recommendations. They, of course are still doing static stretching and I need to give them something other than “that is bad and do something more like this...” I have seen some of your general comments and your referral to the great NY Times article, which is what got me going on this a few years ago, but nothing on volleyball specific warming up. Do you recommend playing “light” 2 on 2 or 3 on 3 over a net only? Or do you have other warmup things you suggest in addition? Any thought, links, book referrals would be appreciated.

Also, a comment on the USA Volleyball site. As a coach I have come to the USA volleyball site multiple times and searched for information on running practices, drills, warm-ups, etc. and outside of your blog haven't found anything useful (well other than the excellent CAP and impact material). I would live to see a part of the

website dedicated to the thousands of new or learning club and school coaches who are trying to figure this stuff out for themselves.

Thanks again for all you have given to all of us!

Coach

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 ¼ 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 7th 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

The Score Takes Care of Itself: January 31, 2010

I have been watching my son play up this weekend against the teams in Men's A division here in Colorado. As I marvel at how well 17 and 18 year olds fare against the older, far more experienced men, one key thing comes to mind that we all need to do better. - To play one point at a time. If we can focus - one point at a time - on what we can control - attitude, internal focus and learning, body language, hustle, effort, communication and one's SERVE - well, the score takes care of itself. This is the title of a great book by Bill Walsh written long ago, but still timeless as ever.

Mindful focus, deliberate practice, and mindful competition - that "right here, right now" focus that the USOC promotes to all athletes - is seen best measured and seen in the errors in serving. In the chaos of the game, playing up against men who hit faster and harder than those they have seen before - errors and misreads abound. Sue Enquist, 11 time NCAA Champion softball player and coach from UCLA, brilliantly puts her talent and skill as a coach is that her job is simply "to be a relationship counselor between the athletes and their love of the game" - so we each need to be better at celebrating and guiding our players to relish and rejoice in the complete uncertainty of the game. What an amazingly fast, powerful, random, exciting game we get to PLAY. Sometimes we play well, en route to playing even better, but sometimes we don't - but we should never stop playing and competing (remember, competition's latin roots are "to strive together," and need to get better at focusing on the fun, one point at a time.

In the joy of playing and letting the game teach the game, we should see the spirit of a game of tag, and the celebration of a hockey goal, along with the connections to teammates. The uniqueness of our game means

every play ends in a point, each and every time. I so often say that I really don't care about the outcome of the game - for that is out of our control - we have focus on those things one CAN control, serve being one of them - and thus - in countless timeouts - we celebrate hustle and effort and then focus on just this next point. Two sayings you might consider using in your gym that have become my favorites are:

*We can't control if we win or lose, but nobody will ever outhustle us.
Hustle beats talent, when talent does not hustle.*

I recently received a great email from a coach who has been using the fun scoring option we teach in IMPACT of the "Connect Four" scoring/game and getting her players to focus on the end of the game in small points. I think sharing a couple of excerpts here might give you ideas on doing the same. Christine wrote:

The difference this year, is that I reminded the girls in our timeout of our practice games and told them, "this is just a small game to 5 points, and then you can go put the token in the Connect 4 game. I need you to play really hard for only 5 points, it's really that simple....and then you can drop the token." The whole team laughed and realized that this wasn't such a difficult challenge, and plus they are really good at the volleyball version of Connect 4, so it eased their mind I think.

My team is pretty hilarious because they LOVE playing connect 4 in practice. They squeal when the box gets brought out. And we usually play some sort of game where the first team to reach 3 or 5 points first gets to play their colored token. Little did I know that keeping the score low, and only making them play really hard for 5 points would help in this tournament situation when we usually seem to let up.

To the boys playing men, beach juniors playing adults, and to any team challenging themselves by playing teams of higher talent or experience, remember that mistakes are just part of the learning process, so never be afraid of them, just forget about them. Stop giving them any attention by head hanging - for that also empowers the opponents who - due to the uniqueness of our sport - get to see each and every one of their opponent's body languages and post-whistle actions. That play is done, GITOVERIT - and focus on what you can control - this and only this upcoming point.

Serving is such a key to winning at every level and the sooner you start practicing mindful repetitions in practice, worrying only about THIS serve point possibility, and making it go in tough and successfully, the better you get in the match. Stop wasting valuable practice time by serving mindlessly - just serving because it is time to serve. Work to make it be the weapon it really is, your first line of defense, and as it is in your COMPLETE control - be GREAT at it, not just good. Be CONFIDENT in it, the other team should be worried, not you.

Time for some "secrets" of mine in serving, for I love to serve teams off the court and love teaching serving (note, there are more serving thoughts in the players section of the grassroots button):

Your serve should be simple - no step (does an accurate free throw shooter step?).

Your serve should be simple - arm already back ready to strike like a cobra, no hand on the ball stuff.

Your serve should be as simple as possible - even if doing a jump serve or floater. I teach a slide jump float as the first version, with no toss but more hitting a quick set given to yourself, with the hitting arm already back. The slide helps younger players learn the key torque movement naturally and more successfully I have found. Your contact point should be consistent - rigid as a ping-pong paddle, never hitting your fingers, just the rock hard and predictable palm of your hand.

Your rhythm should be two count, no more, for if more, you are getting too complex.

You should be relaxed - including, like a good free throw shooter shows, a full, deep, mindful preparation breath.

You should always aim at flat spaces, never at a person.

And finally - you can "say" in your two count rhythm

1. "You're" - low toss or place, then
2. "In Trouble" (fast swing and strike the ball) - for those opposing passers should be in trouble, each and every time you serve whatever serve option you chose.



Simple is key for great serving, the only "closed" motor program skill we have in our sport - the others are all "open," being determined by other's actions which we must respond to. Gymnasts who do their own closed motor programs - including flips, handstands, splits and spins, while on a 4 inch wide balance beam three feet in the air - with no errors, show what level of errorless performance in risky situations can be achieved. We must serve better to win at any level.

Simple as possible, just like an accurate free throw shooter. Remember, those hoopsters can put eight balls out of ten from 15 feet away into a target that is about two square feet. We stand twice as far away from our target - 30 feet, but how big is our target? About 900 square feet - roughly 450 times larger than they have....and you miss?

One final secret - as serving is so important, I used to teach serving a lot with everyone serving. Now I don't. I am coaching a boy's team at Cody's high school when the season starts, only two players on the team will have ever played before this year. We have to win the "serve-pass war" I write of in a chapter in the Minivolley book (remember, it went up Christmas day in the Grassroots Coaches section). So now, half our kids, not all, serve. The other half pass those live serves as best they can to the strip 5-10 feet off the net. No more "Everybody serve" moments. Half serve, half pass and the next time they switch. Yeah, it really can be a game, servers vs. passers, but right now, I just want the servers to know that "You're -- In Trouble" when they serve, and the passers to see live serves over and over and over again, passing the ball not tight, but ALWAYS off the net. Gotta be consistent and teach positive errors in every phase of learning. Add in "Speed Ball" and "Monarch of the Court," for a third or more of practice, and my practice plan is nearly set... as we guide them to discover the joys playing for the joy of uncertain competition.

By the way, my son read this as I was writing it in the gym today on the laptop. He then went out helped his team beat the host college team in the pool crossover, 15-12, while he hit about .750 and did not miss a serve. So they get to stay up in Men's A for another tournament, a pretty good way to end the month of January 2010. Maybe he learned something from dad....nah, don't kid yourself Kessel, it was just the randomness of the game and his time to shine.

Citius, Altius, Fortius all - and thanks for being a part of our sport.

Joy in Volleyball: July 03, 2009

Today, the USA Junior Olympic Boys' Volleyball Championships here in Atlanta began the first of many National Titles with the finals of the 12-and-under division. This city brings back many memories of helping produce the Indoor Olympic and Paralympic volleyball back in 1996, as well as several Big South events, and tomorrow Centennial Park will be filled with funnel cake and ice cream vendors as the city celebrates the Fourth of July. A chance to see my son compete here in the 18 Open with Front Range, while helping coaches learn new ideas in the science of our sport through a CAP course, is just the icing on the cake.



Watching these youngest teams in playoffs – players, coaches, officials and parents, showed the spirit and passion of simply playing the game for the joy of playing. The hustle, team encouragement, celebrations and anguish – and just the sheer fun in playing was so strong, I told some older teams who were struggling to just swing by those courts and remember why we are all here. I had lunch with Cal Wickens of Pace Bootlegger from NY, whose 7-year-old son is here playing in this youngest division, excited not just to play, but to make new friends and swap jerseys at the end. All over the walkway spaces, kids were playing pepper with sisters and little brothers. I was also amazed at the level of diversity seen on the court playing, including the remarkable variety and colors of hairstyles.

Reid Priddy, Beijing gold medal outside hitter, is here and in addition to signing autographs and posing for countless pictures, he honored the 12-and-under division by handing out all the medals to the top three teams. Reminded me of a rock star appearance with all the flashes, cameras and videos recording the moment. His presence, like that of our USA Team and coaching staff at the Girls' JOs in Miami, has both inspired and motivated countless young players, and we all appreciate these role models coming to these season-ending events.



Then later, outside the CNN Center, the bronze-medal kids were still playing, with siblings, using a small Molten volleyball to play wallball, for the same reason we do sport – for the joy of playing and competing. The Junior Olympic Girls' event in Miami continues their season-ending pursuits of National Champions with almost 800 teams. I caught a red-eye here from Phoenix, where I spent two days with the Eppersons and their staff, along with another 500 teams and coaches at the Volleyball Festival in another celebration of our sport. In

closing, we give thanks to the thousands of RVA coaches, leaders, parents and officials who spend their year before coming here the work it takes to give these Junior Olympians their chance to prove that volleyball is an amazing BOYS sport too...

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 Lodore (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 post below or email me at john.kessel@usav.org

I Love to Watch You Play: November 19, 2011

As my last child winds her way through that last year of high school, somehow juggling five AP classes, two varsity sports with captains practices and road trips, peer counseling, friendships that have endured 3/4th her life on this remarkable planet....I keep thinking on how much I am going to miss watching her play. That has always been my line to the kids after their competitions. *I love to watch you play*, for it is true, and because it stops the coach in me from coaching, and gives them the chance to talk about what they might want to discuss about that contest, and even practice, if anything.

Play...Sword battles in the living room, sidewalk races in front of the house, bunk bed string and pulley communication devices, foam noodle helicopters, cutting down our Christmas tree together, Chutes and Ladders and every other game on the planet earth...volleyball and lacrosse since 4th grade, skiing in the trees, bike ride races, camping and card games, we have played and played and played....

How did I get so lucky to have a daughter like I have, many have asked. One that gets along and who is very close with her brother? I remember a mom at a lunch during a qualifier, watching Mac and Cody interact,

asking....”Do they always get along like this?”....I did not need to answer, they just laughed, said yes and went back to goofing off together.



Looking back, I believe it was a combination of pushing curiosity, rewarding effort over outcome, traveling, sports, good music, friends, and trying things... I also think that my training in biology helped let the risks and randomness of life take place without my constant intervention or worrying. I firmly believe that the explosion of antibacterial products is going to backfire soon, with superbugs that use their faster evolution process to get us sick at a new level. For those new to my blog, I urge you to read www.nationofwimps.com and

www.freerangekids.com to know where I am coming from....

Curiosity, as a single parent, kids fighting, or both crying can overwhelm your capacities....I became VERY good at saying “Wow, would you look at that!” and then asking question about whatever I had redirected their tears towards...It could be anything, the airplane vent or seat table, an ant crawling on a wall, or just a picture never seen before....throw in questions or crazy off the wall stories about said “that” and I generally avoided the tantrums and meltdowns that seemed to plague some of those around me....

Rewarding effort over outcome, was reaffirmed strongly when I read Carol Dweck's Mindset, a book I have mentioned before but why not again...my story there harkens back to elementary school, where Cody and Mac both had team projects due on a Thursday, and when they checked with their other 3 teammates they discovered that no one else had done their part...So with the help of hot cocoa and just being up with them, but not doing any of the project for them, my kids each finished the whole team project by themselves. That meant a 2 and 3 am finish, and one short night of sleep.

On arrival at school, I waited till the kids had gone into their classes, and went in to speak to the principal, a dear friend Nancy Saltzman (just a Milliken National Principal of the Year award winner, and fellow CC classmate), to ask for her help in getting the kids 'homework for the next day, without alerting the kids. That night, after the kids went to bed a bit earlier than usual, I pack our winter clothes and ski gear into the back of my Yukon. The next morning, we headed to school as usual, only to "miss" the exit, and then...a story from dad on how proud I was of the hard work they had done 2 nights ago, and that we were skipping school and headed skiing together, homework in hand for the weekend of course, and without any care about the grade, yet unknown, their projects might receive.

That triggered one of my US Paralympic cohorts, Cindy to story tell about the time she went outside her comfort zone as a parent. With her 16 year old son, she headed to three weeks in Europe, using the words "YOU PLAN, I PAY, WE PLAY". Her son's "planning" was mostly looking at a train station departure board, and, thanks to Euro rail passes, adventuring to a new city and country, without a hotel or real plans at the next stop. I reminded me of one of my favorite Olympic stories...where Cody, Mac and I were watching the 2002 Winter Olympics Opening Ceremonies, and I said "Wouldn't that be fun, to go to the Olympics together someday..." Cody then solemnly said, holding my face and looking at me intently..."Dad, that would be the single most exciting thing in my life..." Sigh. A phone call to the Richards family in Provo (who were going to be in Las Vegas for the President's Day Tourney and without tickets, but with a place to stay at no charge, we adventured to Utah, missing just two days of school. Driving in, we saw a sign to the Olympic hockey venue, and just went to look at it, only to find out a double header was just about to start...we waited till the end of the first period, made a more than half price offer to a Swede with tickets in hand he was trying to sell (it goes better when kids come up looking plaintively with cash in hand), and caught two great games at well below ticket face value cost... Bought tickets off the street for cross country skiing and got lucky again, catching two events for the price of one, as a day's event were rescheduled to that same day and ticket. So here are my kids with the 50K team relay guy from Japan, whose ski pole snapped at the start, and who skied the whole first lap with just one pole...and still almost made the medals....That was yet another story about effort over outcome that sport told my kids without me having to say a word...

Music and travel – While they often went hand in hand, again it has been an eclectic mix they have experienced together – over 30 states, including driving and camping way north of the Arctic Circle on the Alaskan Pipeline. They play volleyball up there, based in Coldfoot, Alaska, where the principal stunned me by noting their one school district is 62,000 square miles... They have played volleyball and gone to schools in Mexico, Canada, Egypt and Fiji – hanging out with the locals so much they would say they did not feel like tourists, but as if they lived there. Most of these trips, east to west coast, have been by car ([CLICK HERE for my collection](#)) and thus music is also woven in to those thousands of hours on the road. I have over 100 music DVDs, as I wanted the kids to SEE the performers I liked and listened to, when possible. Throw in the change in technology and some iPods, and you have a lot of song lyrics and musicians my kids know well.

And friends? There is where they have made good choices, with a bit of parental guidance along the way. Looking back, I think my taking my lunch break to do school recess, so the teachers could meet over lunch, was a fortunate but impactful part of friendship counseling and guidance. It also was a pretty good workout, keeping

10 different swingers flying high, as once you did the tenth, swings number one and two were chanting “Mr. Kessel, Mr. Kessel” just to make sure they got reflowed into the skies. I recently learned a good teaching idea on bullying/mean friends that I want to share. Tell the kids to take a nice clean sheet of paper, and to be mean to it...bully it...crumple it up...and then tell them to flatten the paper back to “new”.... I will miss the kids’ friends coming over to the house for after school snacks, homework sessions and sleepovers, and hope that my kids can keep their friendships alive as long as I have been able to with my schoolmates...

So if you have young kids in your family now, a strong suggestion is simply to hold your kid’s hand as often as possible, as there will come a time they don’t want to... I still am lucky enough to hold my daughters hand or arm as the case may be as her homecoming court escort. Still, those days of walking to and from the school yard with your child in hand (yes, a subtle reminder to visit www.childinhand.org and help our volley outreaches there...) are memories that last a lifetime. And...to Mac, in advance of this final run to a championship, I just sent her one of my very favorite Paul Simon songs, that even made the *Rolling Stone* ‘s Top 500 songs of all-time list... Go listen to “Father and Daughter” and you might make it a favorite too...

The story of Mac’s high school final season ends well...They ran into crosstown rival Coronado again in pool play and in the finals, along with some good teams like Silver Creek, Durango, and Windsor along the way...and defeated them all 3-0. Seeing her play with her friends and teammates one last time and win it all en route to a 31-0 season was wonderful. Seeing them doing the first match of the morning all division Chicken Dance was almost as good as watching the dogpile on captain Janae at the end. Coach Dave Barkley noted in the newspaper how much the kids just love to play and compete. So true. They love to play. MaxPreps ranks them in the top 100 in the nation, and that is fitting – she and her teammates worked hard and long for their fourth straight title...and now the adventure at the collegiate level begins...I am missing the school assembly honoring the team, as I am in Little Rock Arkansas, speaking at the state ArkAHPERD convention, and doing a clinic for the Delta Region, which is so capably and creatively run by Joe and Joanie Williams. Such is life as the sole provider, but then again, I had already seen her play...and i loved it...



To My Amazing Daughter – Performance IS Variable: September 30, 2011

Last night was one of those powerful times where parenting and sports collide. I am going to get a bit personal here, as the impact moment happened to my daughter's team and my daughter, who I am also writing to in this specific blog.

A bit of background, so my readers who do not know of my daughter, do know a bit more. McKenzie, or Mac to most friends, is my only daughter. I have been raising her and her only brother, Cody, since 1996 as a single father. She was cut from her club volleyball team in the next season, several years back, for being too short (as she stood there in her size 11 shoes) and her selected teammates rose up against the cut and she was added back. She has played middle, outside, serving specialist and libero – and would be second tallest on that former team now. She also is a 4 year varsity player in lacrosse, tied for the #1 rank in her class, and was voted by her peers Junior Class princess at last year's spring prom and to homecoming court this senior year. She is the best sibling any brother could have (tho in our family we would also note she is the worst, being the only...), and is missing her bro, who is second tallest on his team too – playing D1 at Princeton for the wonderful Sam Shweisky. Thank gosh for Skype and Apple FaceTime. This week she missed school and practice struggling with a bad eye condition, but spoke yesterday at a luncheon to the city Rotary Club as one of the top kids at her high school. Oh yeah, she is VP of the Interact club, is taking 5 AP classes in her senior year, and is head of the Peer Counseling program on campus. Her school volleyball team is currently 12-0 and working hard to win their fourth straight state title in volleyball.

So that said, last night her school dropped their first set in about 2 years, to a 4A team. Not match, just a game. Sure, the starting setter, a great player headed to a Division 1 college up the road, was out with a concussion that happened at the very end of practice the day before. The fact is, the team played poorly in game one, including Mac. 9-25. So the coach, the very experienced David Barkley, changed the line up, changing to a third setter, and younger players from the bench. They played well, the team won 3-1, and the winning streak remained intact, as she and a fellow senior sat on the bench. Versions of this story are repeated millions of time in sport, and I just wanted to share my thoughts shared with her since then in the hopes it might help other parents and players.

Remember to focus on what you can control

That remains after each match, the next practice, not the fact that you were benched; the next point – not that you were aced, or hit out. Those errors are part of learning this crazy, non-stop ball flying, no chance to hold onto the darn ball sport. This is a game, to be PLAYED, so enjoy and learn from it from the bench, or on the court, as points go for or against you. Remember recess, and after school, when you played, and did not worry about riding the pines. Play without fear, play with the joy of the game. Your spirit when you play is in your control, no one else's. A bad game does not define you, it simply reminds you that there is more work to be done as you keep raising your average and return to practice.

Reread my Article Splinter Siblings

Every one of those points about how to stay on the bench, you have worked hard to never do, something to be very proud of.

http://www.teamusa.org/~media/USA_Volleyball/Documents/Resources/Players/SplinterSiblings1212.pdf

Stay the Course of Process Over Outcome

Read and read again, Rob Browning's great piece on this important principle

<http://goldmedalsquared.com/blog/2011/09/staying-the-course-process-over-outcome/>

- For I believe in you, far more than you may sometimes realize. . Peter Vint, our USOC Director of High Performance, sent me this response....

Damn you, Kessel. I'm trying to get "real work" done and you keep sending me all these exceptionally exceptional pieces to read. This is a quick, easy and powerful read. So timely too for me as I've been encountering this scenario on both personal and professional levels. I want to take this opportunity to point out how deeply this "bad night" concept ties to our ongoing discussions of skill acquisition, performance variability, and random outcomes.

Rob writes, "We still aren't sure exactly why we played so poorly..."

*Let's not forget that sometimes, the very real answer to such an outcome (or the converse) is "because performance **IS** variable".*

We can all work to make the average better. We can all work to be more consistent and therefore less variable in our best and/or mean performances. But sometimes, once in a while, we will have right tail or left tail performances due to nothing other than performance variability and the laws of probability. Love it or hate it, it's the reality in which we all work and play.

*I loved reading the way Rob and his team dealt with this and resumed their focus on the **PROCESS OF EXCELLENCE**. "...we are staying the course. We are as invested in the **process of excellence** now as we were before...". And, just between you and me, I'll admit that after reading the last line I gave a hearty fist pump and a "Hell yeah!!"*

Go get em, Rob! I BELIEVE TOO!!!

This it too good to keep to yourself. Pass it on!

Peter

Re-read my Blogs on Stats for Parents and Players and Stuff Happens

Remember that the whole concept of an average means about half the time you are going to be playing below your average is covered in detail - <http://www.teamusa.org/USA-Volleyball/Features/2011/February/23/Stats-for-Parents-and-Players.aspx> and <http://www.teamusa.org/USA-Volleyball/Features/2010/March/01/Stuff-Happens.aspx> Last nite, as part of my role as a parent, you and I watched a short piece on the collapse of both the Red Sox and the Braves in baseball this same week. Those guys are paid millions and still had below average performances at the season's end, at a historic level. Performance is variable and caca occurs.

Keep Your Exuberance...Let Your Spirit Shine.

Remember when you used to say – He/She made me mad, and I worked hard to get you to understand that, no she/he did not, you let yourself become angry. It is in your control. You are way more resilient than you might realize, for you are much, much more than just a volleyball player. Reread this blog (dang dad, do I HAVE to read so much?...yes, for we are learning still...) <http://www.teamusa.org/USA-Volleyball/Features/2011/February/07/Creating-and-Training-Resilient-Athletes.aspx>

Learn From the Great Ones

Last week I got to host a webinar on 1984 Olympic Gold medalist Aldis Berzins as part of our USA Volleyball Great Player Webinar series. Aldis spoke wonderfully about his favorite quote by Theodore Roosevelt given in Paris in 1910. You can watch the whole webinar at <http://www.teamusa.org/USA-Volleyball/Grassroots/Free-Webinars.aspx> and listen to Aldis read this, along with his outlook on when he made errors, thinking that the server got lucky, and it would not happen again. One of my favorite parts was where he spoke about playing in Brazil, and who knows how many thousands were chanting “BRA-SIL...BRA-SIL” and that Aldis simply changed their chant he was hearing to “BER-ZINS...BER-ZINS” --- There is a lesson there, and in his favorite quote:

“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 short again and again; because there is not effort without error and shortcomings; but who does actually strive to do the deed; who knows the great enthusiasm, the great devotion, who spends himself in 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 know neither victory or defeat.”

And when time allows, revisit all the other helpful thoughts and ideas for players at:
<http://www.teamusa.org/USA-Volleyball/Grassroots/Players.aspx>

So my dear child, know that...

I love to watch you play....

You are developing into an amazing leader...

You are putting in the effort and work to be the best player you can be...and

I believe in you...no matter whether you play below your average or above it, win, lose or even draw...

Love Dad

PostScript....the next match, four days later, was against a larger school, cross town rival who is listed as #1 in the city in 5A, state semifinalists the last two years. Mac passed 25 of 27 successes on target, and her team won 3-0, leading the local paper to note, who is #1 in the city is no longer in doubt. Ah the randomness of sport and playing this challenging game...

Postscript #2. Since this was written, Team Cheyenne has continued its run....leading wonderfully to a League championship showdown of two undefeated teams, 18-0 Plains division champion Coronado vs. 18-0 Mountain Division champion Cheyenne. The atmosphere was the best of high school sports - and you can see the result in this fun and spirited 2 minute clip (after the obligatory advert)...

<http://www.gazettepreps.com/articles/coronado-4775-mountain-huffman.html>

Guest Blog – Winning the Lottery: June 15, 2011

Sometimes I get an email that just seems a waste to let remain in my email folder, but instead be shared. This story by Dennis Belaire, who is busy growing as a coach by giving back to USA Volleyball through work with our USAV Sports United Grant for the 6 NORCECA nations and a lot of YMCA outreach programming, beyond that of just “his club,” is one of those emails. Thanks to Dennis and Dale for their willingness to give back to the sport.

The Skill Ignition Volleyball Club (in the Lakeshore Region under the direction of Club Director, Lori Higgins) recently held its 2nd Annual Banquet. This banquet is held to recognize the accomplishments of our athletes. Nearly 200 well dressed people were in attendance. We ask the athletes and coaches alike to “gussy” up so we can get to see each other in something more fitting than the usual sweaty gym clothes.

Our guest speaker was the Father of one of our athletes. This family has been a part of our volleyball club since its inception last year. To give you some basic background information, Brooke Essenmacher played for my 12U team last season and was a precocious child who wanted to master her overhand serve. Her lack of serving skills consumed this young athlete and, during the course of the entire season, I was unable to get her comfortable enough to serve overhand consistently.

As Mr. Essenmacher (Dale) got up to speak, I knew we had given him little direction other than suggesting he speak about the two-year experience his family had with the club. We could have asked many other parents to speak, but, Mr. Essenmacher, was really our 1st and only choice.

He started his speech by shocking the audience in stating that his family happened to get very lucky in the fall of 2009 when they won the lottery! He went on to say that, like most families, winning the lottery drastically changed their lives forever.

He continued by explaining they hadn't won the lottery by stopping at a local establishment and buying a lottery ticket. Their family's lottery ticket, came to them in the form of an 8 ½ x 11 sheet of paper they were handed following the final volleyball game that Brooke participated in with the Parks and Recreation program in their hometown. Although just curious at this point, the Essenmacher family decided to show up at our evaluation process to find out where their daughter fit when matched up against girls her age in a sport she liked to play.

At the evaluation process, Brooke (and her parents) knew she wasn't the best player there but she wasn't the worst player either. She was awarded a spot on the 12U team that I was coaching, however they knew she had a battle ahead of her.

According to Mr. Essenmacher, although unaware at the time, this was when their lottery ticket turned out to be a winner. He went on to explain Brooke's season was filled with enormous struggles because she was unable to master her overhand serve. He described the tear-filled rides home from practice and the sleepless nights her daughter would experience because she felt like she was letting her team down.

I had a few lengthy conversations with the Essenmacher's followed up by emails to them and to Brooke herself during these struggling times. They recognized then and there that the volleyball club was truly vested in making **every** kid in the program into better *people* by helping to make them feel better about themselves. Mr. Essenmacher told the crowd that the support his family got and, more importantly, Brooke received from her coach, me, during these emotional and trying times is when they cashed in their *winnings* from that lottery ticket.

He then looked right at me and thanked me for believing in his daughter and being there for her. This was emphasized further by Mr. Essenmacher, at that moment, when he told the entire 200 people in the audience that I (I still cannot believe he credited me!) saved this young lady's sports career! As his lower lip quivered, mine did too. I got up and walked over to him, shook his hand, and swallowed him in a great big hug! I told him that I loved him and the entire Essenmacher family. And he told me that they loved me as well. I sat back down with a few tears in my eyes and, as a matter of fact, as I sit here writing this today, the tears have returned.

Mr. Essenmacher continued by saying that her 7th grade grade Middle School volleyball happened to be coached by one of the coaches from the club (Coach Lori Higgins and lottery winning ticket #2). He then went on to explain that this season is when they caught lightning in a bottle a 3rd time. Not only did Coach Rich (Cadicamo) finally succeed in getting Brooke to master her overhand serve, she also, as a result of Rich's coaching, developed a level of confidence she will carry with her throughout her entire life!

Brooke played an instrumental role in her team winning Gold at one tournament this season, Mr. Essenmacher told us, when she took her team from down by 3-4 points (around 19 or 20 to 23), to win. She served her team to victory and she ACE served their opponents for match point. So, Brooke has come full circle. He thanked each of us coaches, the club, and her team mates for her accomplishments.

This family, this wonderful and beautiful family, gave **me** (of all people, me) so much credit for being such a positive influence in their lives. I am cognizant of the impact I have on athletes, but the depth of impact I've had on this incredible family amazes me. I didn't know I had THIS much impact and it truly humbles me.

I have also found out, the Essenmacher's have printed out the emails I wrote to them and to Brooke and have placed them into Brooke's volleyball scrapbook. I've somehow managed to touch this family with such enormity it has made me realize once again how important the role a coach plays in the lives of not only the athletes they coach, but also, the families of the athletes we coach. I was, and still am, deeply touched by Mr. Essenmacher's words.

Which brings me back to USA Volleyball and the training and education I've received over the years. The information I've been given during my training has profoundly changed me, not just as a coach, but as a person. As I got more training, the training from USA Volleyball shaped me, then reshaped me. I am certainly not the same coach I was before I got IMPACT certified in 2004; and I am certainly not the same coach I was just few short months ago before I went to CAP III training in COS.

To the Essenmacher's, thank you for giving me such an incredible gift; that story about Brooke. To USA Volleyball, thank you for the opportunities I've been afforded over the years. Diana Cole, and her staff at USA Volleyball are to be commended for what they've done for countless others. I know I've been transformed and I owe that transformation to their tireless efforts. From IMPACT through CAP III, I know that all of that training is what placed me in a position to have such an *impact* on this young athlete.

Dennis Belaire - dennis.vball@gmail.com

Skill Ignition Volleyball Club

12U S1 Dynamite Head Coach

USA Volleyball Certified CAP Level III Volleyball Coach

MHSAA Certified Volleyball Official

PAVO Certified College Volleyball Line Judge

Ohana & Play: December 31, 2010

Happy New Year everyone...I am thinking about the chance to give young players a love of the game is perhaps the most important job of any coach along the path of each athlete's development. This fostering of passion for volleyball is made easy by the very nature of this game, its amazing uniquenesses and its position as the ultimate team sport. So when a child begins to play, it also means the family begins to discover those same qualities, and the best coaches take the time to teach both the child and the parents. The USA Volleyball Parents as Partners Initiative is a new part of helping USAV Junior Volleyball clubs promote this discovery process. Go to <http://promiseofgoodsports.org/> to learn how you can bring this training to your program. The material prepared to help parents and players connect, including a long standing tradition in my coaching of having the kids teach skills and cheer the parents in a "game" are very valuable to helping parents be better partners to your program. More than one older junior player has said at the end of this special parent training session – "That was the best volleyball time of my life..." It really can be that impactful to the team around the team.

Family... No matter where I travel in this world, I cross paths with families who are making a difference in our sport. In August in Bolivia, one of my host families owned a dedicated volleyball facility, five indoor and six more outdoor courts, and bought 8,000 volleyballs to give away to teachers and programs growing the sport in the area of Cochabamba. Mom, dad, and all their children played and now either coached or were doing some sort of volleyball leadership work.

The Epperson family, founders of [the Volleyball Festival](#), have been making family a highest priority in every experience and event they are involved in. If your team is looking for a season ending event beyond the USAV Nationals, you can't go wrong taking your girls (the event is not a boy's competition) to Phoenix after school finals have ended for all our states, and joining over 500 other teams in a long standing family run and focused celebration of our sport.

Taylor Storch's family...this family sets a new standard for how to make the best from a tragedy that no parent wishes to experience. For those who have not heard of this remarkable volleyball family from Texas, the short story is that they lost their 13 year old daughter in a ski accident right after attending the Colorado Crossroads qualifier this year, and donated all her organs. Since then, they have campaigned tirelessly for organ donations, setting up their own website - [Taylor's Gift](#) - while her former JO club has done some wonderful things as well. Perhaps one of the most moving moments I have seen on television occurred this year when her parents visited the donor recipient of Taylor's heart, and listened to it beat with a stethoscope... I still tear up even just writing about it...

The Sato and Oden families...each putting multiple members on Olympic teams, Kim-Elaina-Bev Oden and Liane and Eric Sato, along with brother Gary who assistant coached our men's gold 1988 team, and has returned to give back to the sport coaching the national team again now towards London 2012. What great, child empowering parents these two families demonstrated from the start of their children's junior volleyball career to the pinnacles they reached.

The Van Zweiten Family – FIVB beach players at senior and junior and youth world competition levels. Home court of Phil Dalhausser. How can I help my kids get better indoors they asked me long ago. My answer remains the same to all - Build a court in your backyard - in their case a lighted SAND court, since they live next to the beach in Florida...and gold medalists blossom. Oh, any yes, sons who are named Mr. Florida Volleyball for indoor high school too. In your free time, travel to Africa and use volleyball to help kids and families become healthier and happier people. Those are the Van Z's

We are Family... last month the 1980 team returned here to Colorado Springs to be inducted into the Sports Hall of Fame. Over half the team showed up, including Debbie Green our 5' 4" giant of a setter who returned after the boycotted Olympics to set our USA women to silver in 1984, Captain Debbie Landredth Brown who at 5'7" led the team both on and off the court and now gives back to the sport coaching at Notre Dame, and Terry Place Brandel, who flew over from Germany where she has been living and coaching for decades. This group's theme song was always Sister Sledge's "We Are Family..." as they bonded in being world ambassadors and the number one team in the world, only to see a governmental decision take away their right to play. So many of the team members are coaching collegiately still giving back to the sport. USA Volleyball gave each of them a current national team Mizuno uniform with their 1980 last name on the back, which prompted huge smiles, as these USA athletes had played in an era where the only name on the back of your uniform was USA...

I live in Colorado, where I can enjoy the seasons. My father roomed in college with a fellow many skiers know - the great ski filmmaker Warren Miller... Today it is below zero, fresh snow on the ground and I am watching an amazing film about family - **The Edge of Never** - where a young son goes to ski the same run in the mountains of Chamonix which claimed his father - and he is being taught and shown how to do it - in whole method, not part mind you - how to ski the steep by none other than the father of steep skiing, Anselme Baud - just a year after Anselme lost his own son on the same mountain when a serac broke off killed his 24 year old son. It is a powerful film about teaching and family across the ages - and has a GREAT soundtrack too. I have skied all my life, as have Cody and McKenzie, and we are just back from skiing with extended family in the Vail valley. This is the same valley where in the summer I have played Father Daughter or Father Son volleyball doubles on Father's Days. The same area where we ski Aspen, then I play with my son, then against my son, in the Motherlode, a volleyball family town and event that I have been playing in or visiting since winning in 1974. A decade ago a wise coach from Iowa brought some 6-8th graders to this event...to play doubles in advance of their high school careers, and I got a chance to talk to them about the love of the game. This year my daughter played against those same players, now in their 20s, who continue to play after college - something we all can measure our impact on our players by - how many keep playing this sport for a lifetime.

Perhaps no greater place where family matters is seen in Hawaii - where Ohana reigns along with the Outrigger Canoe Club (OCC) - Do you realize NINE Olympians hail from the Ohana state by learning and playing at just one small club? A club that does not recruit as it is a members only club with a long waiting list, but where the culture of play and passion for the game gives all ages the chance to thrive and shine. OCC's kids' court sits beside the two regular courts, a court that is smaller, with a lower net, but right next to the court where the adults play and mentor by doing. It is a culture of family in the Pacific, where aunts and uncles play and teach even the youngest of nieces and nephews, giving them a love of the game through playing. Then there are huge clubs who recruit constantly yet have had no players reach the Olympic level - So, as oft noted, the coach who knows why beats the coach who knows how, I have taken a look at the "secrets" of the Outrigger family.

1. They play. Nuff said.
2. They start with and play a lot of doubles. Many indoor clubs see this as a threat - what, no coaches? You can pick up bad "habits" - your "technique" will suffer. Usually this is heard from coaches who have not played doubles volleyball - they come from other sport backgrounds, never even played volleyball, or only have an indoor focus, and they simply do not have a clue to what wonderful things can come from playing outdoor doubles.
3. They model the spirit, attitude and skills of adult players, not solely junior players
4. They are family - with father and mothers playing with sons and daughters, aunties and uncles playing with nieces and nephews, and friends playing with family.

5. They don't recruit – they develop the players they have to be the best they can be.

More and more on the mainland we see clubs rise to high rankings largely due to their year round recruiting of the best players in their area. It is a fascinating process to see these recruiters – not really coaches – in action, “signing” players up with promises of volleyball glory, well ahead of any tryout opportunity those clubs who actually do tryouts can make happen. It is the American way, yet those families who put their child into such programs often find out that once their daughter is not tall enough for such programs, they are tossed aside and ignored, despite what contributions they may have made over time. Take time to know the PEOPLE who lead the programs you are looking at, not the club size or promises they might make.

These larger recruiting clubs often systematize as well, reminding me of the great soccer coach quote that “to systematize is to sterilize.” You see the value of play lost as the “value” of instructor dominated training is promoted - where too often the coach is the central figure, not the players who should be being empowered. Deliberate practice comes from within, not the demands of a coach. We see that kid's hopscotch and tag games have been replaced by speed ladders and sprints...where someone can make money by selling you a “method” even if it is not founded on motor learning principles. Jumping over anything you can jump over is being replaced by official jumping hurdles... We need more free play time, on and off the court, more “street volleyball” as doubles at the OCC shows works, more warm up with simple games to play – even with the game of Four Square – including wonderful head fakes and deception, spin shots, winners stay on lessons of life...Remember – we want to train GAME-like – not DRILL-like. You simply need to go from simple games to more complex. It really is that simple and is based on principles and science as all things we do in our sport should be...

I am going to go stay on my family theme and remember the delightful lessons of the importance of family as seen in Lilo and Stitch again, and watch it tonight on New Year's Eve. If not seen in awhile, I suggest you get your team together and share it....

You know, someone said I am a work-aholic, as 7 days a week i am working to grow the game...I want to clarify that, thanks to TED.com, I know now I am a work-a-frolic, and thankful to be doing what I love to do. So go out and thrive, and to those who give you such “Criticism Resistance, Axxholes and Pressure,” simply smile and say, have a good day, for I chose to.

In closing, I want to share a quote I am going to teach my 14er team which begins regional USAV tournament play in two weeks – I will not be courtside, as I will be in San Diego teaching the great Starlings USA Volleyball family, some 50 clubs strong, at their National Directors Convention, as we do a CAP course for the coaches and directors from all over the USA. They too will hear this quote, as Dutch Meyer said something to the effect of ***“We will fight them until hell freezes over...then we will fight them on the ice.”*** I hope to instill relentless pursuit and joyful unending competitive spirit into my player's hearts, and such a quote is part of that attitude...

Let us know how we can help you grow the game, as a member of the USA Volleyball family. Email me at john.kessel@usav.org anytime. Some great things are in store for 2011 which you will soon be hearing about. Again, happy new year everyone!

Volleyball and Fly Fishing: July 1, 2009

I got a new Orvis Helios 3wt recently. Made from the same carbon fiber they use on the Apache helicopters, it is feather light at 1.75 ounces total, and strong as heck, for casting into the afternoon winds along my favorite little streams. The science of technology amazes me, yet in our sport it remains the ball and you versus gravity...Still, look soon to see linejudges being assisted at the international level by the same technology that is used in tennis, to confirm if a ball is in or out...



A gym is a gym is a gym the world around - but when you get out on to a stream in the country or state you are helping, you see the real world. I have been fortunate to catch nature's dumbest animal, the trout (just making sure you know how dumb I am too), in Australia (both the Snow River and Tasmania), New Zealand (where 17 year old Hugh McCutcheon came up and said "Mr. Kessel, I want to come to America and play volleyball, they said you can help me...back in the late 1980s), Ireland, Italy, China, Russia and all over the USA. It is catch and release of course, unless my hosts deserve a fresh trout meal cooked.

The science of sport - we are working hard through CAP, IMPACT, High Performance clinics and training to bring these facts to all. It is our culture we are up against in so many ways, of coach controlled, progressions and more. Thirty years ago, in Fly Fishing magazine (Aug 79), Dave Engerbretson wrote one of my favorite articles about teaching of all time, called "Parents, Kids & Fly Rods." He sets several great "rules" for teaching youth, here is how he leads up to the first one.

Teaching your own child to fish would seem to be a very simple and natural thing. It's no big deal: "Come on, son. Let's go fishin'." But don't be misled! Whether or not you end up with a lifelong fishing partner may well depend upon how you respond to the innocent question, "Daddy, will you teach me how to fly-fish?"

While the question may be innocent, it is significant because it indicates that the child has an interest in learning the sport. Normally, of course, this is no problem - kids love to fish. But occasionally an over-anxious parent will attempt to push a child into the activity before the desire is there, and this is almost guaranteed to cause problems. When pushed, the child will be a difficult student at best, and at worst he'll be completely turned off by the whole thing.

A better approach is to relax and let nature take its course. The exposure that your child has to the sport as you tinker with your tackle, tie flies and practice casting on the lawn should eventually pique his natural curiosity, and he'll probably be eager to try it. So - the first rule is: Don't push the subject, but wait until the interest is there.

Then he shows why we should spike and play first and often with young kids - when he writes..." *When taking the first fishing trip, there must be one primary consideration - do whatever you can to guarantee that the kids will catch fish! Take them to an easy stream, let them catch little, stocked fish, or go bluegill fishing, but if at all possible make sure they're successful. Nothing generates excitement like a fish on the end of the line, and nothing produces disinterest and boredom more quickly than a long day with no action."*

So decades ago I sent this very article to one of the people who has helped USA Volleyball win more international and Olympic medals than maybe any other person in our sport, Dr. Carl McGown from BYU. His clinics and books are the best in the world IMHO (CAP I uses his book [Coaching Volleyball](#) as our textbook), and in his book, [The Science of Coaching Volleyball](#) references then paraphrases this article to make these ideas apply to volleyball. McGown writes:

"Remember, too, that children learn best by imitation; that is, by watching and doing, rather than by long, involved, technical explanations. A discussion of horizontal momentum, optimum jumping angles, force conversion and so on could as well be given in a foreign language for all the good it will do most spikers. The majority of instructors talk too much. Show them what to do. Even the simplest jump is made up of many components, and it is usually a mistake to try to emphasize all of these at one time. A beginner cannot mentally concentrate upon timing, the footwork, the jump, the arm-swing, ball placement, the contact, and the recovery simultaneously. Therefore, after the child has been given a general introduction to spiking, it is best to concentrate on only one component at a time. For example, have the child do a complete spike, but concentrate only on the footwork at the end of the approach."

Gee, all this from Fly Fishing...So some pictures at the end to show how fishing teaches fishing as does the game teaches the game and for us all, the circle of life...my dad when he was 6...me when I was 4...me getting out of the cabins while at the Arizona RVA Staff and Leadership meetings near Sedona, and my son Cody...and the last shot? Wiz Bachman McCutcheon, before she met Hugh, when I took the A2 team fly fishing on the Arkansas River, so they too could get out of the gym.... I will let Dave Egerbretson close this blog as he closed his article...

Yes, we teach them many things besides how to catch fish when we take our children fishing. They learn our philosophy and our attitudes about nature, conservation, streamside etiquette, other people and life itself. We may not even be fully aware that we are teaching these very important concepts. But we are. We teach them by our actions, which speak at least as loud as our words. In fact, it's quite likely that what we do and how we do it will be remembered after the words we have spoken are long forgotten.

The teaching of our children is an awesome responsibility and must not be taken too lightly. For in our children lies the future of clean air and water, wild fish, and the sport of fly-fishing.

Hope you have a great summer, on the court, but also off of it, and maybe on some great stream or lake you can get away to and enjoy - and in the performance vs. outcome part of our science of sport - remember you are going fly FISHING, not fly CATCHING, unless you are taking beginners out to "hook them" to the sport...

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Father's Day and Volleyball: June 26, 2009

My father was my role model in countless ways, and I have done my best raising my kids as a single dad to follow in his World War II veteran footsteps. Fly Fishing, backpacking, skiing, and more, my kids have also done. It may also come as no surprise that both my kids love to play volleyball - but this comes from my dad, who is pictured below, back in the 50's, playing doubles where we spent our summers in Emerald Bay, California.

So the grow the game ideas I again throw out to each of you here, is to create a Father's day tournament of your own next year. While you are at it, create a Mother's day tourney too in May, weather permitting. Why not also have an evening or weekend afternoon early in the season where your players teach their parents the game they are learning. Create a Coed league of fours where mom, dad, daughter and a friend play. This lifetime sport has so many fun ways to get kids to play WITH their parents, not just be watched by their parents....

This past weekend, the 37th Annual King of the Mountain Doubles tournament was held in Vail Colorado. I have been playing in it since the beginning, and almost a decade ago, helped add the Father Son/Father Daughter divisions that just run Sunday, as the event is always held on Father's day weekend.

Friday began with a clinic for kids of all ages, to explain the rule differences, and play several hours of doubles in advance of the Mountain Open stop of the Junior Beach Tour. Saturday was competition for both boys and girls, for over 60 teams. Lighting came in, sounding the alarms on the nearby golf courses and tennis courts, and play was halted for hours, as the rains fell - and the Girls 18 and 16 divisions, the largest playoff groups, postponed their play until the next day. The rest of the Jr Olympic Beach divisions had either finished ahead of the storms or played later that evening to finish up, as the next day was....Father Son/Daughter competition. We adjusted letting some Father's hold off on their matches with their daughters, if those daughters were finishing out their Mtn Open playoff matches.



In the event, Dads only serve dads, kids can serve anyone, and at the lower age levels, the dads work hard to spike only at the other Dad's half the court. The rules on calling lifts are loosened for the unskilled fathers, so the play continues, just as long as it is safe. When a dad has both genders, some dads are gluttons for punishment, and play in both divisions, with the pool groups just adapting so the dad can do both. The rules also allow for the younger player to play up and sub in freely, like a libero, with their other sibling(s). A girl can play in the Father Son division in the age group just as long as she is not older than the age group (boy/girl paternal twins have played), while a boy must be two years younger than the Father Daughter age division in order to play as a team of three (or more, just as long as all the kids are younger).

The event "continues" through the start of the week, as you get the hear from the father's who are so darn sore....i am a human question mark on Monday, or as Heath Hoke said last year (he is en route to Worlds with Youth team to Thailand and could not play with his daughter this time) - I got to the office door at 8 am, but could not make it upstairs to my office until noon...

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> 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 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

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. Volleyball Self Set
 - [Click here](#)
4. Volleyball Self Set #2
 - [Click here](#)
5. Special Awareness Training – Super Spike Competition at BYU
 - [Click here](#)
6. Amazing Animated Optical Illusion
 - [Click here](#)
7. Mind Tricks
 - [Click here](#)
8. 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 nite 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 sweatshirt. 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. Hmmmmm...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 sportscar, 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 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 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=wgi4FJpEI04>

Playing on Copacabanabeach Brasil with the guys – 2011

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 7th 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...

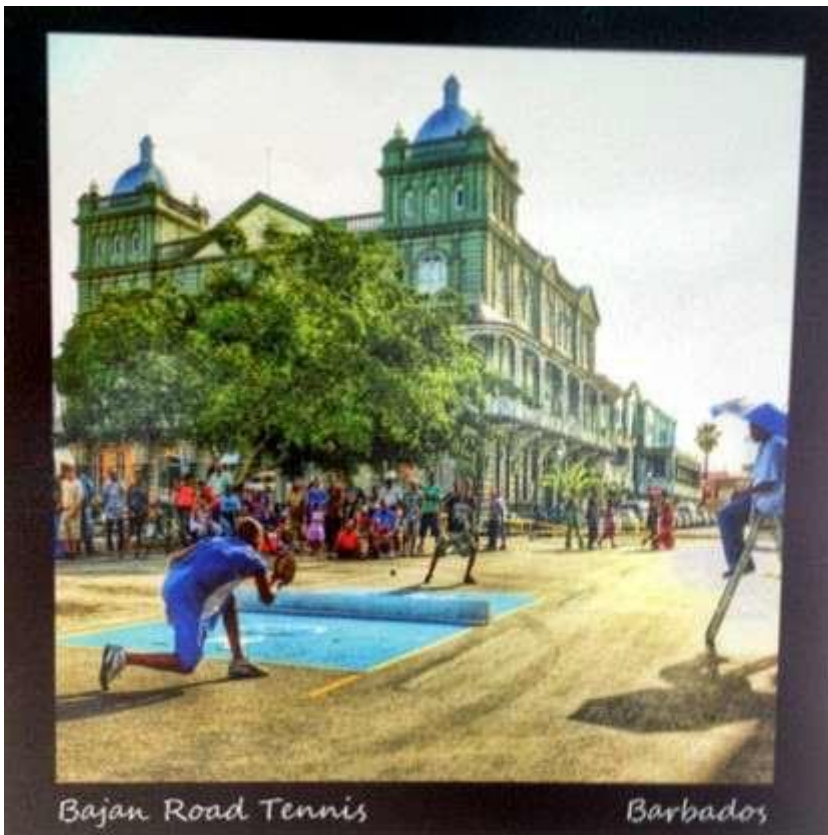


It's too bad I don't like coconuts as there are stands everywhere including lots of coconut water options. They used to be known as British Hondurans so they of course drive on the "other side" of the road and so you walk up to the passenger side only be asked if you were offering to drive.... There 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 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 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 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=2IIYQqrmZwA> 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 40th...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?



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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 - 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: By John Kessel | 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. McKenzie 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), 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

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) 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 5th 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 than 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 supposed to *Head east on Ankunftbogen toward Abflugbogen... Ankunftbogen 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-Wurtttemberg” has Heidelberg High School's Carrie Smith on the cover, attacking, during a match against Ansbach 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 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/Gravity – 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 11th...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

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

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

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=tey6oVuEAto>

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

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=5chwq2ESwXc>

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 16th 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 your help in growing the game together and let us know of other stories to share....john.kessel@usav.org

<http://www.teamusa.org/USA-Volleyball/Grassroots/Best-Practices>

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

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 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

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.michaeltoten.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 live!

<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>



May the force be with you...

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 <http://starlings.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.

Growing Through our 3rd 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 and progressing through our current partnership with [Team USA](#) 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 22nd 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 bronze medal in Olympic competition). Carl was BYU's head coach for two NCAA Men's titles, and was a professor of 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 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, after 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 sitting 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, 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 8th 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 5th 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 it [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 6th 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 4th 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 32nd 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 8th. 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 7th 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 7-8th 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 (8th grade) and #2 (7th 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 7th 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

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, 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 42nd 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 RIMMER* 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

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

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](#) 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

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 SPRINTED 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

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

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

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

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&adxnml=1&scp=3&adxnmlx=1251817418-HMFwI61v8PRKYxjQb64yfA](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/10/sports/10scholarships.html?pagewanted=1&_r=1&sq=athletic%20scholarships&st=nyt&adxnml=1&scp=3&adxnmlx=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 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 <http://www.teamusa.org/US-Paralympics> You can also contact Elliot Blake, USAV Coordinator of Sitting Volleyball Development, at 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 awarded 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 6th 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.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

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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 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. 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

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 19th 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 tournaments), 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 Neppel (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.

The Leave a Ball Behind Program Impact: Jan 16, 2009

Today I packed up some volleyballs to send to the deserving programs of the Special Olympics in Jamaica and to coach Wiyaka Chasing Hawk, who is making volleyball happen for kids on the reservation at the Cheyenne River Project in Eagle Butte, S.D.



These donated balls came from the USA Junior Olympic Volleyball Championships, where we have asked teams to “leave a ball behind” at the end of their season so we can gift them for teams in need. Thousands of balls have come from the courts at JOs, collected by the officials working the tournament (thanks Sue Mailhot et al.), which then get boxed and put on the truck and delivered to USA Volleyball’s grassroots department.

As I flattened the balls into odd looking taco

shapes, the names of hundreds of kids who signed the balls for good luck to the recipients made me smile. Team names are on the balls too. Rockworld Thunder... Texas Power 18... Gainesville Athletic Club...Stellar... Munciana, Stingray “Bronze Champion” ... were just a few of those I read as I boxed them up.

THANK YOU to each and every team who contributed. It makes a difference to so many others who love the game just as much, but who are in just a less fortunate situation. I threw in some USA Volleyball decals, as all are connected to the USAV family - even when from a far away land - and kids love getting the chance to show their pride in our sport.

I would love to see each Regional Volleyball Association (RVA) and even large clubs have their own leave a ball behind program so that the region can donate balls to deserving programs in their own area. Some RVAs wisely do that with the lost and found balls at the end of the season, but perhaps some of you reading this can help the Region and collect just one ball from each program in your age group at Regionals or whatever ends your season. If you ship them to USA Volleyball Grassroots here in Colorado Springs, we will send them along, as we have for years, to Starlings USA programs, Special Olympic programs, Hurricane Katrina schools and NORCECA nations needing balls for their youth.

My bet is you can find such deserving programs in your own RVA, and can hand deliver them to Boys and Girls Clubs, YMCAs and other affiliated organizations connected to USAV. In any case, thanks for helping us grow the game...and we look forward to your contributions to the Leave a Ball Behind program at the end of this season once again!

Tuesday Tips for Coaches of Chaos: 5/10/11

Coaching Behaviour: Last night I did a final IMPACT webinar, and at some point we talk about the “TV Test” aka the “Grandma Test” or the “YouTube” test – as in, would you want your action to be seen on TV, YouTube 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](#).

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

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 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

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

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

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

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/About-the-USOC/Inside-the-USOC/Programs/Diversity-and-Inclusion/FLAME>

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-penn/>

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

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.

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=8jIKG6NEpjc&NR=1&feature=fvwp>
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hyD9UC0BGoM>
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=74_Q26HEQNO

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

Foiled 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 (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

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

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

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.

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

Choosing the Right Words

This cartoonist must have ready my blog on Choosing the Right Words....

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

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

USOC FLAME Program in 18th 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/Inside-the-USOC/Programs/Diversity-and-Inclusion/FLAME>

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

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-donoe.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

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/)



USA Volleyball.

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. 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) 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

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 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.

TEACH YOUR COACH HOW TO HELP YOU LEARN BETTER - In the art of coaching, coaches have many colors and different paintbrushes on their pallet that they can use to help you learn to be your best. It is just that each of you are unique, and for us to excel, a coach should not treat, nor teach each of you the same. Skilled coaches have learned to be consistent with each of you, but not the same. They are there for you in every practice. It is not their job to hammering you with constant feedback, but letting you learn. They will summarize feedback

at times, but anytime you want to ask a technique or tactic question, you can talk to your coach who will always listen. Day or night, on the court, by phone, or even email! It is what you learn, not what the coach knows, that matters. It is our role to help you become a player who is all you can be-- without the coach -- 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. If you have a problem, all energies will go towards the solution.

KNOW YOUR ROLE - 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. Since a teammate does not err on purpose, you need to put those errors immediately in the past, and focus on what you can control, the next point.

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 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.

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.

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. 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 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 midnite 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 chose 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.

Splinter Siblings

Dear Coach,

I am becoming frustrated with my lack of court time during matches. My coach keeps telling me that I am improving, but I keep having to get tweezers on to my splinters after each game. I have thought about changing clubs but I would prefer to stay where I am, as I enjoy the atmosphere in this club.

Cushion.

- Dear Cushion,

You must realize two things: Firstly, the coach has a responsibility to the team to get the best long term and short term results from the team. Secondly, coaches generally hate having to leave someone out of the play.

The coach has to weigh up the importance of the situation, and whether or not it is possible to give the bench a run. There are times when the coach feels that they have a good enough lead to enable the bench player to settle into the game without walking straight in to a minefield. Occasionally in this situation, the team loses all rhythm and may end up losing the match, despite a handy lead. Volleyball does not offer the security of a definite finishing time as basketball or football. There are other occasions when times are desperate on court, so the coach throws a sub in at the deep end and they turn the game around.

The latter case occurred during the Olympic Games. The Korean head coach was coaching a team that was losing unexpectedly. He looked down the bench and called a young player who had only just scraped into the national team, and threw her into the fray. She totally turned the game around, stayed on the court for the rest of the games and ended up with a medal.

Rules To Keep You On The Bench:

1. Don't take any interest in the game; rather, watch the athletes on the other court or in the crowd.
2. Criticize not only your coach, but your teammates as well, and throw in the occasional laugh at their mistakes.
3. Don't bother to listen at time-outs or bring drinks, etc., over.
4. Frown when your coach tells you to go to warm-up.
5. Ask the players on the court where you should be standing.
6. Serve the ball either onto the attack line or against the back wall when you go on to serve, particularly in a pressure situation-then laugh!
7. Make sure that the noise you make on the bench is totally unrelated to what's happening on the court.

8. Leave all of the team gear sprawled out all over the benches and the floor when you change ends.
9. Don't do your shoes up or have your kneepads on until you get onto the court - you should make sure you're going to use them!
10. Wander slowly up to the attack line when the sub is called, with your tracksuit top on but don't stand inside the attack zone.
11. Play "dig the ball away from the setter" when you first come on to receive serve - under the net or into the crowd if possible.
12. Don't worry about really moving into correct position, because the other players are warm, so they can cover you, no matter where you go.
13. Don't ask the coach how and where you can improve your game, and then make sure you get to trainings late, leave early. Miss regular team workouts or show up late without any reason. This tells all that you are a very important player.
14. Get angry with the players who got good court time, because it's their fault that they played well enough to keep you off the court.
15. Don't watch the game closely enough to give anyone any feedback on how the general team tactics were operating.
16. Whenever a referee makes, you think, a bad call, let him know vocally and visibly.
17. Never volunteer to call lines, score or umpire at tournaments. These jobs are only for lesser players.
18. When sitting on the bench during a match, gripe constantly. This lets the coach know that you want to play and are better than the players on the floor.
19. When you lose, always claim that your teammates have let you down. Blame the loss on their mistakes.
20. Don't try to be better than a court player. They are the coach's pet and will always play in front of you anyway.
21. Cry when the game is over so that everyone knows how disappointed you are at not making the court. If the coach doesn't gush with concern, then this just confirms hard-heartedness
22. Don't do any technical or physical training by yourself because it's a scientific fact that training that no-one sees you do, does not have an effect. - Allow yourself the luxury of getting out of shape.

23. Never give 100% in drills as they are boring and you want to save your strength for scrimmage and games.

24. Whenever openly possible, when the situation presents itself, question the coach. This lets him/her know that him/her isn't as smart as he/she thinks.

25. Never help set up or take down equipment, as this lowers your prestige as a player. Always wait until the coach asks you.

26. When you are talking after the game to friends who have come down to see you play, make up a good excuse for not getting court time. Limping after the game is a good one, but try to remember to always limp on the same leg.

27. Make sure that everyone know what a whakka your coach is for not identifying your talent and giving you star billing.

28. The motto "relentless pursuit" is that of medal winning USA teams, but they are too good and it clearly does not apply to you.

We are sure that if you follow these basic rules of the bench, you will be quite successful in achieving your aims.

Now if you turn these points above around, you can see how to stay on the court! All of these qualities and statements are things players need to consider to help improve their attitudes and abilities towards volleyball.

We Suggest:

1. Go watch better players.
2. Play your heart out each game, so you can look teammates in the eye and ask without saying it, I played full out, did you?
3. Learn from the past, the traditions of the sport; study the historical greats in the game.
4. Do the impossible do things you've never done before, be a drill instructor by example; no one should ever question your work ethic.
5. Easy going level-headedness, not cocky in your manner, just quiet confidence and a smile.
6. You have to "be" before you can "do," and "do" before you can "have."
7. Never back down, never fear anyone for the best help you play your best.

8. Talent is no accomplishment, accomplishment is when you take whatever you have- and make it more- to be excellent you must strive to improve- not coast on your talent. Most USA/AUS players are blessed with talent. It is luck they have the health and body to play.
9. Watch TV and Video and matches of teams better than you are often.
10. For life to be meaningful, you must have a challenge
11. You have courage when you most often choose generosity
12. Always do right - This will gratify some people and astonish the rest...

50% of the teams in the world today lost.... It's not the winning; it's self-esteem, confidence, fun, teamwork, fun-fun-fun! Follow your passion as an athlete, make it positive and not mandatory. We have to keep the fun in the business of volleyball. Defense is an attitude, choose a battle you can win. Pleasure is an event – happiness is a process. The process -- coaching/helping/growing the sport -- needs to be focused on, over the moment -- matches/events.

Australia's Campbelltown Cheetahs SASI player, Matthew Grandison, fought hard for every bit of court time he received. The result was a very tough, fit and skillful competitor who has earned the respect of both players and coaches throughout the nation. It appears that Matthew's early coaches did him a favor by leaving him on the bench as a youngster. His determination to prove his worth on the court has pushed him past most of the players who were court players ahead of him in his youth. This story is repeated daily in every program, with players who choose to succeed. We suggest, "Cushion," that you ask your coach where you can improve your game. If the answer is technical or physical, it's up to you to work harder. If the answer is geographical, get on your bike!



JOHN L. KESSEL -- Biography

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



Current Activities:

International Volleyball Federation Level IV/Course Instructor (since 1986) www.fivb.org

Director, World Organization of Volleyball for the Disabled (WOVD) Development Commission – 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

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 Kollektion, 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> - 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

Parents for Good Sports Fellow and National Instructor 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, AAPHERD, National Strength Coaches Association, American Volleyball Coaches Association