



Youth Volleyball Tips for Success

- *By John Kessel, USA Volleyball Director of Sport Development*

After nearly 40 years of spending time coaching 12 and unders, I thought it might be of value to share some of the best ways to grow the game – which should start at this 6-12 year old age group level for all high school and Jr. Olympic club teams alike. Honestly most all of these secrets I have already put into the books I have written to help our sport at the starting level – MiniVolley and IMPACT books by USA Volleyball. There are, however, a few core concepts/ideas I believe worth re-sharing and elaborating on even more.

- 1. *Fitting in VB with Basketball and other sport programs***
- 2. *Finding Enough Coaches***
- 3. *Coaching the Youngest – 3-9 year olds.***
- 4. *Grills for Little Kids***

1. Fitting VB into Other Sports

Recently a coach who attended one of my sessions at the past AVCA wrote me about her challenges of finding space to run volleyball during basketball season. The answer is seen in the drawings below, where you ask the basketball focused facility, for just ONE court, not the gym, just part of it. For youth volleyball you can put three to four courts up on a single regular court space, using the 4 nets on a rope we have created. The video is at this link –

A nice example of how you can take one adult doubles court space outdoors and turn it into four kids nets, each 15 feet wide, or two full courts by pulling two of the kids nets together to make a full court wide on each side.

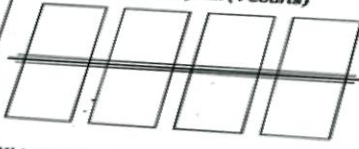


Volleyball Setup: Sharing the Gym with Other Sports

ONE GYM:
1/2 Hoops
& 1/2 VB

- Basketball
- Indoor Kids Soccer
- Floor Hockey

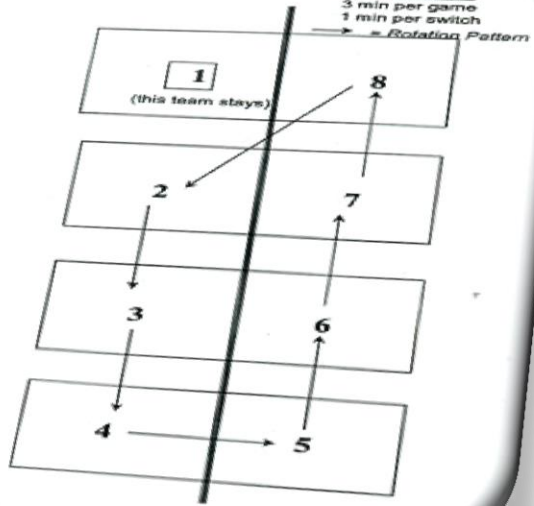
Kids Volleyball (4 courts)



Kids need to be able to watch each other

Volleyball Group Competition

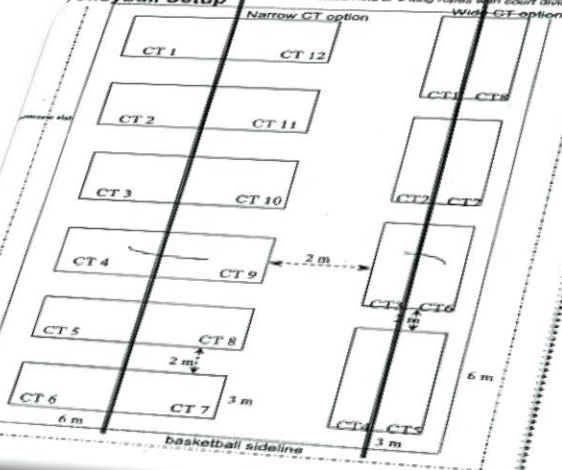
30 min session:
3 min per game
1 min per switch
→ = Rotation Pattern



Outside Concrete Court Volleyball Setup

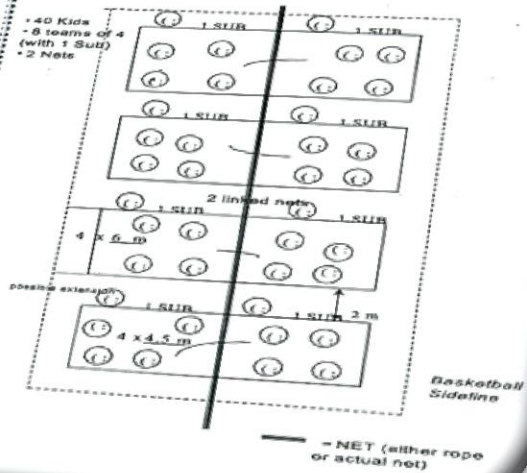
Narrow CT option

Wide CT option



KIDS Gym Volleyball Setup

- 40 Kids
- 8 teams of 4 (with 1 Sub)
- 2 Nets



I used to coach high school ice hockey, and our parents would bring their athletes to the rink for 11pm ice hockey practice, and the next day, they brought them to our 5 am ice time. Swimming practice also has traditionally trained before sunrise, to grind out those stroke specific repetitive mile, in multiple lanes with multiple swimmers per lane. Why can't some of your older players train later or earlier too?

Working with the wall rope standard of the Four nets on a rope allows SIX sports one system.

Volleyball for older kids with the net slid up the rope to a higher level 6 foot 6 inches (200cm)

Badminton and volleyball for younger kids with the net set to badminton height at 5 feet (1.524m)

Tennis - The net should be 36" (91.5cm) at the center strap, and 42" (106.5cm) at the post so making the net height a meter is good for this school multi court version

Sitting Volleyball – For men it is 45 ¼ in (115cm) and women 43 ¼ in (110 cm).

Pickleball - The net height is 36" (91.5cm)

Using the USAV Narrow Band option, you can put school tables under the band set to Table Tennis height. The table is 30 in (76 cm) high and the net is 6 inches (15.25 cm) high.

If you use just 3 of the four nets in the Maximum Contact Net System which comes four nets on one rope, you can use the fourth net to set up Wallyball in a racquetball court. A racquetball court is also PERFECT for training a single sitting volleyball court, as the floor size is almost exactly a sitting court in dimensions – just a meter long per side, so the wall is out. The great thing in this, both the fun of wallyball or sitting, is that you get back on task fast, as the ball does not get away. You could also opt to put the net into a corner of a gym, with deer netting to catch and return the spiked balls hit over this spiking station.

There are

1. rope, or
2. 1.5-2.5 inch ribbon – wire edged is more durable, as is grosgrain (rayon/cotton) – both online at under \$15 for 50 yards
3. USAV net Band – Part of the USAV Sport Kit or \$50 retail
4. 4 nets on a rope – made or bought from Carron Net/USAV, at \$80 a set.
5. Regular net divided into narrow courts by swim noodles for “antenna” creating a 2 meter buffer between each court.

2. Finding Enough Coaches

It seems the in youth sport models of late, there needs to be so many sport “coaches” including strength coaches, mental coaches, agility coaches, assistant coaches, personal trainers, nutritionists and more – that the ratio of coach to player in an individual sport is like 8:1 while in team sports like volleyball it can reach 1:1. For youth sports, I would like you to consider what a great PE teacher can do, as well as the value of open gym and simply uncoached play. I have to say I am a great admirer of golfer Bubba Watson, who won the Masters earlier this year and in all his years of youth development – did not have a coach. When the ever important “Open Gym” can happen over the holiday periods including summer – again there is no “coach” other than the game teaching the game, and the kids develop their

leadership, organizational and decision making skills without being told what to do. So I think programs should do much more open gym than they do right now. Meanwhile, if you look at Elementary PE teachers, they daily handle a class ratio of 1:30 or more. So let the kids gather, and just have some adult oversight and good things will happen.

At the same time, since that which you teach you learn, every CLUB program has dozens of “coaches” waiting to improve their coaching skills, - the older players. I think this is a vastly underdeveloped area in growing our sport and ask here clubs, no matter what their size, work into their programming the opportunity and time to get

3. Coaching the Youngest – 3-9 year olds.

Earlier I wrote about PE teachers, as they both introduce and teach literally dozens of sport options. I think this is a missing part to youth volleyball programs, the chance to experience and learn of OTHER sport options, first by being given a handout on these other sports, both Olympic and non-Olympic, and by doing them as a “warm up” or break in the volleyball training session. For the youngest levels, 3-8 year olds, this can be even be done in “movement” training sessions, as it seems that what used to happen when kids just went outside and adventured is happening so little that youth sports programs become a place to learn how to move ones own body. Creating a movement discovery adventure in a volleyball training session for little kids is easy, just ask the kids to challenge each other in “can you do this?” games and tag games. Give them various sized balls (replacing the rocks from outside) and “sticks” like foam noodles, and throw in some taped court challenges (rather than sidewalk chalk) to make hop scotch and dodge ball courts, along with a few empty 2 liter soda bottles and construction paper “hurdles” and you have all you need. If you just visit your local elementary school PE teacher and ask them to show you around their equipment closet and explain what they have in there, you will see tons of great ideas a club can implement, along with a volleyball program for that school. Remember, this is where parents can also be teammates, not coaches – go outside and play 2 v 2 over a rope with mom and dad, or 1 v 1 plus 1 or have the loser become the “net.” Just play, as the game teaches the game.

4. Grills for Little Kids

Kids want to play, you can see that at recess and in the parking lots and hallways near tournament gyms. When asked – do you want to do a game or a drill on any skill, they always want a game, so make sure to do GRILLS – gamelike drills with scoring. Also, just let them play. Let them create the ways they want to score, or from the list in IMPACT, the MiniVolley book in the game scoring options where over 50 variations are shared to pick from. Have a skill success “Treasure chest,” give out Oriental Trading volleyball rubber ducks, get more gold stars. Remember, how did you learn tag games. – drills? Nope, by playing. The Circulation version stops specialization – your side rotates during play every time the ball crosses the net. Consider “Maxi scoring,” – known in Canada as “Three ball scoring” and many more options found in the book that let them play and learn competitively and cooperatively.

The game of choice, when a net cannot be found, it to have the “loser” of the previous point become the net. This can be played from just 3 kids, to 12 kids – in speedball or monarch of the court fashion – with the team of 1 or more who just lost, standing in between – like “monkey in the middle” – to be the net. They cannot jump, but they can turn and face each sides team and be an active, blocking/reaching “net.” The USA Volleyball website has the MiniVolley book for free on the grassroots/coaches section and the videos of other great grills including this one in action under the Grassroots/USAV Drill Videos section for free viewing and download through www.keepvid.com

Thanks for your help in growing the game together. Please contribute new ideas to the LESSON PLANS section of the Grassroots area of USAV. Follow me on Twitter @JohnKesselUSAV and make sure to download the free Growing the Game Together book for coaches and/or players on the grassroots section also.