

HOW VOLLEYBALL HELPS ATHLETES ON AND OFF THE COURT

Participation in volleyball provides athletes with a special opportunity to enhance physical health while learning the value of teamwork, composure, and perseverance. Participation in any organized athletic activity will cause the individual athlete to establish her own goals and values. She will also sort out the standards of behavior and achievement she will live by while attempting to achieve her life goals. These behavior choices establish the foundations of her adult personalities. Volleyball is an activity which can aid in this process and allow each individual's strengths to come forth.

Volleyball is a great game for building character. Individuals who learn how to excel in volleyball can also develop habits and attitudes which will help them succeed in other areas of life. Volleyball players learn the value of teamwork because success and teamwork in volleyball are inseparable. Volleyball has a scoring system that rewards perseverance. The rules of the game require participants to adhere to high standards of conduct and to respect officials and opponents during competition when emotions are difficult to contain. Volleyball combines a high degree of physical exertion and safety. Other sports have some of these features, but volleyball is the only sport that combines all of these features. Perhaps this is why volleyball is the second most widely played game in the world.

TEAMWORK

TEAMWORK IS THE MOST IMPORTANT DETERMINANT OF SUCCESS IN VOLLEYBALL. A team, whether it is made up of seven-year-old youngsters or Olympic athletes, will not succeed unless all individual team members operate as one coordinated unit. The purpose of most training in volleyball is to fine tune the interaction between individuals on a team. Split-second decisions (required by 40-60 mph spikes) are commonplace and there is no time to think about preparation or responses. Reactions must be instinctive. The explosive movements of six athletes within a thirty by thirty foot area must be well unified. The best teams, as a result of their cohesion, are fun and enjoyable to watch.

Superstars will not succeed without well-organized teams surrounding them. In volleyball, one person cannot make or break a team. Championship teams are often the ones which are able to perpetuate the execution of team functions despite the loss of key players due to injury or any other absence. Top programs win consistently because of team unity, excellent training methods, hard work, and positive attitudes, not merely from the exploits of individual stars. At the highest levels of competition, everyone has mastery of the fundamentals. Execution of team systems such as spike coverage and defense determine the winning team. The long rally characteristic of high level volleyball ends very quickly when individuals fail to execute their team assignments.

Volleyball players learn that their own interests are best accommodated by devoting themselves to the organized function of their team. No sport is more reliant on precise teamwork than volleyball. Team goals are achieved by coordinating the strengths of individual team members. Players must specialize within the context of the team. Small groups of players do most of the spiking and blocking, while other players pass and play

backcourt defense. Usually only one or two players are setters, and some players come in only to serve or to fulfill a specific role in a particular rotation. Backcourt defensive players rely on the position of the block, and spikers must run their routes aggressively and trust that the setter will place the ball accurately. Individual performance is important, but success depends on teamwork—the coordinated interaction between individuals on the court. Working within team constraints and understanding how a team can supplement individual interests are keys to success in volleyball and in other areas of life. Groups can be more effective than sets of isolated individuals, especially if the strength of each group member is integrated within the structure of a team.

SCORING SYSTEM

Under the traditional method of scoring, a team must earn a side-out before it has an opportunity to score (except for the first play of each game.) In essence, a team must win two rallies in a row in order to be able to score at all (except when serving.) Even with the trend of using rally scoring in a deciding game, most matches are still decided predominantly by the traditional method of scoring. The rally point system is very similar to the traditional system of scoring, because the only way to earn an advantage is to win two rallies in succession (except for the rare occasion of a 17-16 game, in which two straight rallies may not need to be won.) Since most opponents are proficient at siding-out, one must have the patience and confidence to attempt to side-out in return.

THE GAME IS AN EXERCISE IN LIMITING ERRORS AND MAINTAINING CONFIDENCE DESPITE THE LACK OF IMMEDIATE SUCCESS. One must deal with setbacks and overcome obstacles in order to achieve important goals in volleyball and in life. The best volleyball teams may fall behind on the scoreboard, but they are able to succeed because they are accustomed to dealing with adversity and maintaining their poise.

A rally, played correctly, might go on indefinitely. In reality, the loss of each rally is usually attributable to fatigue, mental error, or miscommunication, so the game is characterized by the need to endure frustration and maintain composure. The parallels to life are clear. "Winners" are those who view setbacks as opportunities and continually adjust their sights in order to achieve long-term goals. Volleyball players, whether they are conscious of the process or not, are constantly working to develop and maintain the confidence and poise under pressure.

The scoring system in volleyball has another important ramification. No matter how well a team has played, it must be able to win the last two rallies in succession or it can not win the game. No matter how badly a game has gone, a team always has a chance to win if it is able to win at least every other rally, thereby preventing the opponents from scoring the last point. As a result, volleyball matches are frequently characterized by thrilling come-from-behind victories. The scoring system in volleyball presents players with challenges that are similar to those found in other areas of life. One must learn from one's mistakes and not be hindered by them. The person who succeeds may not be the most talented, but, rather, the one who never quits. In volleyball and in life, perseverance many times reaps great rewards.

RULES OF CONDUCT

The rules of volleyball prohibit explicit attempts at influencing the judgement of officials. The decisions based upon the judgements of referees or other officials are final and not subject to protest. Coaches are not permitted to argue with the referee. The referee is permitted to penalize coaches for comments to the officials and or opposing team and displaying disgust in an overt manner. The following acts of team members are also subject to penalty: questioning the officials concerning decisions or committing acts or gestures tending to influence officials. The intent of the rules is clear. Harassment of officials is not allowed and players and coaches should concentrate on the game itself. Participants are not allowed to address the officials in any way except for the few specific exceptions pertaining to the logistics of the match. If coaches allow their teams to try to influence officials, or worse, if coaches constantly argue with officials, then players are learning that aggression and intimidation are acceptable forms of behavior. Players should be taught to respect the officials. Requests for clarification of calls should be done by the team captain. In this way, players learn to how to communicate effectively through proper channels.

Volleyball's rules of conduct encourage players to focus their energy on their own behavior, where it means the most. The outcome of any contest is determined by both internal and external factors. Internal factors are those over which a team has control, such as attitude and effort. External factors are those over which a team has very little or no control, such as the general ability of opponents and judgement call by referees. The best teams stay determined and confident even when officials make errors. Volleyball players learn to deal with adversity by adjusting their own performance and not merely blaming failure on others.

Volleyball players should respect the rules which prohibit harassment of officials and opposing team members. These rules define the boundaries of a game which fosters good sportsmanship, respect for opponents and officials and the realization that **THE KEYS TO SUCCESS ARE ONE'S OWN ATTITUDE AND PERFORMANCE**. In volleyball and in life, one must focus on those factors which one has the power to change. People who try to change others will almost always be frustrated, but opportunities for success are virtually unlimited for individuals who focus on achieving goals through self-improvement.

EXERTION/SAFETY

Athletes develop good habits in regard to obtaining consistent exercise. Volleyball demands extreme physical exertion. It requires repetitive maximal effort over a long period of time, yet it is one of the safest games to play. The physical demands of volleyball, combined with its high degree of safety, make it an exceptionally healthy activity for nearly everyone.

Volleyball promotes physical health and competitive spirit, but not in a manner that involves the physical ridicule of one's opponent. Although the game has an aggressive and competitive orientation, the emotional focus is on keeping oneself highly inspired, yet under control. Since each team plays the game on their own side of the net, physical

contact with the opponents is virtually nonexistent. Opponents may be viewed as friends in a joint display of excellence, rather than as enemies. Players learn that competition is healthy and constructive and that in volleyball and in life, with the correct perspective, everyone can feel like a winner if they enjoy what they are doing.

CONCLUSION

Individuals can benefit from the unique set of experiences and choices that they encounter in the athletic domain. The athletic experience provides lessons about the often difficult process of setting goals and striving to achieve them. Athletes must deal with extraordinary time and stress demands and they must learn discipline, teamwork, and responsibility.

The unique nature of volleyball provides invaluable experiences for all players. Players learn to accept their own errors and limitations. They experience self-sacrifice and delayed gratification. Players learn that consistency is more important to success on the volleyball court than any single "big play." Volleyball is a game of team work, physical exertion, safety, unique rules, and principled behavior. Participants learn not only to play an exciting game, but also to expand their ability to interact effectively with others, and to conduct themselves, on and off the court, with confidence, poise, and respect for themselves and others.