



Kessel's Top Ten Secrets About Coaching Kids In Volleyball

By John Kessel, USA Volleyball Director of Membership Development and Disabled Programs

These are the key ideas to make kids volleyball a success for younger kids in any program.

Get a leader at each school/site. Do this through working with the PE teacher, the Youth Activity programs and Park and Rec. programs, where gym access is more established. Getting enough coaches is part of the need/challenge too. Current players, parents and past players - "YOU WILL BE A BETTER PLAYER IF YOU COACH..."

Get the kids - PE class during school, after school programs for the afternoon. PE class during school, after school programs for the afternoon. Offer to teach the game to the younger fans after each collegiate home match, as part of the college booster program. Have your 14-18 year old junior player COACH once a week for just one hour. This is for kids 4-10 years old, with 20 minutes teaching, 40 minutes of playing (and still teaching as they play), at a low fee, as part of that evening's two to two and a half hour practice. Your older kids will become better players by coaching, and the younger kids will have total fun and an early great start to the game...In Japan, the 5th and 6th graders coach the 1st thru 4th graders for 45 min, then their coach works with them for the second half of a 90 min after school practice.

Get court time - share the gym, or put up nets next to soccer/football fields. Pick a time that the gyms are not used, even 7 am (look at what ice hockey and swimmers do for training). Asphalt and grass courts where weather permits. The public schools need to be USED after school for your programs. (they want you out after school mentality) Private schools will more likely do it if you pay or if you provide a service i.e. train their kids. Build courts/standards, buy new gear and safer padding rather than pay rent. Use tennis courts- Attach your rope or net to the poles in the fence and leave the net up.

1. PUT UP MORE NETS AND COURTS IN THE SPACE YOU HAVE.

This means that instead of being able to control or watch the one ball move around (as the group plays six vs. six or, horrors, nine vs. nine) that you will have more than one ball/net/court to watch and teach. Of course, your training area needs to be safe at all times. Volleyball is the most space efficient ("crowded") court sport, you can get 24, even 32 kids per single regulation basketball court. Share the gym with hoops, soccer, or other programs, string net up for just half the gym, you can fit lots of kids on one half, and buy a divider net that can be tied up to eyebolts wall to wall. Use the big mesh size netting, so those doing the other sports can see you spiking and playing the game.

Corollary - Make these nets EASY and fast to set up. Use rope/Kevlar nets not cable, and using wall anchors rather than standards if need be. Best to get a nice AAI sleeved pole system that goes up fast. Mark the corners of the court only with tape, or put down markers (flat thin rubber discs or feet and such) in the corners, or outside, put down socks and play barefoot, or mark the sand by dragging your foot in the sand.

Corollary - A net does not have to be a regulation adult net. Each 10 meter long adult net can be made to host TWO kids courts, with a two meter buffer in between. Rope nets, are fine, with markers hanging down to separate the court areas. Badminton nets are great for all kids. And in a pinch, one kid standing there...can be a net/barrier to play over! Not one net and 20 kids per side, but 4-10 nets and 2-4 maximum per side. If no rope, link jump ropes together. Or use 2 kids as the "standards" per court and they hold up the jump rope as the net while the other 4 kids play 2 v 2, rotate through, playing short games. The kids holding up the "net" are getting conditioning too. Not anchoring the bottom of the net is FINE, indeed for active gym situations, preferable, even though the ball does not play out of the net.

Corollary - Get more volleyballs! Your volleyball program should have just as many volleyballs in the storeroom as you have basketballs. And as many nets as well (how popular/fun would basketball be if your gym only had one hoop and one or two basketballs for your whole group?) These balls must NOT be rubber. The best choice are the "Lite" volleyballs - made regulation size but lighter in weight, and used in the USA Jr. Olympic Volleyball Championships 12 & under division. Beach balls - rainbow colored for like \$1 are great for younger kids as they travel slower. "Market" balls, the ones that are about \$2 and permanently inflated are also fun options. Even round balloons for any age on a small court are fun, travel slower and safe. You can make them out of a fabric cover, nylon or cloth, in school, program or just wild colors, using a helium quality round party balloon as a bladder. The pattern for these balls is found on the

education section of our website at www.usavolleyball.org. Even panty hose rings or duct tape applied around the balloon can give it heft for faster but safe flight.

Corollary - Play on any surface. Use tennis courts, play sitting volleyball on a stage or in the lunchroom, play on grass, sand, concrete, asphalt. Heck, they make about \$100,000 for the March of Dimes in a mud volleyball tourney. Play in the Pool, play in a racquetball or squash court. Sport Courts have allowed USA Nationals to be held on 50 courts under one roof, www.sportcourt.com. PowerGrips (you have seen those big suction cups being used to carry window glass?) allow you to set up outdoor courts inside. Power Grips - Six inch TL6-FH- with red line vacuum indicator and a tough plastic pad protector. PO Box 368 Laurel, MT 59044 800-54-7341 or (406) 628-8231. FAX 406-628-8354. Park and Sun nets are great options for nets that can be used on grass, sand or hardcourt, complete with standards and anchor ropes (Parksun@aol.com). These same powergrips are used to create sitting volleyball court options using Wallyball nets in racquetball courts. No having to chase balls when playing Wallyball or sitting volleyball in that environment.

2. PLAY HALF YOUR PRACTICE.

You are not training them for the Olympics, you are teaching them to LOVE activity and fitness. Learn to teach technique to each player as they PLAY the game, just step in and show what to do right, as all eyes will be on you. Never show what they are doing wrong, show what to do, over and over and over....

Start with the game, and go back to the game. Drills are used to introduce a skill, but the game is the key. Enjoy the game, as the game teaches the game. Why would kids want to play a sport that is no fun, or if they rarely get to play games?

3. SPIKE FIRST AND OFTEN.

This is THE skill that all love to do, and right now everyone in the world is forced to beg for it (Coach, when can we hit?). Do it as their first introduction to the sport at ANY age, using the overhead pass to set things up, NOT the arm bruising, wince making, shank happy forearm pass skill too often taught. If you spike and serve first and often, more and more kids will join the sport, rather than be driven off by the forearm pain inflicting frustration experience.

Corollary - Lower the nets, so they CAN hit. Put them waaaay down so everyone can hit over them easy.

4. MAKE YOUR LARGEST TEAM SIZE FOUR.

If you can, put up lots and lots of nets, as in #1, and play all games like the Olympic Sport of Beach Volleyball, where they cover the whole court, 2 vs. 2. Your kids get tons of learning, and when the ball comes over, I have a 50% chance on the first one, and a 100% of touching the ball and being very active/learning in the second one.

5. TEACH & REWARD COOPERATION, CHARACTER, AND EFFORT

This is a game that has a national championship for coed Open level play, that tens of millions play at the park and recreation/church level as a way to meet new friends. Let them move, run, throw and play hard. Help kids train HARD. - BEFORE and during the practice. Karch set up the gym, prepared it himself, when he was captain. As a leader you need to do the basic "grunt" work of the sport, -running an event. This is a blue collar, hard work ethic sport to win. Marv Dunphy, USA 1988 Gold Medal coach noted that one of the rarest things is to see a player make full effort in training all the time. Reward cooperation and have FUN, worry about technique less or later.

Corollary - Good teams know the "Better the ball" concept, as a good citizen and team player.

6. TEACH THEM TO TEACH THEMSELVES.

If you have a class of 25 kids, and 30 minutes you can only give about a minute of individual attention to each kid. They need to get good during the other 29 minutes you are not paying individual attention to them. The tossers and servers and all should be the players, acting as "assistant coaches." Active learning is preferable. - to quote a bull riding camp brochure - "Plenty of bulls, lots of riding" Perform practices/drills/plays designed by the players.

7. SHOW THEM RATHER THAN TELL THEM.

Words have little meaning to beginners. Ask them questions, do not tell them the answers. Guide players to timing and judgment adjustments, not technique only. "I hear, I forget, I see, I remember, I do, I understand." - Chinese proverb. The more you know, the more you try to tell them, and the more you confuse them...

8. CREATE A POSITIVE, FUN ENVIRONMENT

There should be no fear of mistakes. Get excited about their doing it right, and ignore most their errors. Teach them to make good mistakes, rather than bad ones. Coach proactively, not reactively. Be specific and positive in feedback. If it starts with the word "don't" then don't say it... Avoid all sarcasm. Talk only in the positive. Say what they should do, and not the don'ts. If it starts with don't, don't say it. Be consistently positive - Problems are stepping stones, not obstacles. Be enthusiastic - "Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm" - R.W. Emerson

Corollary - Be Consistent - Kids need you to be positive in practice and in any competition, not Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

Disabled players may play easily with able bodied, while all levels can take time to play sitting volleyball, where the game is the same, except the net is a meter high, the six person court size is 6 x 5 meters, and you may not lift up higher off your behind to attack the ball, only to go lower and defend or pass. It is a great game on a lowered wallyball net in a racquetball court- and the ball does not roll away! For more info or to try out for the USA Paralympic team, contact go to www.usavolleyball.org and click on the disabled button.

9. MAKE THINGS AS GAMELIKE AS POSSIBLE.

Given the choice of a drill or a game, everyone chooses the game. At this level, learn to play "games" that are actually drills, and make them gamelike in the ball going over the net, keeping score and such. Even your "warm up" should be a game, using balls, one vs. one over the rope (three hits in a row by the same player OK). You can set up stations, even using the "volleyball training devices" (commonly called basketball hoops) for games of one bounce for setting and passing accuracy.

Corollary - Help kids MOVE on the court. Stop things teaching them not to move. (X on the floor), and playing 6 vs. 6. One of the unique things about volleyball at the starting level is that tactically to win, you play poorly - 1 hit will win, vs. 3 hits per side you lose. Pair passing teaching NOT moving. Warm up with running to and through the BALL, not running on the court. What we are trying to help you with is stopping "bump ball" where the kids stand and pass the ball over the net. They need to learn to READ, ANTICIPATE, JUDGE and TIME the flow of the game and flight of the ball.

Corollary - Let them serve OFTEN, but brief, 1-2 minute periods. This is like the game is played more, and serving, being a closed motor skill, i.e. the only skill a kid does all by themselves, will the skill they have fastest success with. Indeed, you may need to change the rules and only let a kid serve a maximum of 3 serves before a new server rotates in.

10. MAKE SURE TO HAVE SCORING AND "CONSEQUENCES"

Rally score for kids rather than sideout score. Play for 5-10 minutes each "match" with the winner whoever is ahead at the buzzer. Modify League play - do not keep score. Festival finishes at the end of the league. Delay the start of competition, not play but the scoring competition, until the end of the season and REWARD learning.

Corollary - Use loss of playing time as your "consequence." Do not use physical activity as the punishment, e.g., situps or pushups. The beach game teaches the idea of "Winners stay on". King/Queen of the court, where the winning side in a one point, "instant winner" game, gets to stay on, is the #1 favorite of all kids.

Corollary - Score cooperatively first, transition scoring second, competitive third.

Cooperative scoring is defined by you where the point is scored for each time the ball crosses the net after three hits.

Transition scoring - The players cooperate to a certain level, and once reached, the rally becomes competitive using any of competitive scoring. This is much like the tradition of rallying for serve in table tennis

Competitive scoring - traditional scoring but kids best work with Rally scoring, a point on every serve. This point on every serve has been the way the game is played by children all over the world starting Jan 1, 1999 and in the 2000 and 2004 Olympics.

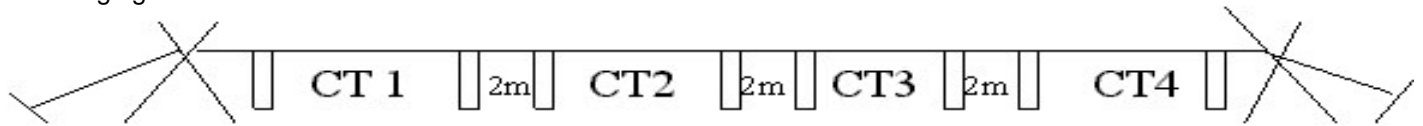
In Closing - **Share your ideas and secrets, to help grow the game for all kids.** As you will see below, there are many more ideas that are valuable, if not in our top ten list... **Everything Changes**, so take time to read all the new ideas in this project, as many will help you at ALL Levels of the game!

CREATING PLACES TO PLAY

Kids all over the world play volleyball over any barrier they can find, low chain link fences, logs, rope or string, etc. When you can, everyone would be wise to get a good net system, such as those from Park and Sun (parksun@aol.com), and others. These portable systems can be used on grass, beach, and using PowerGrips and other systems, even indoors. Here are some ideas for putting up net systems for places around the world

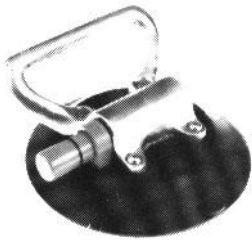
Replace That Cable - If you already have a net, but it is one of those alive-and-stabbing-your hands frayed cable types, spend some money to replace the cable with the rope-like synthetic fiber ropes that are stronger than steel. We suggest getting it from a marine supply store in your area, or online from www.optimumrigging.com. Kevlar is one option but does not have the UV resistance that is needed for outdoor use, so we recommend either Vectran or the new Spectra ropes. The 1999 prices from Optimum Rigging as a reference for the plain 40' piece of rope is as follows: 5/32" Vectran 3,200 lb.. Break Strength \$36.00; 3/16" Vectran 4,500 lb.. Break Strength \$37.20; 3/16" Spectra 3,800 lb.. Break Strength \$22.00

Just Make A Rope or String Net - Many places around the world, including your own bedroom or family room, can have great competition just over a barrier. Great matches have been played over rows of chairs in airports for example. Outside, you can put up a long rope, using crossed pieces of wood, and raise/lower the net height by the width of the bottom of the "X". Keep 2 meter buffer zones by hanging duct tape (weighted at the bottom) or rope down as "hanging antennas."



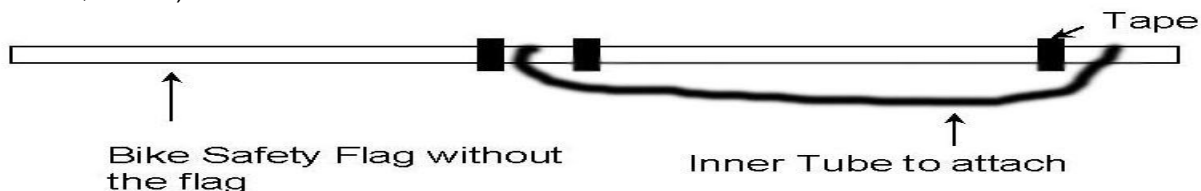
Wall Anchors - Many places put up eyebolts to make a permanent place that is easy and fast to anchor to. While that is a good idea, fast and easy, I suggest the following modification to let you be able to adjust the net to any height easily, and to have a place to also anchor the bottom of the net. Anchor to the wall using a "trucker's knot," a pulley like knot that finishes with a slip knot, using the extra loop in the line to gain leverage and make for very tight stringing.

Power Grips - These vacuum cups (you have seen them used to carry large panes of glass) are good for creating temporary anchor points on smooth surfaces like varnished wood floors. USA Volleyball also uses them to hang



banners on walls if the surface permits. Get the 6" LP6-RH for flat surfaces. You can reach them at Wood's Power Grips, PO Box 368, Laurel, MT 59044 (800) 548-7341, FAX 406-628-8354. Park and Sun also carries them in stock. Remember, wallyball nets in a racquetball court are great for sitting and wallyball versions.

Antennas - Asics and Shur Grip are the two best antennas out on the commercial market. They cost \$75 a pair for competition versions, but you can easily make them by buying bike safety flags and getting bike tire innertubes (used with holes, or new) as below ..



Sand Anchors - These deadman are most simply made from 2 x 4s or discs, buried in the sand with a rope attached, so the guy lines to the net poles have a place to anchor to. Put in 90 degrees to the pulling force.

