

# YOUR MISSION, SHOULD YOU CHOOSE TO ACCEPT IT IS TO BE A COACH

## LEARNING, IMPROVEMENT, AND FULFILLMENT INTEGRATING RELEVANT TRAINING INTO YOUR PRACTICES

*Relevant training optimizes meaningful touches and integrates game-like activity to teach the common body of knowledge so athletes will respond appropriately in competition. Relevant training is not a system for coaching nor is it a set of drills. It is based on research and encompasses everything from using cues to teaching periodization. It can easily be adapted to meet the abilities of the coaches and the needs of the athletes.*

Prepared by Gary Horvath  
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## **Purpose**

The purpose of this paper is to encourage volleyball coaches to find ways to increase the level of relevant training in their practices. Having said that, the process of increasing relevant training applies to all sports.

## **My Story as a Coach**

My tennis doubles partner and I accepted the mission to begin coaching tennis as 15 year olds in a summer city recreation program many years ago. This was about the time that *Mission Impossible* was a hit television show - hence the title for the paper.

Like most coaches we had good intentions and like many coaches we thought that being a good player meant we were automatically good coaches. My partner's mother always joked, "If you boys lived in a litigious society you might be arrested and thrown in jail for impersonating tennis instructors.

In retrospect, we weren't as good as we thought we were, but were not in jeopardy of being thrown in jail for the way we coached. Times were simpler and it was easier to be a coach and an athlete. At the time there were no coaching manuals, the Internet didn't exist, and coaching resources were scarce.

Like many coaches, we learned the trade from others and we typically learned on the job. Some of what we learned was excellent, but much of it wasn't. I was fortunate to continue coaching while in college and coached professionally upon graduation. I spent thousands of hours coaching and learned

from my on-court successes and disappointments. I also improved as a coach by attending professional conferences, talking with coaches and players in a variety of sports, watching practices, reading and watching videos. In retrospect, I wish I would have had been able to streamline the process for learning how to coach.



**Relevant Training**

Over the years I watched a number of inefficient practices in multiple sports. Some of these practices reminded me of the way I coached as a teenager. The primary skill that was taught was standing in line. The coaches had good intent, but they lacked knowledge of how to incorporate relevant training.

To help me better understand how much relevant training actually occurred in my daughter's volleyball practices, I charted the number of meaningful touches in a series of their volleyball clinics and practices.

The results showed that the most successful coach optimized the touches in her practices and the other coaches didn't. I summarized the results of this analysis in the paper, *Optimizing Meaningful Touches in Volleyball Practice*. I shared the paper with coaches and they reacted to it in one of the following ways: they got it, they didn't care or didn't want to get it, or they weren't sure how to optimize the number of touches in their practices.

This follow-up paper was written for coaches who want to further increase the level of learning, improvement, and fulfillment that takes place in their practices by increasing the level of relevant training. It focuses on the activities and drills that are used in practice, fully realizing that relevant training is not a system for teaching, nor it is a set of specific drills.

By design, this document defines a detailed, but not complicated, process for determining what drills and activities to include in a team practice. The intent is to help coaches develop a filter that allows them to reduce learning by trial and error.

The hope is coaches can use this information to develop a process that will allow them to increase the amount of relevant training in their practices.

#### **A Few of the Things I Learned as a Coach**

When I was 15 I accepted the mission of becoming a coach, a decision I will never regret. Over time, I learned and improved. It was very fulfilling. Some of the most important things I learned as a coach are listed below.

- Coaching is an art, not just something you do on Tuesday night at 7:00.
- My junior high tennis coach taught us to think, play with consistency and enjoy the sport. We didn't realize we were learning in the process.
- From my college classes I learned the challenges of measuring skill and performance and the need to play and coach in a safe manner.
- When I evaluated and rated coaches, I learned that all coaches can find ways to improve.
- Good coaches base their teaching on research. They filter out the myths, gimmicks, and fads.
- Like many rookie coaches, I taught the players to stand in line. I spent more time disciplining the players than coaching them. It made no sense, so I changed.
- Kids will improve without coaches, but they will improve at a faster rate with good coaches.
- I learned to listen to the athletes that I coached - they told me what I was teaching them and what I wasn't teaching them.
- Good coaches make it look easy because they work really hard to become good coaches - and they never stop working and learning.
- My recent experiences with the USA Volleyball coaching programs have helped me to combine the research and coaching concepts that I learned along the way.

Every coach has a unique story. So, Coach, what's your story?

**Learning, Improvement, And Fulfillment  
Integrating Relevant Training Into Your Practices**

page 1 Your Mission Now that you have Accepted It  
 page 3 The CBOK and Playing Time  
 page 8 Assessing the Situation  
 page 13 Change  
 page 15 So, Why are We Doing This Drill?  
 page 19 Extending Drills  
 page 25 Perfect Drills  
 page 30 Your Mission Now that you have Accepted It -  
 Part II  
 page 33 The Words and Concepts of Relevant Training  
 page 40 USAV Coaches Manifesto

**Executive Summary**

There are many things that coaches, in any sport, can do to increase the level of relevant training in their team's practices. For example, coaches can provide their athletes with cues between points. With that in mind, the executive summary is written as a series of cues.

**Cues for Relevant Training**

Reading the Ball/Play	Normal termination
Processing	Kids teach kids
Reacting	Cues
Contact point	Constructive feedback
CBOK	Feed forward
Practice plan	Use the net
Cooperative drill	Teach the whole
Competitive drill	Random training
Grills	Specificity
Optimize meaningful touches	Performance over outcome
Game-like	Practice time vs. playing time
Respond in competition	Extending a drill
Based on research	Regression to the mean
Multi-focused drills	Misled by randomness
Multiple balls in the air	Growth mindset
Live ball drills	
Optimize meaningful touches	

## YOUR MISSION, NOW THAT YOU HAVE ACCEPTED IT

*By design, this paper defines a detailed process for determining what drills and activities to include in a team practice. Successful coaches go through a similar process, but they may do it in seconds or minutes whereas a coach with less experience may take much longer to evaluate the value of the drills used in practice.*

### You've Chosen to Accept the Mission to Be a Coach

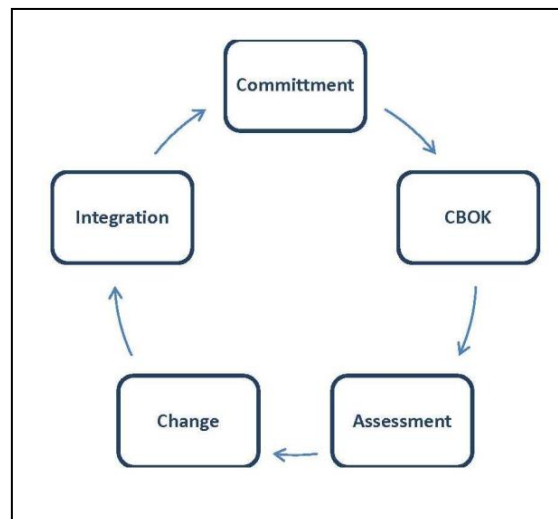
The information in this section highlights why people coach. It also outlines a process that coaches can use to integrate game-like activities into team practices.

### Why do You Coach? Is it the Money or the Nice Car?

Most coaches don't make enough money from coaching to drive a Ferrari; however they are rewarded in other ways.

- Do you like to work with youth?
- Are you skilled at teaching or selling?
- Do you enjoy helping people learn and feel good about themselves?
- Do you have fun coaching?
- Do you like to share your knowledge with others?
- Does coaching provide you with a means of enjoying sports in a different way?
- Were you asked to coach because nobody else wanted to do it?
- Is it rewarding to coach?
- Do you have children who you want to coach?

If you chose to be a coach for any of these reasons (except the Ferrari) it makes sense to further invest in your career by finding ways to integrate relevant training into your practices. Athletes will learn and improve at a faster pace which will make practices more fulfilling for them, their parents, and the coaches.



### Increasing the Relevant Training in Team Practices

This process is applied to volleyball, but it could also be used for evaluating the practices of other sports as well.

1. The process begins with "**commitment**", a strong word for some. Coaches should find it easy to make a **commitment** to improve their skills as a coach since they are asking their athletes to improve their skills as players and a team.

2. The common body of knowledge (**CBOK**) for volleyball is similar for all teams. The drills and activities in practice are directly related to the CBOK. In their practices, coaches must efficiently teach the skills listed in the CBOK.

3. Coaches should honestly **assess** their practices to determine the current level of relevant training and to find ways to increase it.

4. It will be necessary for coaches to **change** if they are to increase the learning, improvement, and fulfillment that occurs from increasing game-like activity in their

practices. This should be easy given that a volleyball match is an exercise in adapting to change.

5. Coaches will compare the CBOK to the current drills used, the effectiveness of those drills, and the potential for more effective drills. At that point they will have the knowledge to **integrate** more game-like activities into team practices.
6. Once these steps have been completed, the cycle repeats itself.

## THE CBOK AND PLAYING TIME

*By integrating relevant training into their practices coaches can avoid these questions from parents, "What are you doing to make practices more fun and to turn my daughter into a gamer? How are you going to get more meaningful touches and game-like learning in your practices?" Coach, you can do it!*

### The CBOK and Playing Time

This section discusses the CBOK and every coach's favorite topic - playing time for the players.

All sports have a common body of knowledge (CBOK). The fundamentals and basic rules of volleyball are the same for teams at all levels.

The rules of volleyball are simple. One team serves and the last team to hit the ball in bounds wins the point.

A high level CBOK for volleyball is provided below. It is based on the main sections in the table of contents of Gozanky's *Volleyball Coach's Survival Guide* or *Coaching Volleyball- Building a Winning Team* by McGown, Franske, and Moser.

Coaches may choose to add detail to the CBOK based on the needs of the athletes in their program. For example, the CBOK for an advanced team may include more detail and it could be several pages in length. The CBOK is the foundation for the drills that are run in practice.

In this case the CBOK is divided into two parts:

- Principles, skills, and tactics
- Player and program soft skills.



All CBOKs include serving. Jump serving will be a higher priority in the CBOKs for college teams than entry level programs.

#### CBOK - Principles, Skills, and Tactics

Principles	Technical Skills	Tactics
Read the ball	Serving	Mental Toughness
Process information	Serve return	Team Defense
React to the ball	Setting	Team Offense
Contact point when hitting the ball	Passing	
	Attacking	
	Blocking	
	Digging	



In entry level programs coaches will spend a majority of their time on principles, skills and tactics. For example, a six-week entry-level recreation program is less likely to address periodization than a competitive team in the 18U division.

Even at an entry level, coaches find it necessary to include the player soft skills and the program skills into their team practices.



Coaches can use statistics and goal setting to help this server further improve her skills.

CBOK - Player Soft Skills and Program Skills	
Soft Skills	Program Skills
Communications	Coaching philosophy
Conditioning	Governing body regulations
Ethics	Management/rules
Goal-setting	Injuries
Leadership	Team/club rules
Nutrition/hydration	Parent -coach relations
Periodization	Parent-player relations
Sportsmanship	Coach-player relations
Team dynamics	Public relations/media
	Statistics



Coaches can teach the setter leadership skills as a way of improving team dynamics.

### I Came to Watch my Daughter Play, Why is She Sitting?

When parents enroll their daughters in a volleyball program many of them think they are paying for playing time in the tournaments. Some of them even have the season's lineup card completed before the first practice of the season.

 Official Volleyball Tournament Lineup	
1.	MY DAUGHTER
2.	SOMEONE ELSE'S DAUGHTER
3.	SOMEONE ELSE'S DAUGHTER
4.	SOMEONE ELSE'S DAUGHTER
5.	SOMEONE ELSE'S DAUGHTER
6.	SOMEONE ELSE'S DAUGHTER
<b>Substitutes</b>	
a.	MY DAUGHTER ISN'T A SUB
b.	MY DAUGHTER ISN'T A SUB
c.	MY DAUGHTER ISN'T A SUB
d.	MY DAUGHTER ISN'T A SUB

The season's lineup card, compliments of #1 daughter's parents.

Be aware when parents learn to "do the math!" They will change their focus from the lineup card to the quality of the practices. By integrating relevant training into their practices coaches can avoid the following questions from parents, "What are you doing to make practices more fun and to turn my daughter into a gamer? How are you going to get more meaningful touches and game-like learning in your practices?"

**Coach, you can do it!**

### Do the Math

It is understandable that parents want to see their daughter compete in match play given their time and financial investment in the sport. At the same time, they need to do the following math problem to understand the relationship between playing time and practice time.

*Does your daughter spend more time playing or practicing?*

#### Assumptions

A. A club practices 3 times a week for 2 hours each practice for 24 weeks.

#### Calculations

B. The club plays 5 matches at 6 tournaments during the season. They also play 5 matches in 2 national qualifier tournaments. Each match lasts 1 hour.

A. The total hours spent in practice are  $3 \times 2 \times 24 = 144$  hours.

B. The total hours spent playing matches equals  $5 \times 6 \times 1 = 30$  hours plus  $2 \times 5 = 10$ ;  $30 + 10 = 40$ .

#### Answer

Your daughter spends 144 hours in practice and 40 hours playing matches.

Coaches must allocate tournament playing time appropriate to the priorities of the program.

More importantly, the math is very clear. They have an obligation to increase relevant playing time in practices by increasing the number of meaningful touches and amount of game-like activity. Court time is a precious commodity. - use it wisely.

**Its Relevant - Your Daughter's Team Get Their Tushes Kicked!**

The number of meaningful touches in a practice determines the rate at which players and teams improve. Coaches should optimize, rather than maximize, the number of touches based on the needs of the team.

The number of touches may be determined by the time spent on non-volleyball activities (setup, warm-up, discussions, dealing with injured players, cool-downs). As well, teams may spend time in strategy talks, working on mental toughness, sportsmanship, proper diet and hydration, or reviewing videos of match play. These and other factors play an important role in having functional practices, even though no meaningful touches are associated with them. In addition, the number of touches may vary as a result of the skill level of the athletes, number of courts, equipment and training aids, length of practice time, and coaching philosophy.

Consider the following two scenarios. In both cases the team practices 3 times a week for 2 hours each and they practice for 24 weeks:

1. The Wildcat players average 1.0 meaningful touches per minute or 120 touches every practice. Each of the Wildcat players will get 8,640 touches during the season (72 X 120).
2. The Scorpions average 2.0 meaningful touches per minute, or 240 touches every practice. Over the course of the season each player will get 17,280 touches (72 X 240).

The scenarios are highlighted in the adjacent table.

The touches add up quickly. The difference between these two scenarios is 8,640 touches over the course of the season.

$$(17,280 \text{ touches} \text{ minus } 8,640 \text{ touches} = 8,640 \text{ touches})$$

The difference is equivalent to 36 practice sessions. In theory the Scorpions will have accomplished as much half way through the season as the Wildcats will accomplish by the end of the season.

Practice Minutes	Number of Players	Player Touches Per Minute	Player Touches Per Practice	Group Touches Per Practice	Player Touches per Season (72 practices)
120	9	4.0	480	4,320	34,560
120	9	3.5	420	3,780	30,240
120	9	3.0	360	3,240	25,920
120	9	2.5	300	2,700	21,600
120	9	2.4	288	2,592	20,736
120	9	2.3	276	2,484	19,872
120	9	2.2	264	2,376	19,008
120	9	2.1	252	2,268	18,144
120	9	2.0	240	2,160	17,280
120	9	1.9	228	2,052	16,416
120	9	1.8	216	1,944	15,552
120	9	1.7	204	1,836	14,688
120	9	1.6	192	1,728	13,824
120	9	1.5	180	1,620	12,960
120	9	1.0	120	1,080	8,640

## ASSESSING THE SITUATION

*The biggest room in the world is  
The room for Improvement  
-Author unknown*

### Assessing Your Practices to Increase Relevant Training

Coaches can increase the level of relevant training in their practices with an honest self-evaluation or assessment from another coach. That evaluation can be a discussion over coffee or it can be a more formal evaluation such as illustrated on the following pages.

Coaches may customize these questions based on their CBOK and the level of their players and coaches. For example, at higher levels the questions could be more skill specific. The evaluation of serving drills could be expanded to include float serves, pace, placement, and clearance.

Again, this is designed to be an assessment of practices, not the entire program.



This practice had 18 players. It would have been more productive if the coach would have used 2 courts instead of 1 court to allow the players to get more touches

#### Assessment - Coach's Mindsets

Questions	Yes/No/NA	Action Items
Do the coaches have a growth mindset as opposed to a fixed mindset?	Yes No NA	
Do the coaches create an environment where athletes are challenged to learn?	Yes No NA	
Do the coaches focus on effort or performance as opposed to outcome?	Yes No NA	
Do the coaches provide constructive feedback or feed-forward comments?	Yes No NA	
Do the coaches use cues that are meaningful to players to help them learn?	Yes No NA	
Do the practice activities transfer to match play or do they emphasize false fundamentals or skills that only allow the players to look good in practice?	Yes No NA	
Do the coaches understand that players have peaks and valleys and over time and their performance regresses to their mean performance?	Yes No NA	
Do coaches focus on raising the mean performance of athletes rather than focusing on the peaks and the valleys?	Yes No NA	
Are the coaches committed to relevant training and meeting the needs of the athletes?	Yes No NA	

### Assessment - Organization of Practices

Questions	Yes/No/NA	Action Items
Do you have a practice plan?	Yes No NA	
Do you post your practice plan or share it with the athletes?	Yes No NA	
Have you allowed time for necessary discussions, drill changes, and water breaks? Coaches can practice conveying their message in 30 to 60 seconds - the length of a timeout.	Yes No NA	
Have you established the time for each drill? General guidelines are 3 to 4 drills in an hour (15 to 20 minutes per drill - shorter for younger athletes).	Yes No NA	
Have you included some time (15 to 30 minutes) for scrimmages?		
Do you have names for your drills? This eliminates the need to describe them every practice.	Yes No NA	
Do your drills safely maximize use of the space in the gym?	Yes No NA	
Do you have kids teaching kids in your practice? Juniors learn by watching their peers play. They also learn when they are asked to teach their peers to play.	Yes No NA	
Have you taught the athletes skills that will allow them to feed or toss the ball to start drills? Feeding is a physical activity that is better than standing and watching.	Yes No NA	
Have you included scoring systems in your drills to make them competitive or game-like?	Yes No NA	
Do you know when to make a drill tougher or easier? A general guideline is to make the drill more difficult if the players' success rate is 65% to 70% or higher and make it easier if the success rate is lower.	Yes No NA	

### Assessment - Optimizing Touches

Questions	Yes/No/NA	Action Items
Do the warm-up drills have meaningful touches?	Yes No NA	
Do you work in threes to increase meaningful touches?	Yes No NA	
Are the team conditioning drills specific to volleyball?	Yes No NA	
How many drills include multiple balls in the air at the same time?	Yes No NA	
Have you optimized the number of live ball drills?	Yes No NA	
Do your drills include playing the ball over a net or a temporary net (rope or ribbon)?	Yes No NA	
Do your drills cover the skills in your CBOOK (sets, digs, attacks, etc.)?	Yes No NA	
Are the coaches spending their time coaching and not feeding?	Yes No NA	
Are the athletes constantly in motion to increase the sport-specific conditioning effect of practice?	Yes No NA	
Are the drills game-like? For example, will the setters and hitters practice setting and attacking when the pass is out of system?	Yes No NA	
Have you emphasized drills that include random training vs. block training to ensure long-term retention?	Yes No NA	
Have you minimized single focused drills and increased the number of drills that end with natural termination	Yes No NA	
Do your activities emphasize specific skills or training specific to volleyball, as opposed to general skills?	Yes No NA	
Do you teach new skills as whole so athletes can learn the complete movement and execution of that skill?	Yes No NA	

### Assessment - Motivation

Questions	Yes/No/NA	Action Items
Have you identified the needs of the athletes?	Yes No NA	
Do the drills address the needs of the athletes?	Yes No NA	
Do your drills engage or motivate all the players?	Yes No NA	
Do your coaches have the same expectations of the players in practice and matches? For example, are the players told to serve aggressively in practice then told to just get their serves in during competition?	Yes No NA	
Are the players challenged or put in positions where they must practice outside their comfort zone?	Yes No NA	

### Assessment - Measurement

Questions	Yes/No/NA	Action Items
Have you set goals and a mechanism to track the performance of your individual players?	Yes No NA	
Do you have goals or metrics to track the performance of groups of players such as setters and hitters?	Yes No NA	
Do you have goals or metrics for the team?	Yes No NA	
Do you compare your performance to your goals?	Yes No NA	
Do you have areas where you track the number of touches per player, based on their position? For example, some programs limit the number of jumps for attackers and blockers.	Yes No NA	
Does performance to the established goals or metrics dictate the drills used in subsequent practices?	Yes No NA	
Do you use scrimmage or match statistics to determine the focus of your practice?	Yes No NA	
Do you rate the effectiveness of drills in their ability to increase learning, improvement, and fulfillment?	Yes No NA	
Do you keep your practice plans and notes as a way to make future practices even stronger?	Yes No NA	



# CHANGE

*Change is the law of life. And those who look only to  
the past or present are certain to miss the future.*  
*-John F. Kennedy*

## Change - Ugh!

Many people struggle when they are asked to change. Coaches may agree that the concept of relevant training makes sense, but implementing change may be easier said than done. The following discussions are included to let coaches know they are not alone if they wrestle with change. Endorsing change will allow coaches to further increase learning, improvement, and fulfillment in their practices.

### First Discussion

*Parent:* Did you like the part of the USAV IMPACT course where they talked about how the game teaches the game.

*Coach:* Yeah, that's a cool idea. I like it.

*Parent:* Can you implement it into your practices?

*Coach:* Oh we can't do that because we have to teach the girls how to hit the ball and where to stand. We have to teach the girls and don't have time to play games.

### Second Discussion

*Parent:* Could the coaches in your club be more effective if the players had more meaningful touches in practice?

*Coach:* Yes, most of our coaches aren't very good and don't get it. Would you watch my practice and give me some feedback?

*After practice...*

*Parent:* You have great rapport with your athletes and they have fun. Do you think they will retain what you worked on?

*Coach:* Yes, we did my favorite blocking drill for 35 minutes, they better get it, or else.

*Parent:* I noticed several players standing around and others did not appear to be engaged. Did you see the same thing?

*Coach:* Oh that is normal.

*Parent:* Would it help to change drills?

*Coach:* No, one girl doesn't like to block, the other one was injured and couldn't go 100%, and the other girl has had a bad attitude since day one. They just need to focus.

### If David Letterman was a Volleyball Coach...

*If David Letterman was a volleyball coach who didn't like change these are 10 reasons he might give for not integrating relevant training into his practices.*

1. I have a set of great drills that were handed down to me from my coach and his coach.
2. The club has a system that works. Why change?
3. I like single focus drills because I'm in control. They look more organized, That's important to the parents.
4. I don't like to have multiple balls in the air because that makes practice look chaotic and unsafe.
5. It is important to demonstrate to the players and parents that I am knowledgeable about the sport by giving detailed descriptions of skills, techniques, and tactics.
6. When I told the parents that the game teaches the game, they said, "That's why we play tournaments. Get on the court and teach them how to play!"
7. If the club really wanted me to be a better coach they could pay for me to go to coaching clinics - in Hawaii.
8. I like breaking the skill into parts, because I can explain it better to the players that way.
9. It's just the junior varsity team. The kids aren't very good, so it doesn't matter if we hire someone who has never coached before.
10. When the girls miss their serves, they should run 3 laps. It's good conditioning and it motivates them. That's how you teach discipline and skills.

## SO, WHY ARE WE DOING THIS DRILL?

*My tennis doubles partner's mother always joked, "If you boys lived in a litigious society you might be arrested and thrown in jail for impersonating tennis instructors."*

**How does this Drill Teach the Skills in the CBOK?**

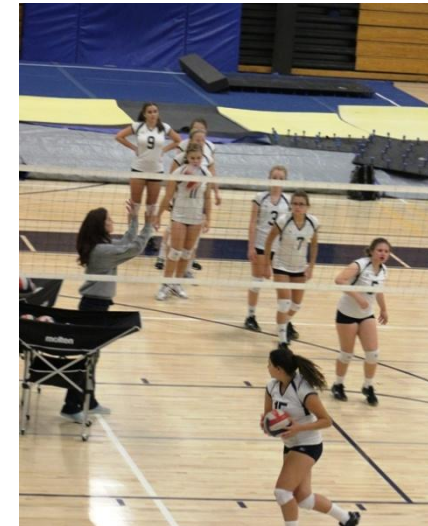
Along the way a coach is exposed to a lot of good information and even more that isn't. Over time coaches develop a filter to determine what activities will meet the needs of the team in their next practice. In simplistic terms they ask the question, "Why are we doing this drill?"

This section includes a handful of "traditional" drills. While some learning may occur from using them, coaches are encouraged to seek drills that will more effectively teach the skills in the CBOK. The good news is there are many drills that help athletes learn and improve.

<b>Drills With False Fundamentals</b>			
<i>Name</i>	<b><i>Dead Fish</i></b>	<b><i>Speed Serving</i></b>	<b><i>Hit the Cycle</i></b>
<i>Purpose</i>	Spot serving	Serving	Movement, hit all shots
<i>Description</i>	Athletes are divided into two teams. When the coach signals, the girls serve simultaneously from opposite ends of the court. Whenever a player hits a serve out of bounds she must go to the other side and lay down like a "dead fish." Teammates can bring her back to life by hitting a serve that she can catch while sitting or laying down. After 5 minutes, the team with the fewest dead fish wins.	The players split into two groups and serve. The teams will have a contest to see which team can be the first to hit 10 serves in the court.	A coach hits players a choreographed sequence of shots from the same side of the net starting with a serve followed by a dig, attack, middle block, block on the opposite side, dig, ball over their head, dig, hit, and block. (The sequence of shots varies based on the coach).
<i>Value</i>	Athletes of all ages have fun playing the drill. It introduces young players to the concept of spot serving.	Servers are instructed to develop a ritual before serving rather than to serve quickly. This drill focuses on false fundamentals.	The drill introduces newcomers to the chaos of the sport and allows them to hit a variety of shots.
<i>Comments</i>	There are better drills for teaching athletes to spot serve; however, it is important to have fun. Depending on the age group and their ability, this may be a good drill to use <u>on occasion</u> to mix things up.	There are many serving drills that effectively teach players to serve in game-like situations.	The drill is not game-like because the movement and shot pattern are choreographed. There are better drills to teach movement and the chaos of competition.

### Drills With False Fundamentals

<i>Name</i>	<b><i>Serve and Shag</i></b>	<b><i>Coach on One</i></b>
<i>Purpose</i>	Serving and conditioning	Movement, reactions, anticipation
<i>Description</i>	Athletes are divided into two groups and line up to serve from opposite ends of the court. They hit a serve and run to the other end of the court, pick up their ball, and serve it back.	Athletes surround the coach in a big circle. One at a time the coach hits a random sequence of balls to a player from 10 feet away. The athletes in the circle shag balls and count every time the designated athlete touches the ball. The drill ends when the hitter reaches 25 touches.
<i>Value</i>	The drill emphasizes false fundamentals, such as serve and run to the other side.	Athletes are taught to guess where the ball is going rather than read and react. It emphasizes false fundamentals.
<i>Comments</i>	Players tend to lose focus on their serves very quickly - they just hit it in. There is a tendency for players not to hustle when doing this drill. There is an incentive for players to hit their serve in the net to minimize having to chase the ball. There are many drills that are better for conditioning and serving.	A coach consumed 20 minutes of a 2 hour open gym doing this drill with 15 athletes. Each girl made contact with the ball 25 times, although not all touches were meaningful. It took each athlete slightly more than a minute to get 25 touches. For 19 minutes they stood around and cheered for their peers. The coach worked hard and had approximately 500 touches in 20 minutes. Afterwards the coach was dripping with sweat and walked over to a group of parents and said, "That was a great workout for the girls."



**Are your drills game-like? Are they live ball drills? Do they focus on single skills? If not, there is an opportunity for change.**

### Drills With False Fundamentals

<i>Name</i>	<b><i>Serve Under Fire</i></b>	<b><i>Shadow Volleyball</i></b>	<b><i>Mindless Serving</i></b>
<i>Purpose</i>	Build teamwork and teach players to serve under pressure.	Practice proper technique and movement.	Common warm-up drill or drill to practice serves.
<i>Description</i>	The players get in a line. Each player serves one serve. After the team finishes serving, they have to run one set of wind sprints for each serve missed. The drill continues until every team member hits their serves in. At the entry level, this drill is painful to watch.	The coach choreographs a routine where players go through the motion of hitting various shots without a ball. For example, the athlete returns a serve, attacks from the strong side, blocks, retreats to the 10-foot line, shuffles to the middle, passes a ball, attacks from the middle, blocks, retreats to the 10-foot line, shuffles to the right, passes a ball, attacks from the right side, and blocks. The same pattern is repeated on the other side.	The players split into two groups and practice serving. Because many players are hitting jump serves, coaches should do this drill in a manner that eliminates the potential for injuries.
<i>Value</i>	Coaches claim this drill teaches athletes to support their teammates when they make mistakes. They also believe it helps the athletes to serve under pressure.	Many countries emphasize shadowing techniques. Some clubs in the U.S. consume 10 to 15 minutes of each 90 minute practice doing it. Too often this drill is unsupervised and the players just go through the motions.	This drill may be appropriate in warm-ups prior to a match. It may a good drill for introducing a new serve. This drill may be effective if it is done for short periods and the athletes have a purpose such as spot serving, float serves, serve with pace, or low clearance - and they stay focused.
<i>Comments</i>	This drill has limited value and in some cases is counterproductive. There are many drills that more effectively teach athletes to serve under pressure.	The drill may have value in limited situations if the athletes properly execute the technique. There are better drills to teach movement and technique.	This is a single-focused drill and may be valuable in certain situations. Over the course of the season multi-focused serving drills are preferred.

## EXTENDING DRILLS

*Failure isn't fatal, but failure to change might be.*

*-John Wooden*

### Getting More Bang for the Buck - Greater Learning and Improvement

Creative coaches can find ways to extend drills into drills that include more skills or they are more game-like. For example, they can convert single-focus drills into multi-focus drills by playing the ball over the net or adding blockers. They can also add a scoring system to make a drill competitive or more game-like.

Coaches may have multiple balls in the air. If they do this they must ensure that safety is a concern.

Ultimately, the extended drill must meet the needs of the athletes in a game-like way. This section shows examples of how drills can be extended, keeping in mind the focus of this paper is to find ways to increase game-like activity.

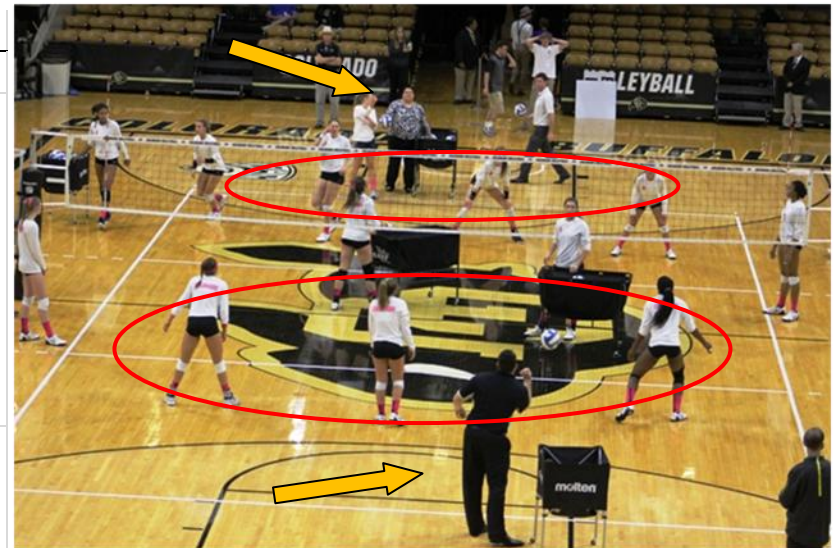
<i>Extending Drills</i>	
<i>Name</i>	<b>Serve Receive Attack Drill</b>
<i>Description</i>	The photo shows part of the warm-up for a University of Colorado match. As shown in the picture, the serve receive/attack drill was initiated by the coach in the black on the near side of the net. He served to the libero who passed to the setter, who set a group of hitters. The three players on the same side of the net as the coach (in black) were blockers. The head coach, in the black jacket and white blouse (far side), is near the libero and can provide input as appropriate.
<i>Extending the Drill</i>	<p>In a practice setting the coaches might extend the drill in the following ways.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Players could initiate the drill with a down ball or a serve.</li> <li>• Players other than the libero could receive serve.</li> <li>• Hitters could attack from the middle and weak side.</li> <li>• The group could be split in half and the drill could be run on both halves of the court. This would theoretically double the number of touches.</li> <li>• Various scoring systems could be used.</li> </ul>



Coaches can creatively find ways to optimize touches and make drills more game-like.



<i>Extending Drills</i>	
<i>Name</i>	<b>Serve Return University of Colorado</b>
<i>Description</i>	In the pre-game warm-up (University of Colorado vs. UCLA) the CU coaches on both sides (arrows), near the ball carts, originally initiated the drill with underhand ball tosses, which is not game-like. One of the three receivers (red ovals) passed the ball to the setters, who are standing near the ball carts at the net. The setters caught the ball and put it in the cart, i.e. the point was not terminated naturally. At this level, the coaches did not initiate the first shot simultaneously for safety reasons.
<i>Extending the Drill</i>	As the warm-up continued, the coaches extended the drill by initiating the point with a down ball, instead of a toss. In a practice setting, the drill could be extended by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having players serve or initiate the drill with a down ball.</li> <li>• Allowing hitters to attack or hit down balls where they are not allowed to jump. For safety reasons, the drill would have to be modified if hitters were allowed to attack.</li> <li>• Two groups could do this drill on a half court.</li> </ul>



When extending drills it is important to optimize touches and ensure the drills are conducted in a manner that is safe.

<i>Extending Drills</i>	
<i>Name</i>	<b>Serve Return UCLA</b>
<i>Description</i>	In their warm-ups, UCLA used a variation of the serve return drill that CU did (above), except it was terminated with an attack. UCLA actually had a player start the drill from the near side (oval). This allowed the three coaches (arrows) to monitor the drill from the endline on the other side of the court.
<i>Extending the Drill</i>	The drill featured relevant training. There are a number of variations that could be run on this drill.



The UCLA coaches let their athletes initiate drills so they can coach.

### **Extending Drills**

<b>Name</b>	<b><i>Mindless Serving Made Mindful</i></b>
<b>Description</b>	In the University of Oregon's pregame warm-up the players served from both ends of the court. Trainers are on the court to deflect balls so servers don't hit a jump serve and land on them, specifically, the player in the bottom right hand corner (red oval). She is approximately two feet off the ground as she makes contact with her serve.
<b>Extending the Drill</b>	It is mindful to serve as a group for pre-game warm-ups, particularly because the players are focused on hitting their serves with a purpose (float, low clearance, placement, pace). The main disadvantage to serving as a group in practice is that the drill emphasizes only one skill and players have a tendency to lose focus after hitting several serves. The drill can be extended by combining it with serve return drills or other drills described in this document.



**Safety matters, especially when players are hitting jump serves and serving simultaneously.**

### **Extending Drills**

<b>Name</b>	<b><i>Hitting Lines</i></b>
<b>Description</b>	In a pre-game warm-up for a high school match the team lined up in one line (oval) while the coach tossed each player a ball to attack. They hit it, chased it, put it in the cart, went to the end of the line, and waited.
<b>Extending the Drill</b>	Some coaches prefer tossing balls to hitters in pre-match warm-ups because they can get a lot of hits in a short period. There are a number of ways to extend the drill: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initiate with a down ball, pass, set, and hit.</li> <li>• Have multiple hitting lines with setters.</li> <li>• Use the other half of the court. Let blockers or defensive players be part of the drill.</li> <li>• An alternative method to hitting would be to let the players self-toss, self-set, and hit.</li> </ul>



**Court time is a precious commodity. Use it wisely. The drill could be extended by having two hitting lines, blockers, or defensive players.**

<b>Extending Drills</b>	
<b>Name</b>	<b>Sequence of Drills-Hitting With a Setter</b>
<b>Description</b>	This next two photos show a sequence of drills at a club practice. There were 18 players and 3 coaches (arrows) on one court. The coach in the middle (yellow arrow) on the opposite end of the court tossed balls to two setters, who then set two hitting lines. The two coaches on this side of the net (red arrows) were blockers.
<b>Extending the Drill</b>	There are several ways to extend the drill: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have a player on the near side of the net initiate the drill with a down ball. A player could then pass it to the setter, who sets the hitters.</li> <li>• Instead of standing in line, athletes could be blocking or playing back row.</li> <li>• A scoring system could be used to make the drill competitive.</li> </ul>



Coaches should teach the athletes skills that will allow them to initiate drills. Likewise, players should be given an opportunity to play in the drills, while coaches work with players from the sidelines.

<b>Extending Drills</b>	
<b>Name</b>	<b>Sequence of Drills-Hitting With a Setter and Back Row</b>
<b>Description</b>	After about five minutes the coaches (arrows) extended the drill by including defensive players. Throughout the entire drill a coach initiated the drill with a toss. The players never blocked in this drill.
<b>Extending the Drill</b>	There are several ways to extend the drill: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have a player on the near side of the net initiate the drill with a down ball. A player could then pass it to the setter, who sets the hitters.</li> <li>• Instead of standing in line, athletes could be blocking (instead of the coaches).</li> </ul>



Safety matters! Note the ball just outside the sidelines (circle). The coaches were busy feeding and blocking and did not notice it.

### *Extending Drills*

<i>Name</i>	<b>Sequence of Drills - Stations</b>
<i>Description</i>	After the drill on the previous page was completed the coaches split into 3 stations to provide specific training in smaller groups. The coach on the far side (rectangle) worked on offense. The coach in the middle (oval) worked on defense. The coach at the right edge of the photo worked with a small group of setters (not shown).
<i>Extending the Drill</i>	The drill could be extended by setting up the gym so the athletes could practice on 2 courts instead of 1.
<i>Comments</i>	The sequence of drills was clearly planned. It was evident the coaches had planned the practice.



**Working in stations can be an effective way to increase the number of meaningful touches and specific skills training.**

### **If David Letterman was a Masterful Volleyball Coach...**

*If David Letterman was a volleyball coach who was a master at extending drills to integrate relevant training into his practices this is a list of the top 10 things he might suggest.*

1. Maximize use of the court space to optimize meaningful touches.
2. Prepare a practice plan. This gives the coach a chance to identify drills that need to be extended or eliminated.
3. Use both sides of the court and do drills over the net. If necessary drills could be done over a rope or ribbon.
4. Use multiple focus drills.
5. Use half courts and have multiple balls in the air (safely).
6. Select drills that require the athletes to hustle the entire time. Sport specific conditioning will reduce the need for off-court conditioning.
7. Teach the athletes skills that will allow them to initiate drills.
8. Allow the coach to be in position to provide cues between points.
9. Include a scoring system to make the drills more game-like and fun.
10. Teach the athletes skills that are specific to volleyball.

## PERFECT DRILLS

*Veteran coaches know hundreds of drills; however, many only use 10-15 drills on a regular basis - and they use them over and over. Over time they have become masters at customizing and creating derivatives of the drills to meet the needs of the athletes.*

### So, What is the Perfect Drill?

Typically the most popular sessions at coaches' clinics are the drill sessions. Some coaches are just as obsessed with finding the perfect drill as young girls are with finding a unicorn.

Veteran coaches know hundreds of drills; however, many only use 10-15 drills on a regular basis - and they use them over and over. Over time they have become masters at customizing and creating derivatives of the drills to meet the needs of the athletes. Customization may come in the form of scoring systems or special stipulations. For example, the teams may require a specific person to be the designated attacker.

Some of these drills are played on half courts with multiple balls in the air because most teams have a limited number of courts. If space is available they can be altered slightly and played on multiple courts.

So, what is the perfect drill?

**The perfect drill is an activity that optimizes the number of meaningful touches in a game-like situation to address the needs of the players identified in the CBOK. There are many perfect drills and they may vary from day to day.**

This section is not intended to be a drill book, but a sample of perfect drills. There are numerous websites where you can find thousands of drills. Remember, as you review them have a good filter!

So, Coach what's your set of perfect drills?

<i>Perfect Drills</i>	
<i>Name</i>	<b>Threes (Over the Net)</b>
<i>Purpose</i>	Warm-up drill emphasizing control and game-like angles.
<i>Description</i>	Athletes often warm-up and practice in pairs. Instead, they should warm-up in threes and practice over a net, rope, or ribbon whenever possible. This is a cooperative drill.
<i>Comments</i>	There a number of variations. For example, players may practice with a self-pass, self-set, and roll shot.



**Most teams warm-up in pairs. It is more effective to warm-up in threes because the path of the ball more closely replicates the angle of the ball in competition.**

<b>Perfect Drills</b>			
<i>Name</i>	<b><i>Self-Pass, Self-set, Hit</i></b>	<b><i>Ones, Twos, Threes</i></b>	<b>What do you Need to Work On?</b>
<i>Purpose</i>	Ball control, particularly ball-control above your head.	Movement, communications, and all skills.	Varied.
<i>Description</i>	Ultimately the athletes should do this drill over the net in groups of twos, threes, or fours. It begins with a control down ball to a teammate. That person passes to herself, sets herself, and returns a down ball to her teammate. This is a cooperative drill.	Have players play on the half court. If you have multiple courts they can play on the middle third or the whole court. They can play 1-on-1, 1-on-2, 2-on-2, 2-on-2, 2-on-3, or 3-on-3. When there is only 1 player on a side, that person would be allowed three hits using self-passes, self-sets and roll shots.	John Dunning, Stanford Coach, periodically lets players spend time at the end of practice working on a skill of their choice. There are times when the players may know better than the coach what they need to work on to maintain their confidence.
<i>Comments</i>	Some coaches believe that most athletes cannot control the ball when it is above their head. The purpose of this drill is to address that problem. This is an excellent drill for warming up, particularly for younger or less skilled athletes.	This may be used as a warm-up drill. The drill may be cooperative. The athletes would work together to see how many consecutive shots they can hit. The drill may be competitive where a team tries to win a game.	This drill can build trust between the players and the coach. It also places responsibility on the player to be aware of what they need to work on.



At times it is valuable to allow players to identify the skills they want to work on during a designated portion of practice.

<i>Perfect Drills</i>			
<i>Name</i>	<i>Burn</i>	<i>Designated Attacker</i>	<i>Server vs. the Team</i>
<i>Purpose</i>	Movement, communications, and all skills	Ball handling, communications, tactics	Teach players to serve aggressively
<i>Description</i>	Teams include 3 or 4 players. The point begins with a serve or a down ball. Players are allowed to pass, set, and hit roll shots. They are not allowed to leave their feet and attack. Every time the ball goes over the net they must rotate. A minimum of three players is required. The drill can be played on a full court or half court.	Teams will be comprised of two, three, or four players. A designated hitter is assigned for each team. The only way the team can win a point is when the designated attacker records a kill. The drill can be played on a full or half court. It may be necessary to allow two designated hitters for teams with weaker skills. A variation is to have designated setters.	The server plays against two or three players on a half court. The winner is the first to five points. The server wins a point when she gets an ace, forces an error, or she touches the attack. The attacking team scores only if they hit a kill that the server does not touch. The scoring system may have to be adjusted based on the level of the athletes.



In this drill the designated attacker was the defensive specialist. The drill can be structure to emphasize the athlete's strengths or areas for improvement.



<b>Perfect Drills</b>			
<i>Name</i>	<b><i>Think, Move, and Win</i></b>	<b><i>Speedball</i></b>	<b><i>All Skills Drill</i></b>
<i>Purpose</i>	Movement, communications, tactics.	All skills activity.	Teach all skills
<i>Description</i>	Teams will have two or three players and they can play on half or full courts. The drill begins with the players throwing the ball back and forth over the net, as is done in Newcomb. Anytime a ball touches the ground a point is won. In the second round, the teams play points where only one hit is allowed. In the third round they play points where one or two hits are allowed. In the final round teams will play points where they must play three hits on every point. This is strictly a competitive drill where players can play mini-games to five. Younger players might have to be taught how to "be competitive" to win this drill.	Divide the players into 4 teams, with two teams on end of the court - one on the court and one behind the end line. The two "off" teams each have a ball, as does one of the "on" teams. The on team with the ball starts play with a serve and the teams rally normally from there. The team that loses the points exits the court and the off team on that side enters the court and serves. The winner of each rally scores a point, with the game played to some predetermined point total. <i>Comments:</i> This drill is similar to Queen of the Court, except there are more touches.	A player begins the drill with a down ball or a serve to one, two, or three back row players. The serve return is passed to the setter who sets a hitter. The drill can be done on a full-court. It is possible to get more touches if it is done on a half-court. In the latter case, the point would be initiated from opposite ends of the court. There are many variations of this drill. Some were shown in the warm-up photos for CU and UCLA in the previous section. The level of relevant training will increase if blockers, defensive players, and a scoring system are included.



This game-like drill began with a down ball and focused on passing, setting, hitting, and blocking in a competitive situation.

## YOUR MISSION, NOW THAT YOU HAVE ACCEPTED IT - PART II

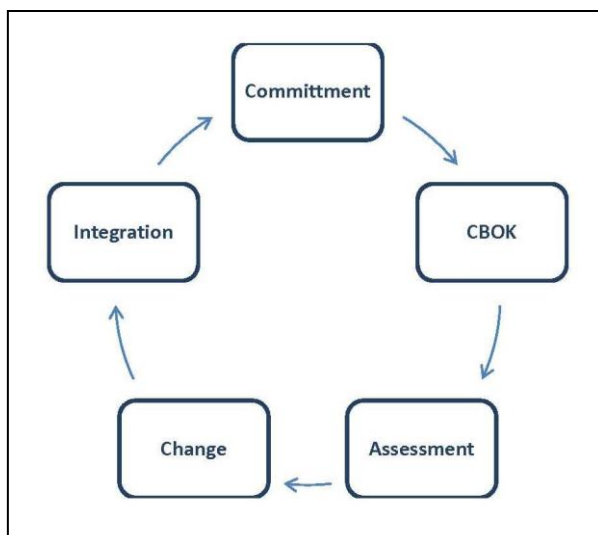
*A coach is someone who can give correction  
without causing resentment.*

*-John Wooden*

## Integration - Pulling It Together

The process discussed on the previous pages allows coaches to identify drills and activities that will result in relevant training in their team practices. In short the process is summarized below.

- You accepted the mission to be a coach.
- You understand the CBOK, with areas of emphasis specific to your team.
- You have completed an assessment of your team's practices for relevant training and understand how your drills and activities align or don't align with your CBOK.
- You realize that change can be challenging, but it leads to increased learning, improvement, and fulfillment for players and coaches.
- You have reviewed drills that are good, bad, and ugly and you know how to ignore, extend, or select the perfect drills for your team.
- You can now sit back and say, "Mission Accomplished"
- But since volleyball is always changing, the process is ongoing.



The worksheet template on the following page shows how to use this information to arrive at your team's perfect drills.

### The First Practice of the Season - Game-Like!

*The following is the body of an actual email about a mother describing her daughter's first day of club volleyball with a coach who integrates relevant training into the team practices. (Names are not included).*

The team's first practice was yesterday.. After practice my daughter talked nonstop for an hour. The team did their official measuring of height, block touch, standing reach, etc. My daughter said the practice was like none other she's participated in before - and she has played four years. She said every single activity they did was game-like and they practiced every element of the game.

It's a new team and she was nervous, but she quickly settled in and feels better about how she stacks up against the other girls. It is clear she has to up her game to compete.

My daughter likes the coach and his style. He stopped play frequently to have the girls watch one or two players doing something wrong. He would show them the correct way. My daughter was the first player stopped. Ugh! The coach handled the situation in a way that challenged her to correct the problem. It was a positive experience for her.

The coach didn't compliment a single girl on anything and oddly, that seemed to motivate them. Here's the funny part. Last evening (and this morning) my daughter's hams, quads, butt, and core were so sore that it hurt when she coughed, sneezed, and walked. Like a supportive parent I laughed harder with each moan and groan. The coach believes the girls should condition, but doesn't believe in wasting practice time to do it. And the funny thing is she thought she was in pretty good shape. I can't wait for the next practice!

## WORKSHEET

### Mission Accomplished - Increased Learning, Improvement, and Fulfillment

#### Common Body of Knowledge

*In the columns below list areas where you may want to add greater detail to your CBOK*

Principles	Technical Skills	Tactics	Player Soft Skills	Program Skills



#### Assessment Action Items

*In the columns below list action items from the Assessment Section indicating how you will make your practices more game-like.*

Coach's Mindsets	Organization of Practices	Optimizing Touches	Motivation	Measurement



#### Drills and Activities

*In the columns below list the perfect drills, drills to be extended, and drills to avoid to identify your perfect practice drills*

Perfect Drills	Plus	Drills that Can be Extended	Minus	Drills to Avoid	Equals	Your Perfect Drills	Your Perfect Drills

## THE WORDS AND CONCEPTS OF RELEVANT TRAINING

*The game teaches the game.*

## There is More to Creating Efficient Practices Than Meets the Eye - Terms and Concepts

The following terms, phrases, and concepts relate to relevant training.

**Ball Slappers** - Coaches who slap the ball and often yell, "Ball" prior to tossing or hitting it to initiate a drill. Coaches use the slap as a way of notifying the players the ball is coming their way. Others claim the slap replicates contact with the ball during match play.

**Block Learning** - In the block style of learning the coach focuses on a skill until it is mastered and follows a progression to the subsequent skills. For example, a coach who has a player hit all serves cross court for 10 minutes is using block learning. This learning style is common in academia and may make athletes feel good about themselves in the short-term. There is greater retention with interleaved or random teaching. When coaches are first teaching new skills it may be appropriate to use block learning briefly, but the transition to random learning should be made as soon as possible.

**Cheerleader Coaches** -Enthusiastic coaches who mean well by saying, "Good shot," on every ball. Enthusiasm is good, but they would be more effective coaches if they used cues or feed forward comments to encourage their players.

**Constructive Feedback** - John Wooden was considered the master of constructive feedback. His comments were succinct, they addressed the situation, and they were actionable. The comments were positive in nature because they were delivered in a caring manner that was not threatening or demeaning. In fact they showed that he cared about the growth of the athlete.

**Cooperative Drill** - Players work together on a drill toward a common goal. For example, a group of three players may work together to see how many balls they can hit in a row.

**Common Body of Knowledge** - All sports have a CBOK. It is the technical volleyball skills, tactical volleyball knowledge, key principles, and on and off court activities that are necessary for playing and coaching a sport. The basic CBOK and rules are the same for teams at all levels. In volleyball a point begins with a serve and it is won by the last team to hit the ball in bounds.

**Communications After a Point** - Research in tennis showed that in doubles play recreation players communicated less than 30% of the time between points, college players communicated about two-thirds of the time, and professional players communicated after almost all points. In volleyball, communications after points helps keep all players on the same page, particularly when there is confusion on the court or a need to address specific issues such as tactics.

**Communications During a Point** - Players are taught to "call the ball" to ensure proper coverage and prevent collisions on the court. In most club matches players have about .7 seconds to react to a serve and about half that amount of time on an attack. Players should focus more on reading the ball/play, processing the data, and reacting to it.

**Communications Off Court** - Coaches should teach the players how their words and body language during a match can impact their

teammates. Discussions about body language and communications should be held off the court in a non-threatening environment.

**Competitive Drill** - A scoring system is used in drills and players compete against each other. The objective is to win the drill.

**Cues** - A brief phrase or set of words that coaches can use to convey information to players about their performance. For example, "Cover line." may be used prior to a point to remind a blocker that an opponent is likely to attack down the line. That cue may be used after a point as constructive feedback that a blocker effectively covered the down the line attack.

**David Letterman** - David Letterman was a late-night talk show host famous for his top 10 lists.

**Dead-Ball Drills** - Dead ball drills are initiated by the coach. Quite often they are started from angles on the court that do not replicate match play. For example, many coaches start many of their drills standing near the net post. Every time a coach touches a ball, it prevents the athletes from touching the ball.

**Developing Practice Skills** - Many drills emphasize skills that are used in practice, but not in a match. (See False Fundamentals). Coaches should focus on drills and activities that are game-like. Most coaches and players would rather win the match than the warm-ups.



**The setters' coach is coaching near the sideline in close proximity to the setter. He provides cues to the setter between points.**

### **If David Letterman was a Volleyball Virgin...**

*If David Letterman had never seen volleyball before, these are the top 10 questions he might ask if he walked into the club down the street.*

1. Is the coach exorcising the ball when he slaps it hard, hollers "Ball", waits for people to react, then throws it up in the air?
2. How many volleyball coaches were divorced last year because they were chained to their ball carts and wanted to take them home and sleep with them?
3. If volleyball is an active sport, then why do coaches spend most of their time teaching kids to stand in line?
4. I watched a person claiming to be coach give a 10 minute dissertation about how to set the ball. When the girls started practicing all he could say was "Good shot," even when they set it into the 4th row of the bleachers. Was he the coach or the cheerleader?
5. Why do coaches have a cart of balls, when they only use 5 balls all practice?
6. How many wind sprints do coaches run when they make mistakes or bad decisions?
7. Why do coaches tell the players to hit their serves hard in practice, but then tell them to just get it in during a match?
8. Since the coach got more touches than the players during practice, what position will he be playing during the next match?
9. Why does the coach always start the point in volleyball by standing by his ball cart over near the bench? When did that become a rule?
10. If the girl learning to hit a serve misses it, why does she have to do 10 pushups? Most likely she is a slightly imperfect human who wants to get better. It seems like the only way to improve her serve is practice hitting serves instead of doing pushups.

**Extending a Drill** - This is the process of converting a single focus drill into a multiple focus drill.

**False Fundamentals** - False fundamentals are skills that do not transfer to match play. For example, a local team spent 10 minutes of each 90 minute practice doing wall sits. The players were proud about

how much easier it was to do this drill as the season progressed; however, their on-court performance suffered because they were not practicing skills that were used in the matches.

**Feedback** - Feedback is the way coaches, parents, opponents, or teammates react to a player's performance. The feedback may be valuable if it is constructive. Feedback is not helpful when it is demeaning, distracting, or does not provide relevant information.

**Feed Forward** - Comments made to help athletes focus on the next shot rather than what has happened in the past. For example, after a player misses a serve she may say to herself, "I'm a good player, next time I'm going to hit a good serve. Now I will focus on reading and reacting to the ball when they serve it to me." Coaches should use feed forward comments when talking with players between points. In addition, players should communicate with each other between points using feed forward phrases or cues.

**Game-like** - Game-like drills use the same skills, techniques, and strategy that would be used in a match. For example, game-like activities may include scoring, sportsmanship, and mental toughness as part of the drill.

**Grills** - Another name for game-like drills. Grills teach players to respond appropriately in competition.

**Irrelevant training** - Training that includes activities that are not game-like or that emphasize false fundamentals. Irrelevant training may help teams win the warm-ups, but not the match.

**Kids Teaching Kids** - Effective sports programs in other countries have kids mentoring younger players. By learning to teach the sport, the older players will better understand the sport. Along these same lines, kids should learn skills that will allow them to initiate drills.



The coach is at court side (bottom left corner) prepared to provide cues or feed forward comments to the players between points.

**Live-Ball Drills** - Live ball drills are initiated by the players. Preferably they are initiated from the court with a down ball, serve, or shot that gives their teammates an opportunity to read the ball/play.

**Meaningful Touches** - Touches that are game-like.

**Mindsets** - This is a book written by Carol Dweck. In her research she identified two types of mindsets that relate to coaching. Coaches with fixed mindsets believe the talents and abilities of their athletes are already established - they are fixed. They believe many of the best athletes are natural athletes. Athletes with a fixed mindset are focused on looking good and being told they are good. Many of them never reach their potential. Coaches with a growth mindset challenge their athletes to develop their talent through instruction, practice, and hard work. Athletes with a growth mindset are challenged when they lose or when things don't go their way. In these situations they find ways to get better.

**Misled by Randomness** - Randomness about the mean is the variability about the mean (see regression to the mean). For example,



a volleyball player may hit 80% of her serves in. Randomness about the mean occurs when she hits 7 out of 10 serves one day and 9 of 10 serves another day. Coaches who are misled by randomness may think she got worse when she hit 7 of 10 serves and may think she improved when she hit 9 of 10 serves. This variation or randomness about the mean is normal. Improvement comes when a player's average improves over time using a larger sample size. For example, a player hits 80 of 100 serves in during March and 83 of 100 serves in during April.

**Multiple Focus Activities** -These activities emphasize multiple skill sets. For example, a hitting line could be extended to a drill that focuses on passing, setting, hitting, and blocking. A scoring system could be used that could address mental toughness and sportsmanship skills.



Volleyball is played over the net, yet the coach on the other side is doing pre-match warm-up drills that only utilize one-side of the court.

**(The) Net** - The net divides the court into two 30 foot squares where the ball must land. The rules state the ball must go over the net into the playing area on the other side. In other words, practice should be held over the net. If there are too many players for one court, then use a rope or ribbon to make a temporary net.

**Newcomb** - Clara Baer, a physical education instructor, invented the sport in 1895 as a variation of volleyball. It differs from volleyball because the ball is thrown and caught, rather than being hit.

**Normal Termination** - Points are terminated when one of the teams hits the ball out of bounds or they hit a winner. Drills that are multi-focused and terminated normally are likely to be more game-like than those that are not.

**Optimizing Touches** - Coaches should design practices so the drills meet the needs of the team. This may be determined by what they need to work on, which players are at practice, the amount of discussion time that is needed during practice, when the next match is, when the last match was played, or a variety of other factors. Coaches should strive to optimize the number of meaningful touches rather than maximize them.

**Outcome Based** - Players and teams are measured by the outcome of the competition, i.e. they won or lost the match.

**Praise** - Praise is a form of feedback that may make a player feel good, but has little value because it is not instructive. In the case of cheerleader coaches, praise may not be insincere. With a little more effort coaches could just as easily say, "Good arm speed," or "Next time -you will get good arm speed." Feed forward comments are more valuable than meaningless praise or the standard feedback, "Good shot."

**Performance Based** - Players and teams are measured by their performance or effort in competition, not by the outcome of the match.

**Periodization** - Periodization is a systematic long-term training program designed to help athletes achieve peak performance at the most desired times of the year. Typical phases of periodization include: preparation phase, pre-competition phase, competition phases, active-rest phase.

**Practice Plan** - A practice plan is an outline for the practice. Most importantly it includes the names of the drills (and descriptions if necessary), projected times for each drill, names of coaches and players in attendance, injured players, and special equipment needed. The basic practice plan should be shared with the players in advance or posted prior to practice for the players to see. Some successful coaches recommend saving their plans. They make notes about activities that were successful, those that were not, issues that need to be addressed with players, and areas that need to be covered at the next practice.

**Random or Interleaved Learning** - This is a style of learning where a coach will teach new information while reviewing information previously covered and information that might be covered. For example, when helping a player with the cross court serve, the coach might have the athlete hit a mix of serves cross court and to other locations. Research shows there is greater long-term retention with this learning style.

**Reading the Ball/Play** - Reading the ball/play involves reading where the ball is going based on a number of factors - score, opponent techniques, opponent tendencies, spin, pace, and position of

opponents. When players start a drill or game-like activity with a serve or down ball from within the court they are giving their teammates a chance to practice reading the ball/play.

**Regression to the Mean** - This is a mathematical way of saying that a player's performance evens out over time, i.e. data tends to the average. For example, if a volleyball player hits 80% of her serves in, then she may hit 7 of 10 serves in today and she may hit 9 of 10 serves in tomorrow. The coach should be more focused on raising the mean than on the randomness about the mean.

*Is your practice plan a secret? If so, why? Post it and share it with your players!*

**Relevant training** - Relevant training optimizes meaningful touches and integrates game-like activity to teach the common body of knowledge so athletes will respond appropriately in competition. Relevant training is not a system for coaching nor is it a set of drills. It is based on research and encompasses everything from using cues to teaching periodization. It can easily be adapted to meet the abilities of the coaches and the needs of the athletes.

**Single Focus Drills** - These are drills that emphasize only one skill. For example, the coach tosses a ball to a hitting line during the warm-ups. If training drills are primarily single focused, the athletes may not perform as well if there are multiple shots to consider.

**Specificity** - This is the principle of training that states that practices should be relevant to the sport. In other words a volleyball coach must teach skills that apply to volleyball. Running laps or wind sprints may help improve a person's endurance or quickness, but those exercises won't help a player move efficiently to set or attack a ball. In other words, athletes must practice hitting or setting to improve their footwork related to those positions.

**Sportsmanship** - Sportsmanship is the conduct of athletes in an ethical and fair manner during competition. This behavior includes the actions of athletes in winning and losing situations - and when they are relegated to sitting on the bench. In addition, many programs extend sportsmanship to a player's behavior outside of competition. Sportsmanship is something that must be taught and practiced like other skills.

**Stations** - Some coaches will organize practices so that athletes work in small groups on a specific technique or skill. For example, a group of players may work on setting while others work on serving. Multi-focused drills should be used when athletes are working in stations.

**Teaching the Whole** - Skills may be taught as a whole or as a part. Teaching the whole allows athletes to better understand the skill. With more complex skills players should practice the whole, while focusing on the part.

**The Game Teaches the Game** - Practices should be game-like. Coaches should emphasize all aspects of the sport including skills, techniques, strategy, sportsmanship, and mental toughness, i.e. the CBOK. This does not mean every practice should consist of playing sets or matches. The disadvantage to playing sets is that one person hits while eleven players, plus those on the bench, watch the activity.

**The Perfect Drill** - The perfect drill is the one that helps the athletes learn and address their needs. A perfect drill will allow players to perform well in competition. There are many perfect drills.

**Winning the Warm-up** - Many warm-up drills prior to a match feature single focus drills. It is easy for players to look impressive in these drills. The team that wins the warm-up may not necessarily win the match. If the setter only practices sets that are in-system then she

may not be able to set effectively during a match when passes are out of system.

**Work in Threes** - In racquet sports athletes often hit the ball back in the direction it came from - that is the high percentage shot. Volleyball players don't have that luxury because the direction of the path of the ball is changed on almost every shot. For example, the libero angles her serve return to the setter who in turn changes the direction of the path of the ball with her set to the middle. It is recommended that basic volleyball drills are done in groups of three, rather than pairs.

**About the Author** Gary Horvath is a USAV CAP I level coach. He has coached volleyball primarily in recreation and middle school programs. As well, he is a Master Professional with the United States Professional Tennis Association. He has been recognized for coaching juniors and adults in programs ranging from entry level to highly competitive. In addition, he is a founder of the USA Professional Platform Tennis Association. In that capacity he helped led the development of the organizational structure, the certification criteria, and testing process for the sport's teaching professionals. Horvath is a member of the Wilson Advisory Staff (platform tennis). [www.garyhorvath.com](http://www.garyhorvath.com).

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## The USAV Coaches Manifesto

USA Volleyball has published their coaching manifesto that includes the principles of relevant training

BE A RELATIONSHIP COUNSELOR BETWEEN A PLAYER AND THEIR **LOVE OF THE GAME.**  
WHOLE NOT PART.

THE BEST TEACHER SHOWS YOU WHERE TO LOOK BUT NOT WHAT TO SEE.  
PRINCIPLES BEFORE METHODS. **FEEDBACK =**  
**BE CONSISTENT.** INFORMATION FOR YOUR GROWTH MINDSET TO UTILIZE.

READING IS THE MOST IMPORTANT SKILL TO TEACH.  
BECOME A **GREAT** STORYTELLER. USE A WHITEBOARD. SOCRATIC COACHING.

**BE A COACH.** **RELENTLESSLY**  
THE COACH WHO KNOWS WHY BEATS THE COACH WHO KNOWS HOW. **POSITIVE.**  
INCREASE YOUR CONTACTS PER HOUR. USE OF THE COURT WITHOUT USE OF THE NET IS PROHIBITED.

INTENT VS. RESULT. GUIDED DISCOVERY.  
KIDS DON'T CARE HOW MUCH YOU KNOW UNTIL THEY KNOW HOW MUCH YOU CARE.

POSITIVE ERRORS TO PERFECTION. DEVELOP **AMAZING LEADERS.**

**PROCESS OVER OUTCOME.**  
YOU'RE A TEACHER FIRST AND ALWAYS. TEACH THE GAME BETWEEN CONTACTS.

**OPPORTUNITY IS NOWHERE.** THAT WHICH I ALLOW, I TEACH.  
NEVER TAKE A PLAYER'S PERFORMANCE PERSONALLY. **SPECIFICITY.**  
SPEED FIRST... ACCURACY SECOND. THE COURT IS YOUR CLASSROOM FOR TEACHING PERFORMING ARTS.

YOU HAVEN'T TAUGHT THEM IF THEY HAVEN'T LEARNED.  
**NEVER BE A CHILD'S** BE DEMANDING BUT NEVER DEMEANING.

**LAST COACH.** RANDOM OVER BLOCKED. INFORMATION NOT HUMILIATION. SCIENCE VS. OPINION.

FEEDFORWARD = GUIDANCE NOT CRITICISM.  
YOUR PRACTICE OBJECTIVES SHOULD NOT BE A SECRET.

