



Volleyball ACE™ Power Tips

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Tactics and Strategy in Volleyball

By Marilyn Nolen, 1968 Olympian and former head women's volleyball coach at Saint Louis University in Missouri.

Every sport has strategies so common that they are applied almost automatically. These expected forms of play are used in response to various recurring athletic situations. Like other sports, volleyball has certain strategies which, when properly executed, improve the soundness of a team's game and increase the chances for success. Volleyball's basic strategies can be seen clearly in terms of the sport's six basic skills – digging, setting, spiking, blocking, serving and receiving the serve.

Digging

Centered around digging, sound defensive play requires a considerable amount of coaching involvement and teamwork. As in each of the other five basic skills, there are certain strategies each individual player must utilize. First each player must learn to form the prescribed defensive pattern(s) – that is, to get into the correct position before the ball is hit. A catch-and-throw method of teaching can help beginners, especially, learn the necessary defensive patterns.

For successful digging and defense, each player must get ready to play the ball before it is hit by the opponents. The only way to be prepared is if every player expects to be hit with the ball every time it is attacked. Thus, every player assumes a defensive ready posture in anticipation.

Another key point for successful digging and defense is that your players must try for every ball. They should never allow a ball to hit the floor without at least being touched. Secondly, they must commit themselves to trying for every ball with two hands.

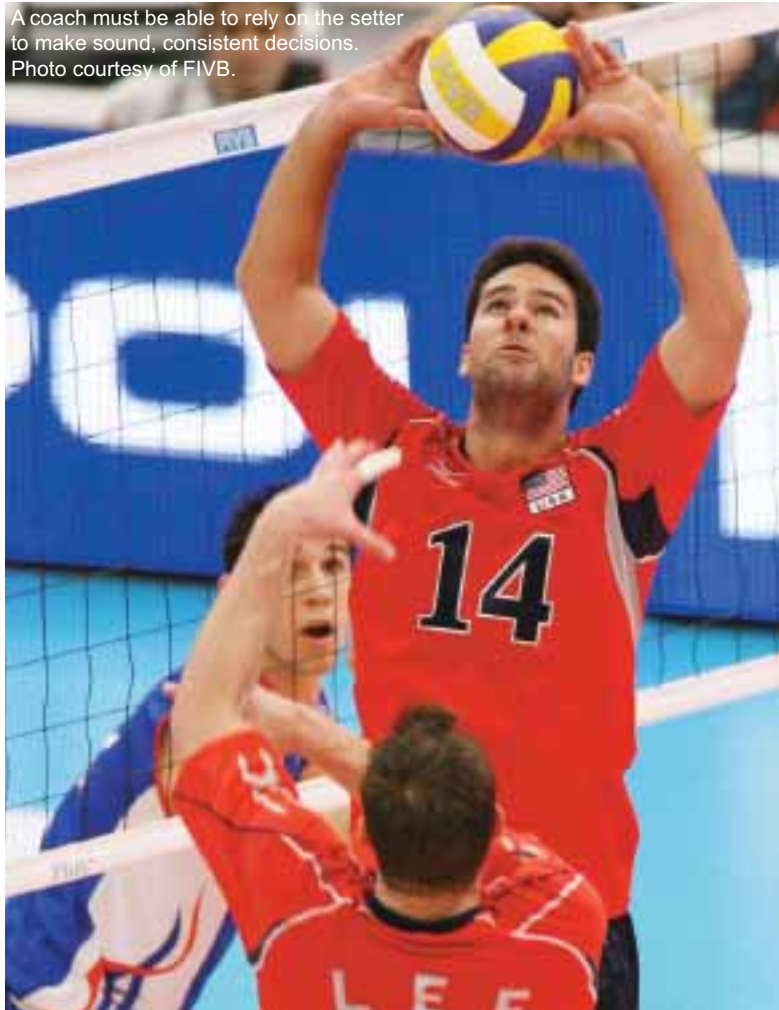
Good defensive training begins with giving a team many repetitions in the basics described here. Although these patterns may seem simple, effective use of them will bring a team greater defensive success.

Setting

Setting the ball for the attack is strategic at even the simplest levels of play. Depending on the quality of the pass, a coach must be able to rely on the setter to make sound, consistent decisions. Following is a list of strategic demands on the setter, in ascending order of difficulty.

1. The ability to set the ball to the left-front position is the most important skill for the setter to acquire. A coach can develop this ability by emphasizing that fact and by constant drills in practice.

A coach must be able to rely on the setter to make sound, consistent decisions. Photo courtesy of FIVB.



2. With any set, the ball should be delivered well. Good delivery means that the ball is touched legally, set high enough and positioned properly relative to the attacker.

3. After becoming consistent in the skills outlined in Nos. 1 and 2, the setter's primary goal should be to set a good set to a good attacker. This goal requires the setter to know who the right attackers are, something that must be emphasized in practice. The setter should be especially aware of the primary attackers – those who score high statistically.

4. A poor set should never be made to a secondary hitter (a statistically lower attacker). What becomes a poor set when made to a secondary hitter may well have been a good set, or at least an acceptable one, if it had been made to a good hitter. In other

words, often it is the hitter's ability that makes the difference in whether a particular set is poor, acceptable or good. Secondary spikers require good sets.

5. When setting a good set to a secondary hitter, the setter must have a specific shot planned for that spiker. Obviously, this requires a good deal of thinking by the setter (as should be expected in better intermediate and advanced play). Planning for a specific shot depends on observing the block positioning of the opposition and specifically setting for either a line or a cross-court attack. By paying attention to which attackers the opposing blockers are keying in on, the setter can often get the secondary attackers in one-on-one situations.

With one blocker versus one attacker, the attacker has a decided advantage. Simply notifying secondary spikers of open shots on the opponent's court before the set is made to that spiker will often result in a successful shot. This kind of communication should occur when the ball is dead before service. Because opponents often place the least effective blockers opposite the secondary attackers, the setter can look for these switches, being especially aware of size mismatches, and communicate the situation to the spiker prior to the next volley.

6. At a critical time, the setter should not set a cold hitter (one just coming into the game or one who has not been set often throughout the game) or an unsuccessful attacker.

7. Neither critical, high-risk sets nor trick sets and plays should be used at the end of the game – and especially not at game point.

8. When your team is making points, continue to use the sets that are working. Change strategies in the game only when opponents are successful at stopping the attack.

Spiking

When plays and advanced attack systems are developed along with setting ability, the spikers have less pressure to incorporate individual spiking strategy because deception is planned into the system. Nonetheless, at every level of play, each attacker must develop some individual competence, especially to use in less-than-perfect situations. The strategies described here will give even beginning attackers statistical success. Once again, this list is in ascending degree of demand upon the attacker.

1. The ball must be hit into the opponent's court, even from a terrible set. The ball must be kept in play.

2. The hit should be to the opponent's disadvantage.

3. The ball should be killed (put down to gain a point or side-out). The kill is the most difficult shot to make consistently and often an error will result if the kill is the attacker's only focus. To become a good spiker with consistent statistics, Nos. 1 and 2 must be the primary focus, with kill attempts occurring only on the good sets. Success results from consistent play – without undue risk taking on poor sets.

The attackers must develop skills to hit every type of set. Beginners or intermediate players may need to poke or dink sets that are too low or too close. Advanced players, on the other hand, must acquire the ability to attack these sets. Sets that are back from the net and deeper than the hitter's normal range require high contact and a considerable amount of topspin. In advanced play, these sets still should be skillfully attacked, rather than given as free plays to the opponents. This requires a lot of practice time.

In training attackers to become intermediate-level players, a coach should have them develop two power shots: the line shot and the cross-court shot. However, it is equally important that they know when to use a power shot and when to dink or tip. The dink or tip is most effective on a good set, but the attacker must know what defense is being used by the other team before

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Various Cities, Japan
- Nov. 18-Dec. 2** **FIVB Men's World Cup**
Various Cities, Japan
- Dec. 12-15** **AVCA Annual Convention**
Sacramento Convention Center
Sacramento, Calif.
- Dec. 16** **AVCA Talent Showcase**
Sacramento Convention Center Hall C
Sacramento, Calif.
- Jan. 10** **2008 AVP Hot Winter Nights Tour**
Ford Center Arena, Oklahoma City, Okla.
- Jan. 11** **2008 AVP Hot Winter Nights Tour**
Scottrade Center, St. Louis, Mo.
- Jan. 12** **2008 AVP Hot Winter Nights Tour**
Sprint Center, Kansas City, Mo.
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At every level of play, each attacker must develop individual competence in any given situation. Photo by Steve Markos/Courtesy of USAV.



incorporating the tip. Obviously, just giving the ball directly to an opposing defensive player is not effective. The tip is best used in surprise, especially after the hitter has been spiking effectively and powerfully. In other words, it is best to dink after opponents have acquired respect for the attacker's power.

Blocking

Blocking is an advanced skill, one which becomes especially complicated and high-risk when more than one player is blocking. For low skill levels, and especially with beginners, the best strategy is not to block unless the set is close. The degree of success in the skill of blocking is very low at any skill level.

The distance of the opponent's set from the net is a key for blockers. The further away the ball is from the net, the less need there is to block. Unless the opposing spiker has two developed power shots, one properly positioned blocker is sufficient. A two-person block should only be used if the opponent's ability warrants it.

Advanced play presents a middle blocker with another strategic decision: when to commit to blocking center on a quick set

(thereby giving the opposing setter an opportunity to set up a one-on-one situation – one blocker versus one spiker – in an outside position near the sideline). Coaching and statistical input are usually required for the middle blockers to be successful in making these decisions. However, the middle blocker should be aware of these two fundamental strategic considerations:

- Honor the middle when the opponent's primary spiker is attacking the middle.
- Overblock the line when the set is to an outside position and very close to the net.

Honoring the middle (guarding the middle closely) is necessary when the opponent's primary spiker is attacking the middle regularly with success. There are some further strategic considerations in this situation, however. A perceptive blocker can pick up certain cues and recognize when to honor the middle. Many setters only set the middle on the perfect pass. In addition, setters often develop observable habits, such as keeping their arms straight when setting the middle, or perhaps dropping their hands. The setter is sometimes out of range to set the middle attack, especially when the pass pulls the setter away from the net. With these cues in mind, the blocker will know much more reliably whether honoring the middle is required in each situation.

Overblocking the line should occur when the set is delivered by opponents to an outside position along and very close to the net. In this case, it is necessary to overblock the line to prevent the ball from being tipped, hit or wiped off of the outside blocker. Overblocking requires the outside blocker to position the inside hand on the ball.

Serving

Service strategy depends on the ability of athletes to perform the skill. Each player must have a reliable serve that measures up to the skill level of the competition. In addition to a reliable serve, their repertoire should also include a higher risk but stronger service attack. Generally, either the coach or an advanced player determines the positions to serve into the opponent's court or lineup. Still, every player makes a decision as to how to serve aggressively upon rotating into the service corner. Ultimately, the player decides how much risk to take. Players

should take the opportunity to be aggressive in the following circumstances:

- When seriously behind in score.
- When points are never made in a particular serving rotation.
- When the score is stuck in the middle of the game, especially in the middle of the match.

• When the team's ability to side out is high.

Safe serving is more strategic in the following instances:

- When serving the first ball after winning the coin toss for service.
- After a time-out.
- After serving several points in a row.
- After a long rally.
- After the player in the preceding rotation has missed the serve.
- When a strong front line rotation is at the net for the team.

Receiving the Serve

Receiving the serve is undoubtedly the most critical skill for establishing a team's success. Perfection in passing depends

Perfection in passing depends upon both the team's skill level and the effectiveness of the power of the opponent's serve. As a result, receiving the serve is the most critical skill for establishing a team's success. Photo courtesy of FIVB.



upon both the team's skill level and the effectiveness of power of the opponent's serve. These factors, listed in ascending order of difficulty, should be considered when receiving the serve.

1. Avoid being aced. Try at least to touch the served ball.
2. Make the pass playable. Get it in the air somewhere.
3. Pass the ball between yourself and the setter.
4. Target the pass to the setter.

If the team cannot side out because of poor passing, change the receiving pattern. This alteration includes moving the pattern forward or back, flooding to one side or covering an ineffective passer.

Any time passing is unsuccessful in a 6-2 offense, change immediately to a 4-2. The best passers should be in optimum position to receive the statistically highest percentage of serves (near

the middle of the court). In tense situations, strong passers should extend their range and cover extra court area, in addition to assuming the responsibility for getting the ball passed. In extreme situations, the best passers can take every serve.

If failure to side out is the result of a poor attack, the serve reception pattern should be varied to position the best attacker to spike – left front. In beginning to intermediate play, the setter cannot be relied upon to perform a good set to any position but left front. This limitation requires patterns designed to allow the setter to set the best spiker in the left-front position.

(Reprinted from *Coaching Volleyball*, Kinda S. Asher, ed. (1997). Indianapolis, IN: Masters Press.)

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Number of Players: 3-6

Number of Balls: 1 or more

Objective:

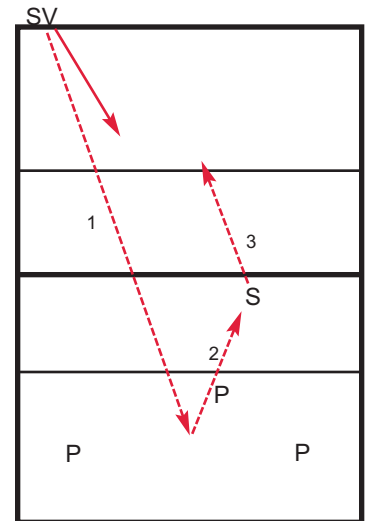
To provide opportunities to practice serve receiving, setter deep tipping and defense by the server.

Directions:

1. The server (SV) serves a ball to the receivers (P).
2. The ball is passed to the setter (S), who attempts to dump the ball over the net behind the 3-meter line.
3. SV comes on the court to play defense.

Scoring:

1. The server gets three points for an ace.
2. One point is earned if SV brings up the dump so that a second player could set the ball.
3. Two points are earned if SV brings up the dump so that a second player could set the ball.
4. Receivers get a point each time the setter's dump lands behind the 3-meter line in-bounds, untouched.
5. SV loses two points for a missed serve and loses three points if a serve is passed over the net and lands in the court behind the 3-meter line untouched.



Two-Pass Reaction

Sean Byron, Rutgers-Newark

Number of Players: 2

Number of Balls: Steady supply

Objective:

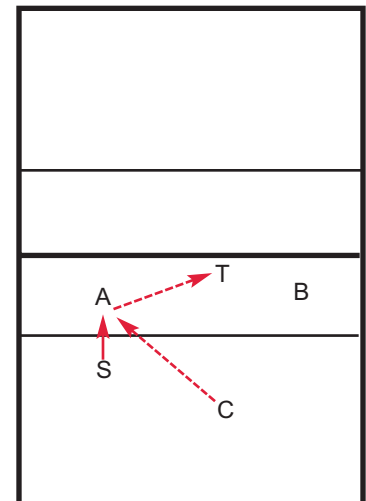
To practice setter movement patterns in segments. The drill helps to identify which routes the setter moves better or worse in. Some setters move well across the net, whereas others move more naturally away from it.

Directions:

1. A coach (C) is positioned behind the attack line to toss passes to a setter (S). The setter will set to a predetermined target (A).
2. The coach tosses 2-point passes (errant passes

that are settable, but not to the target), at which point the setter attempts to move, stop and set the ball to a pre-determined location. (It is a good idea to predetermine the movement pattern when players first attempt this drill.)

3. Begin with one toss to position A, then one to position B, and repeat to position A so the setter is moving forward and backward.
4. The coach can control movement off the net during the drill, allowing the setter to recover on his or her way back to the target and tossing a distance just within the capabilities of the setter.



Outside Hitter (OH) Tournament

Jim McLaughlin, University of Washington

Number of Players: 5

Number of Balls: 1

Objective:

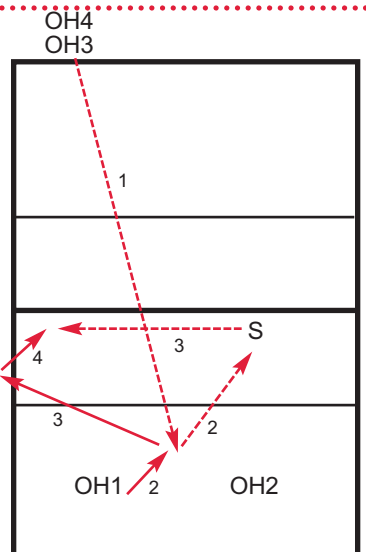
To ensure the outside hitters (OH) watch the serve and then pass and apply proper mechanics and timing.

Directions:

1. Two outside hitters (OH) set up on one side of the court behind the 3-meter line, and a setter (S) on the same side of the court sets up in proper setting position.
2. Two additional hitters are behind the endline on

the opposite court.

3. OH3 and OH4 serve to OH1 and OH2. OH 1 and OH2 score a point every time they get a clean hit.
4. After five serves, OH1 and OH2 switch.
5. After 10 serves, OH1 and OH2 serve to OH3 and OH 4.
6. After the round is completed, the hitters pair up with someone they haven't played with yet.
7. A coach can turn this drill into a tournament configured this way:
 1 & 2 vs 3 & 4
 1 & 3 vs 2 & 4
 1 & 4 vs. 2 & 3
 OH1 and OH3 vs OH2 and OH4
 OH1 and OH4 vs. OH2 and OH 3



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