



You Will Be a Better Player If You Coach

By John Kessel, USA Volleyball Director of Education, Grassroots, Disabled & Beach Volleyball

The title of this article sums it up. How our USA coaches might better implement this fact is the focus of this article, for it can also make a huge impact on the development of talent in both the youth levels, and disabled programming of our nation.

When I ask coaches if they believe that players will be better players if they coach, universally the answer is yes. When I then ask from the start of their junior programs in late fall/winter, to the end of the JOV season in early summer, how many times their players have had the chance to coach, the answer is usually...none. So I am submitting the following request to my fellow coaches and parents –

Please incorporate a chance to coach in your JOV or High School practices, by creating either a Kids' Court Leagues and/or a Sitting Volleyball Training/Play Hour, in all cases coed preferred, and bring in new, younger kids to this open to all volleyball opportunity.

What do we mean by this? These two population groups can help your Jr. Olympic and High School program players get better, by giving them a chance to coach. Marty Miller of the USAV Grassroots Commission pointed out the myth of adult wisdom, explaining how kids are often better than adults in giving the information needed for learning. If you have a club of any size, your teams can reach out to coach others. This will help your kids teach themselves better, readies them to coach in the future, and begins the important process of giving back to the sport. These kids being in the gym with your program learn so much just by watching. If you ever go to Outrigger Canoe Club in Hawaii, you will see two adult sand courts, and one 6x6 meter kids court with a lowered net, alongside the adult courts, as kids learn playing and watching.

For single team clubs, simply arrange to visit elementary schools, Day Care Centers, Boys and Girls Clubs, PALs, YMCAs and the like, to guest star/coach during a volleyball program they have going. Create a few times in your season practice schedule to help these programs do the ideas of coaching others younger/less skilled. In sitting and in youth, boys and girls can play together safely.

These options include the world wide popular versions of minivolleyball, as we use in the Kidz Kourt at nationals. You can lower a wallyball net to kids height, or play on any real or backyard badminton court, as these spaces are great for kids court training.

Options also include the Paralympic game of sitting volleyball, using a classroom and a rope/net strung between two chairs kids on to be the standards, rather than canceling a practice. Programs can also use the ever-present racquetball courts of many places, even trading out the hour of coaching in that court, for another hour of full court gym use in the same facility. Put the wallyball net up lower, at a meter high, with powergrips (or between to chairs over a rope if need be), as the court dimensions are near perfect for the sitting game, and you do not have to chase the ball if it is hit out.

For the larger clubs, setting aside a certain weeknight or two that new kids (disabled or not) from outside the program can come learn and play regularly, at no or low charge, is best. For that one normal JOV court, you create 10-12 kids courts, or three sitting courts, and each team coaches on their cycle, once every 6 weeks in a 6 team club program for example. To the new youth or disabled kids, the training/play happens weekly or even twice a week; they just get new coaches each week.

You could also go twice a week, doing disabled one time and youth another or one of those groups each time, with large clubs. Finally you could do the same by splitting or sharing a practice into one hour of coaching youth, and one hour of regular JOV practicing (perhaps with the kids getting to watch that second hour). Have the coaching teams plan to come in a half hour early, or stay a half hour after their training, and split the coaching time, to the kids get a full hour of training. Whatever you are able to create time wise is great, while 90 minutes for little kids is plenty for a session.

Putting one or two double nets down the court space, temporarily taping or marking corners or even whole lines with Sport Xs or other removable court markings, allows you to get 6-12 kids courts of 3-4 meters wide and of varying length. Anchor to the wall with eyebolt rope standards, or portable weighted standards, powergrips, and the like.

For insurance purposes, use USAV's league insurance fee, at about \$12 per court side, to make things affordable. This fee, based on a maximum of 6 playing on a side (3 courts of doubles), means you can properly cover the activity for 8-12 week periods at a very low cost, not a per individual fee, unless desired. The average program can be covered for about \$50 for the whole period. Remember to get waivers, and medical release forms if the parents do not stay to watch. You might also want to get your RVA to create a lower cost membership, or to incentivise clubs to start youth/disabled programs by giving some sort of discount.

While this is not really within the scope of this request, the fact is that the most important coach is titled, the game, for the game teaches the game. Tied closely to this fact is that players learn best by doing, rather than watching, thus the two person game is one of the best ways to learn.

Since our job as coaches is to teach them to teach themselves, giving the players a chance to teach others helps them in this skill. *That which I teach, I learn* - is a Japanese proverb of simple truth.

In Athens, the Paralympics included both men, and for the first time ever, women. Our USA Women brought home a Bronze Medal, the first ever Paralympic Volleyball medal. We need the help and support of Junior Olympic Volleyball programs and High Schools and middle schools to identify, encourage and develop the talent of our future USA teams for both men and women.. The game is basically the same, international rules, libero, rally scoring and all. The major differences are simple:

1. The court is 6 wide x 5 meters long a side, and the net height is just over a meter.
2. You can block the serve.
3. You cannot have an "illegal bottom lift" - gaining height as you put it over.
4. Your behind is your "feet" to be used for line violation determination etc.

Here is what we would like you to do:

Contact your local rehabilitation programs, including Shriners Hospitals and the like, and get a least 2-3 kids wanting to come play the sitting game. Three sitting courts can be made from putting a double net or rope down the center of the regular court - using the endlines and 3 meter lines as the sidelines for 6 meter wide courts, and the regular sidelines as the 4.5 meter long endline (5 meters is regulation but 4.5 works great). If a JO team of 12 players splits up into three courts, or six sides, they are only playing doubles, should no kids show up. With any kids showing up, you put one on a side. You can also play on just two courts, 3 JOV kids per court, and playing four vs. four with just one disabled athlete per court. These two or three courts can have 12 or more disabled kids still mingling with the coaching as some will be playing instead, and ultimately can accommodate 36 disabled kids - with the six sides each getting a coach and a referee, the work of the JOV team coaching/helping for the hour or session.

In some cases, the USA National Sitting team program may reach out to your program to ask that you similarly give an hour or two a week to helping develop one or more local National Team players. Men or women, the need for each of these sitting players to gain experience is vital for our success in future Paralympics, and playing with JOV kids, even who do not know the sport well, is very valuable and important. Check the www.usavolleyball.org website and click on the disabled button for more information about the programs and disability definitions, and contact the head coaches – Men's Team Bill.Hamiter@usav.org and Women's team Mike.Hulett@usav.org , if you know of any talent. While not until 2009, the Deaflympic USA Men's and Women's teams are always also looking for talent, in both indoor and beach levels. and if you cross paths with any good hard of hearing volleyball players, put them in touch with John Knetzger at jjk123@sbcglobal.net

For everyone's information, we are also looking for help in the following additional areas of talent identification, and any good leads you might have in these areas can be developed locally as well.

1. **AAHPERD, (American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation & Dance - National convention and regional conventions - Can you help at the state level?)**
2. **National Recreation and Parks Association - Can you help at the state or city level?**
3. **National State High School Athletic Association - National Athletic Directors Convention**
4. **National Congress of State Games – Executive Directors convention**
5. **National Rehabilitation Hospitals Conference - Can you contact the Shriners or other local rehabilitation centers in your area?**
6. **PAVO and National Officials Groups - Make sure every referee you know is looking out for disabled males and female of any age who are already playing the game, and get them to put such players into contact with the USA program.**

Thanks for helping grow the game!