



How to Make Drills that Work for your Team

- By Tom Tait, Brevard College, FIVB Instructor and USA CAP Cadre Member

Introduction

At almost every coach's clinic that I teach, be it local, national or international in scope, most of the coaches in attendance want to come away from that clinic with a large notebook full of drills that they can take home and use in their practices to make their team the best in the league. And why shouldn't they? They know that the teams that practice the best drills tend to become the best teams. The problem comes in defining that word "best". If the drills don't work for your team, and if they don't do the job for which they were designed, they aren't the best drills, no matter how cleverly designed they may be. There is no recipe book of drills that will do the job for your team. You, the coach, have to design the drills that are going to help your team reach its potential. So let's take a look at some of the things that will help you to make drills that work for your team.

Specificity – The Premier Principle

Training outcomes for your team are specific to the training that it undergoes. In other words, if your team trains with drills that are designed simply to be self-contained exercises that have little or no relevance to the way the actual game is played, your team may get real good at doing cute little drills. But they are now more likely to lose in a real volleyball game. Training is specific. It's perfectly logical then that the single best drill for learning how to play volleyball is to play volleyball! This is need to do is roll the ball out and watch scrimmaging will not maximize the needs to be. So drill design is still specificity principle must be properly results. Sometimes a single skill must be isolated and worked on until enough proficiency is attained to allow that skill to be applied in a larger context. Still, however, that newly perfected skill will not be of much use in the game until it is practiced under gamelike conditions often enough that it becomes nearly automatic.

...The Single Best Drill For Learning How To Play Volleyball Is To Play Volleyball!

Design Basics

As you decide which drills to use, whether they come from a "recipe" book or are your own creation, some basic thoughts should guide your design choices. For example, the order in which drills should be put together and applied with beginners is: 1) single skill in a simple, controlled environment, 2) single skill in a more complex, open-ended environment, 3) double (or multiple) skills put together in a sequence that is likely in a real game, 4) modified games that emphasize the skills that you particularly want the players to focus on, and finally, 5) the game itself. Must you follow this order of presentation? No! Remember the specificity principle. You could easily start with #5 to put the single skill into perspective, and then come back to #1. In summary, drills should generally progress from single to multiple skills and from a controlled (perhaps artificial) environment to an open-ended, actual game environment.

Coach or Player Orientation

Should your drills be oriented toward you (i.e., you control the flow of the drill), or should they be player oriented? Each style has its advantages and its disadvantages. Coach-oriented drills are often good for beginners if their success rate needs to be controlled by the coach because their teammates are not yet good enough to do the job. As a general rule, because of specificity, player-oriented drills are better. They allow for more-realistic circumstances, more repetitions, and more acceptance of responsibility by the players. A good hybrid style of the two previously mentioned orientations is a so-called coach-initiated drill. In this type of drill the coach controls certain aspects of the drill to help ensure an emphasis where it is desired. Generally the coach either initiates the drill and then lets it be played out to a natural conclusion, or the coach may initiate certain portions of the drill interspersed throughout the entire drill. If you are going to use any drills other than purely player-oriented, you need to perfect the physical coaching skills of serving, tossing and spiking (not necessarily over a net), at least to the point that you can reasonably control the flow and basic pattern of the drill that is initiated by or oriented toward you.

Specificity Revisited

The motivation level of the players and the quality of the outcome of almost any drill is significantly enhanced if the drill is goal-oriented. Both empirical and research evidence tells us that youngsters focus better and learn faster if they have realistic, short-term goals to work toward. Therefore, every drill, gamelike and goal-oriented. In movement (and certainly every goal-oriented mode; the player is “well enough” to meet some self- So once again specificity of something with our drills other number of minutes or until some magic number of attempts have been made. That kind of approach is boring, inefficient, not goal-oriented, unproductive, and non-specific, in other words, *lousy*.

Every Drill, Simple or Complex, Should be Gamelike and Goal-Oriented

simple or complex, should be the real game, virtually every ball contact) is performed in a trying to perform that skill perceived notion of success. training begs that we do than running them for “X”

Scoring Systems

There is perhaps no better way to make your drills gamelike and goal-oriented than to use one or more scoring systems to establish the criteria for what determines “success” in a given drill or part of a drill. Adding “plus-minus” scoring to a drill that has been an “Okay-it’s-time-to-end” drill will take that drill to a whole new level. And by using other scoring methods, such as consecutive-number-of-successes (the “wash” scoring concept), rally scoring in scrimmage-like drills, or even straight point scoring; you can easily perform the same drill that you’ve done numerous times, but improve it dramatically. It can become a handicap drill (where one or more players are faced with a new challenge of handicapped scoring). Or it can be completely changed in emphasis to force the players to focus on those aspects of the drill that are most crucial to the development of your team.

Integration

I am a strong believer in integrated training. Why? Because of specificity. An entire human being has to perform in the volleyball match in a highly integrated manner. So does the team. And the environment is one that is very open, with an infinite number of possible variations occurring in any given match. Therefore, training must integrate as many aspects of the game into a whole context as is compatible with the major goals of the given drill. Utilizing “continuous” drills, modified scrimmages, drills that have a “natural” volleyball ending, the scoring systems, and the afore-mentioned makes for an endless variety of drills, each of which does a good job of integrating the various aspects of the game (and/or person/team) into a single, *volleyball specific* drill. Your key contribution to these drills is “informed imagination.”

**An Entire Human Being
Must Perform in the
Match in a Highly
Integrated Manner**

Informed Imagination

This is where the art and science of coaching become one. To design “good” drills, you must know what it is that you hope to accomplish through them. So you have to know the skills, tactics, strategies, etc. well. And you have to know how to modify drills to make them do the best job possible for a given situation. This is one of the areas where the “good” coaches are separated from the “average” ones. You need to develop good analysis skills and combine those with the same kind of empathy deal with players outside of a drill skills that you need when you need to be able to determine just what you want the drill to do, convey that to the players well, and then design and run the drill (modifying it in “mid-stream” if necessary) so that it does what you want it to do. Finally, you need to evaluate the drill so that you can determine whether you should repeat it as is, modify it and repeat it, or send it to the drill recycling center for proper disposal. Copying someone else’s drills is fairly easy. Properly using your informed imagination to design and modify drills (your own or other’s) is not very easy for most coaches, but it pays far greater dividends for your players, your team, your program, and you.

**Using Informed
Imagination Pays
Great Dividends**