

## **"Confronting Fear in Volleyball"**

Do you remember the last time you were struck by fear in a game? If it threw off your performance on a decisive point, you have plenty of company! Let's confront and destroy this feisty foe.

### ***FEAR DEFINED***

Webster defines fear as a distressing emotion aroused by impending pain, danger or evil, whether real or imagined. In volleyball, fear is usually brought on by the possibility of making a mistake, appearing incompetent, or losing. Other descriptions of fear are self-doubt, worry, concern, and negative thoughts or feelings.

### ***FALLOUT OF FEAR***

Fear is seldom helpful in volleyball. It may lead to negative outcomes including dangerously high arousal, impaired concentration, reduced confidence, tensed muscles, lost rhythm, indecision, expectations of failure, and lowered perceptions of control. Although this emotion effectively alarmed our ancestors of approaching predators, the most threatening predator on the volleyball court is often fear itself!

Typically, fear increases with the perceived importance of the situation. Play becomes more conscious, careful and tentative in an attempt to avoid mistakes. The term "choking" is used to describe this effect. A serve that was once aggressive and difficult to return is reduced to a high percentage sideout opportunity for the opponent. Crisp passes that were on target become awkwardly steered and pushed for added security. Opponents not overcome by these same tendencies quickly realize an opportunity, play more aggressively, and assume control of the match.

### ***FEAR IS NOT NERVOUSNESS***

It is important to distinguish between fear and nervousness. Whereas fear is always a negative mental state, nervousness is a physical condition (e.g., increased heart rate, sweating) that can actually improve play. Martina Navratilova, in tennis, admitted that she always got nervous when playing and had to gradually learn that it was not a weakness. Jack Nicklaus stated that he did not know how to play great golf when he was not nervous. So while nervousness provides a great source of energy to enhance performance in critical moments, fearful thinking about what might go wrong is a useless menace.

### ***BUSTING FEAR***

There are no quick or easy solutions to eliminate fear from your game. Since fear arises as a result of your own appraisals and expectations, it will be important to comprehend performance in a slightly different way. Here are some ideas to help you view things differently and begin to eliminate this harmful emotion:

1. Forget about how others might see you. Your perceptions about yourself are most important.

2. Begin thinking like a winner both on and off the court. Frequently image what you would like to have happen while avoiding doubtful thinking about possible misfortunes.
3. Keep an active memory of times when you performed well and learn to eliminate memories of bad performances.
4. If you become afraid during a match, realize that your opponent may feel the same way. Focus concretely on what you are going to accomplish and then just do it.
5. Practice games at 12-14, 7-13, or 14-15 rally scoring in the final game. Learn to love this challenge. Maintain an aggressive style of play rather than becoming tentative.

Your best volleyball comes when you are relaxed, poised, and believe in your abilities. You cannot control the outcome and you cannot always win, but by confronting your fears head on you'll develop the courage of a champion.