



USA Volleyball

# Wash Scoring Drills

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## Some History

In 1984, when the USA men were in the process of preparing for what was to be their gold medal performance in the Los Angeles Olympics, Bill Neville, their highly imaginative assistant coach, designed a scrimmage-like game he called the “wash” drill. What set that game apart from the thousands that preceded it was the scoring concept upon which it was based. And the application of that concept in the ensuing years has helped to revolutionize volleyball training throughout the world. Thanks Bill!

## The Concept

The wash concept utilizes a goal-oriented scoring system in which the goal is a consecutive number of successful executions. For example, 3 (three kills in a row) might be the goal for a particular game that is emphasizing individual attacking. Or, for a full-team game designed to emphasize transition offense, 2 (winning two down-ball rallies in a row) might be the established team goal. In any case, if the goal is not reached, whatever partial score had been earned to that point of failure is eliminated (i.e., “washed away”) and the scoring starts over again at zero. So the individual attacker whose goal is 3 consecutive kills could bury 50 spectacular shots without ever getting out of the wash game until three of those successful hits were strung together in sequence.

## Acute & Chronic Impacts

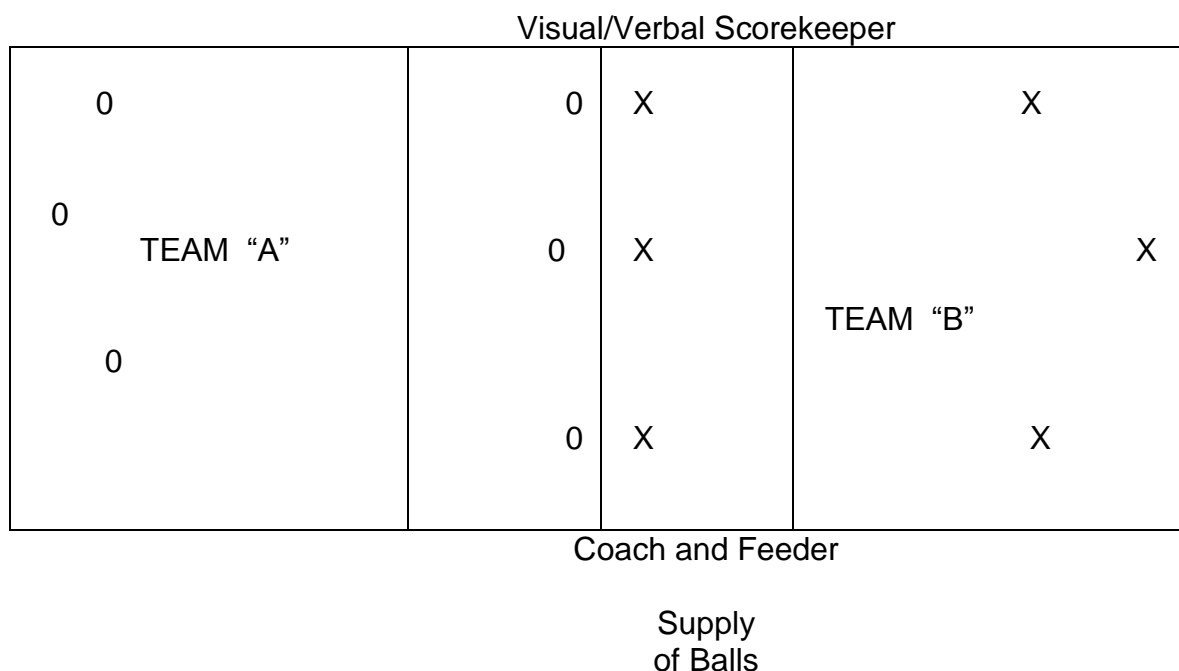
The wash scoring concept, when properly applied, causes behavior changes in players/teams that are immediate (and in many cases, profound) and can easily lead to lifetime changes that go far beyond the sport of volleyball. To reach a consecutive-number-of-successes goal, a player or team must learn to play each rally/point/skill one at a time. If the one-at-a-time attitude and behavior don't develop, there will be many “washes” and few accomplished goals for that player/team. Therein lies the beauty of the wash games. They constitute a powerful tool to help the coach instill in the players a consistently high level of performance that is driven by the attitude required of them for success in the various wash games. From the players' perspective, it turns an ordinary (perhaps boring) drill into a game that is both challenging and fun.

## Basic Application

Wash scoring can be applied to almost any known volleyball drill or game, simple or complex, single skill or multiple, one player at a time or several teams at a time, no matter what the age or playing level might be. And the application can be designed to make the game emphasize almost any particular aspect of the game on which the coach desires to focus attention.

Requiring servers in a serving drill to get three in a row into zone #1 before being allowed to try for three in a row into zone #5 is an example of good use of wash scoring in a simple, single-skill drill.

Below is an example of a typical six-on-six wash game that assumes the teams involved are equal and that they score points easier when receiving serve than they do when serving. Because of the scoring goal (explained below) this could be called a “2 vs 2” wash scrimmage. The setup and format are as follows:



1. Overall Object: Earn all six rotations before the other team does.
2. Wash Scoring Goal: Win two rallies in a row, first a serve-initiated rally, then a free-ball rally.
3. Serve: Alternate between “A” & “B.”
4. Free-Ball Rally: initiated by a toss from coach on sideline as soon as the serve rally ends; the serving team always gets the free-ball.
5. Rotation: Only if the team wins both of the rallies is the rotation earned; otherwise it’s a “wash” and the coach signals for the next serve rally.

As is true with goal-setting in any walk of life, the best results are obtained when the goals are realistic but challenging. So the coach must learn how to choose just the right length of “stick” from which to dangle the “carrot.” Should we expect a beginning youngster to serve ten-in-a-row over the net? Probably not; maybe the wash scoring goal should be only 2 in this case. Through having learned from others, trial and error experiences, and sometimes just dumb luck, the good coach will be able to customize the goal to suit the situation and thereby provide an appropriately high level of motivation for the players. Applying the right wash scoring to a drill/game is similar to designing or choosing an effective drill/game, in that it requires that the coach: 1) clearly understand what the drill/game is designed to accomplish, and 2) choose a goal score that is most likely to facilitate the accomplishment of those objectives. For example, a regular scrimmage could be modified by making the receiving team win three rallies in a row (one off of serve-receive and two free-ball rallies) before being allowed to gain the serve and rotate. That could force a team that runs a good serve-receive offense, but has trouble

concentrating on defense and transition attacking, to focus on each of the three rallies – otherwise they never get a chance to score points when serving.

## Advanced Applications

After gaining some experience with fairly simple applications of wash scoring, good coaches will discover a wide variety of more advanced ways in which the scoring system can be put to use to help solve many different problems. Here are some examples:

### Handicapping

One fairly common problem occurs in competitive team games when one team is significantly better than the other (as in starters versus second team) and, as a result, the good team is not sufficiently challenged in the game. *Handicap* wash scoring can be a big help in solving this problem. For example, the starters could be required to win four consecutive rallies, while the second team only has to win two in a row to win the reward that accompanies reaching the wash scoring goal. Obviously, the starters will have to work hard and concentrate throughout the game if they are to overcome the handicap with which you have saddled them. If the handicap is correct, the results should be positive.

Handicapping can also be accomplished by the manner in which the coach conducts the game from the sideline. Tosses from the coach, for example, can be made easy or hard for the team receiving them. Time given between rallies can be dramatically shortened to make errors by the “handicapped” team more likely. Utilizing this technique gives the coach quite a bit of control over the rate at which successes or “washes” occur, and thus more control of the overall outcomes of the game.

### Combining With Others

Wash scoring can be combined with regular scoring to make a game or scrimmage more physically demanding or more psychologically intense or both. For example, a regular scrimmage could be set up such that the final two points can only be scored by winning two additional freeball rallies immediately after what would have been “game point” is scored. This makes the eventual winner work extra hard to finish off the game.

Or perhaps combining wash scoring with some form of continuous game might be what your team would respond well to. Here’s one to try. A continuous rally that may usually be set to end after exactly two minutes can have a wash scoring goal established that kicks in when the two minutes is up. In other words, the rally only ends some time after two minutes and after the wash goal has been accomplished (e.g., three kills in a row, two good blocks in a row, or even just three errorless contacts in a row). Now the players are learning to concentrate in spite of being tired.

### Individualizing Goals

Individualizing goals can be accomplished in numerous ways besides through handicapped scoring. In a typical serve and serve-receive drill, individual players can be given individualized wash goals to accomplish before moving on to the next task or

drill. If the goals are chosen well, each player will be challenged to a degree that is relatively the same as any teammate experiences.

Suppose you want to run a scrimmage-like wash game, but you want Team “A” to focus heavily on serve-receive plays while Team “B” concentrates on defense and transition offense. That’s easy to set up. Just have Team “B” do all of the serving for the game, so that they will have to play defense and run their transition offense in order to reach the scoring goal that you established for them (e.g., “3”: win three defense/transition rallies in a row). Reaching their goal entitles them to rotate one position. Team “A,” on the other hand, must win four serve-receive points in a row before they can rotate. Since this is a player-initiated game (via the serve), you can focus your attention on various aspects of the game without having to worry about when and where the next ball has to be tossed. Your manager can keep track of the scoring.

### **Other Considerations**

Wash scoring, especially if it is at all complicated, introduces a new element into a drill that must be planned for. In addition to making sure that the ball flow is controlled properly, you must designate who will keep score and how the score is to be communicated to the players. Otherwise confusion on the part of the players (and perhaps the coaches) will negate a lot of the usefulness of the scoring system.

Utilize your creativity and knowledge of your players to find better ways to apply wash scoring into your program. It won’t work exactly the same way for you as it might for someone else. That’s part of what keeps the wheels of progress turning!

Be prepared to change the game in midstream if necessary. If you have made the wash scoring goal too high or too low, so that it can’t do the job you want it to, stop the game and modify the goal. The important thing in this case is to find the goal(s) that will help motivate the players to move in the intended direction.

No scoring system or game or combination thereof can guarantee that learning and behavior modification will take place automatically, or that any changes will be positive. But the wash scoring system properly applied will provide numerous opportunities for you, the coach, to guide the learning and behavior changes by helping to create some great “teachable moments.”