



11 WAYS TO BE A BETTER VOLLEYBALL PLAYER ON THE COURT

As coaches of young volleyball players in elementary and youth teams, much time is spent teaching the mechanics of the four main volleyball skills: serving, passing, setting and hitting. The fifth main skill—blocking—may be included depending on the level of play. All of these skills are more easily mastered by players who have either natural athletic tendencies or who have had previous athletic training. Most other players can be taught these skills over time and they can usually be mastered with constant repetition. However, with only a few weeks to prepare for the first match of the season, what can be done now to make better overall players of every participant, including the less-experienced or less-athletic player?

The following is a list of 10 ‘non-athletic skills’ for a club team of 14-year-olds. Indeed, these ten skills can and should also be practiced with players of all ages.

1. CALL THE BALL

Coaches: Teach your players the mantra: “As a player, I must call it loud, early and often with a tone of voice that makes it absolutely clear to everyone around me that they should get out of my way because this ball is MINE!” **CALLING THE BALL BUILDS CONFIDENCE!**

Players: Make sure to call the ball early enough, even before it crosses the net, so that others can stay clear and get into an on-help position. If another player calls the ball at the same time and with the same high level of certainty, do one of two things:

- a) If there is time, call the other player’s name to tell that player to go for the ball as you back off to give him or her room to play the ball;
- Or
- b) if there is not time or you are both almost on top of each other, just continue to play the ball, you will have a much better chance at winning the point than if neither of you plays the ball.

2. EXPECT EVERY BALL TO COME TO YOU

Never become just a spectator on the court. Whenever the ball is moving, you should be, also. As long as you have your mind set that the next ball is coming to you, you will be ready when it actually does. You will be ready to make a play on the ball from a position of readiness rather than just reacting at the last moment.

3. KNOW YOUR AREAS OF RESPONSIBILITY

Your areas of responsibility change with each touch of the ball, either by your teammates or by the opponent’s players. Be in position, defending your territory or ready to complete the attack in your territory, by attacking or covering the attacker. When on defense, have your mind set to believe that the opponent will not successfully attack your territory.

4. PURSUE EVERY BALL

Even if you have not yet mastered the passing skills to play a stray ball perfectly, you will give your team a huge emotional boost by running down and getting to the ball wherever it goes. Even if you can’t pass the ball when you get to it, an attempt at least to touch it and keep it off the floor, might give a pursuing teammate a chance to play the ball. At the very least, your teammates may get a free ball over to the opponent.



5. GO TO YOUR LINE

Even the best player cannot properly play a line ball if her/she chooses to guess (or hope or pray) that the ball is out. Not pursuing a ball that falls on your side of the court makes you appear to be either lazy or indifferent—or at the very least, unable to see clearly. It is also impossible to play a ball that has already gone over your head or out of your reach. Going to the line show you are always ready to hustle for our team. It show that you value every single point. More importantly, if you happened to have thought the ball was out and you were wrong, at least now you are in s position to correct your error and play the ball. Go to the line even if it is obvious the ball is out. That way, you do not ever have to consider when to go to the line—you simply always do.



6. STAY LOW ON DEFENSE

Remember, the other team is not aiming at our chest, or your waist-high platform or eve at your knees. The opponent is aiming at your floor. Get low and stay low to move to where they hit the ball.

7. PLAY FROM THE OUTSIDE IN

The opponent is aiming at spots inside the lines on your side of the court. The player you want to pass the ball to is also inside your side of the court. Therefore, it makes most sense to face into the court toward your setter's spot at the net. You will have a better control playing the ball in front of you and in the court than a ball that you must back up on or turn around to try to play.

8. FACE THE TARGET

Your body wants the ball to go where it thinks you are going. If you face the crowd on the sidelines, then that is where your body will tell the ball to go. However, if you face the setter's position, your pass has a better chance of getting to the setter. If, when attacking you face the other team, your attack ahs a better chance of landing in their court. Until you develop the ability and presence of mind to steer the ball to exactly where you want it to land, at least face the target and let your body do the steering while you concentrate on the proper contact.



*Information taken from:
Albright, E. (2003). Ten ways to be
a better volleyball player on the
court. 14(2), American Volleyball
Coaches Association, Dynamic
Power Tips, Colorado Springs.*

9. STAY ON YOUR FEET

Play the ball on your feet, even if you have to go to the floor for a ball. After you play the ball, you can recover with a floor skill, if necessary. But remember, as in Skill No. 2, if you expect that every ball is coming to you it will be easy to play it on your feet. Sprawls and rolls can look impressive to the fans and certainly when executed properly, they can soften the impact with floor. However, it is extremely difficult to make a good pass when you are not on your feet, and it is impossible to be in an on-help position or running in for coverage if you are on the floor.

10. ATTITUDE IS EVERYTHING

Attitude is that variable that allows you to do more with what nature gave you and to get more out of what you have been taught and trained. You will know you have the right attitude for volleyball when you realize for the fist time while standing on the court waiting for serve or a hit or a set that you find yourself actually hoping the ball does come to you because you are totally ready!

11. BE FIT AND STRONG

Volleyball is a power sport, so you need strength to power up and attack the ball; move quickly and power up to block the ball. Take opportunities outside of practice time to develop strong legs, core, arms and butts. It's a butt and gut sport!