

The Metamorphosis of a Coach to a Teacher

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A year ago, when I sat in CAP I, I distinctly remember sitting in the middle of the class, 15 minutes before John Kessel began to speak thinking to myself, *'I have been playing this game for 27 years, and coaching for the past seven years, how much more can I learn? What can they really teach me? After all, the teams had done fairly well over the years, so, I must be doing something right.'* Well, not five minutes into the class, I realized just how little I knew, and just how wrong my approach had been.

I fell into the trap: 'You teach the way you were taught,' and never knew it. I spent the next two days taking 20 pages of notes and could not wait until I got back to *teaching* volleyball. It was as though I broke through the clouds and could see.

The very first thing I did when I got home was to go to my drill book and remove each and every one of them. I needed to replace them with two concepts I learned at CAP I:

1. The game teaches the game
2. Use the net

I took what I had learned during the CAP course and tried to design a few games that could be changed a little to meet various concepts I wanted to teach. No longer would we be spending time partner passing, serving to an open court, having blocked practices, or hitting into an open court; no, we were going to let the game teach the game.

As the boys' season approached I was ready. For the first time, I had an assistant coach to work with. Now, my assistant coach played for me last year. So he played through my last years of stupidity. As we rolled out these games and played them for a few weeks, he turned to me one day and said: *"Why couldn't you have taken this course the year before so we could have ran them?"* I apologized to him. That year's group was so spectacular that they would have improved even more. However, I was encouraged by his comments, and we plugged on.

There was player resistance. After all, most of them had peppered since freshman year and taking that away from them seemed wrong. I tried to explain what I learned at CAP, and how I thought we could improve if we stuck to the plan. We did improve, but, I must say, not to the level I thought we would- more on that later.

I also teach a girls' 17s team, and I brought the same concepts to them. Learning from my 18s boys' team, the very first night of practice we sat down and talked about what I learned at CAP and how we would use these concepts I learned at our practices. As some time went on, we learned what games worked better than others and made some adjustments.

While the boys were not as successful as I thought, the girls were more successful. I believe the changes we made were working. Some of the other coaches in the club were beginning to use the games we developed. That was exciting!

Yet, the boys' season bothered me. I could not figure out why it had not been successful. I signed up for CAP II, hoping I could find the answers. I did.

We were sitting in the drill design section of the class, and were reviewing one of my favorite games. I spent a couple of minutes describing what it was and what I looked for out of it. Tom Tait looked at me and said: "*How do I know how I am doing?*" That was the answer! I was never one for consequences, or trying to keep track of every outcome in practice. I only had a few hours a week and did not want to lose the time doing a consequence versus teaching volleyball. This was a mistake. Athletes need to be challenged, tested.

I went back home after CAP II and reviewed my mission statement and season plan for the teams. I reviewed all of my games and incorporated all of the little things that when combined, make a big difference. We incorporated the idea of little points creating big points, and too many error points taking away from big points. The idea of error points came from an interview with Brian Urlacher where he talked about how they keep the Bears defense so focused. Some days we will be focused on communication, some days it is covering the hitters correctly, some days it will be everything. As we approach the tournament season, we may incorporate all of the items into every game. This quote sums it up best:

"We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit" – Aristotle.

We keep that tally going all night. You can see the boys keeping their eye on the score. At the end of the night, we administer a consequence to the team with the least amount of big points. We have found that the boys practice much harder knowing everything we do is a competition. I do not think the consequence is that important to them. Rather, I think it is constantly being aware of "*How am I doing?*"

I've tried to write about what I learned from CAP I and II and how it can relate to every teacher. It breaks down into one word: education. The game evolves and all of the teachers must keep up with it. Keep your mind open to new ideas, reach out to other coaches and see the things they do.

In short, CAP is a tremendously effective program and I for one, am glad USAV runs it.