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# COACHES' CLIPBOARD

## A NEWSLETTER FOR OVR JUNIORS COACHES

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### POSITION JOB DESCRIPTIONS

I'm often asked what are the characteristics coaches should look for when position training their players. I remember when I used to rely on tradition to select the roles for the players—tall players in the front row and short players in the back row; best hands is the setter; tallest player is middle blocker; best hitter goes outside; best digger is Libero and always goes in for the middle blocker because they are too big for the back row.

Thanks to good mentoring and USAV CAP, I learned to ask the deep questions that challenged traditions I was expected to follow. Why do I have a kid who is probably not the best player on the team, who is expected to make at least 33% of all contacts, be the setter for the team? Why do I have the tallest kid, who is typically not that mobile, play the middle blocking position which requires them to move pin to pin in a heartbeat? Why in a back row setting offensive system do we not train our middle or right side hitters to set when we're out of system in front row situations? Why don't we train our Libero to do the same in the back row? Why can't big kids pass and little kids hit?

Ok, so I had a lot of questions. The more I talked to the 'guru' coaches in our sport, I got a better picture of what players need to be able to do. Consider the following food for thought regarding primary responsibilities of each position.

#### Setter

- *Leading the offense:* is effective in communication with all teammates; setting accurately the tempo and location of each play; leading the hitters, maximizing their strengths, elevating their levels of play through motivational techniques, using them in their best situations, and keeping their focus on the task at hand; calling hitter routes based on hitter strengths and/or reading the opponent's defense by rotation.
- *Aggressive serving:* is confident in "first serve" responsibility; knows the opponent's serve-serve receive targets; ability to hit targets with effective serve consistency.
- *Right Side Back Row Defense:* understands and executes specific digging skills required of right back in the team's defensive system; reads line tips and play them accordingly; digs hard hit line shots; knows when to hold position or release to setting responsibilities; directs out-of-system play from position.

- *Right Front Blocking:* understands and consistently executes correct position relative to hitter; understands, recognizes, and positively reacts to the realities that the opponent will often attempt to attack the blocking-setter.

#### Left-side Hitter

- *Attacking the leftside:* effectively hits all tempos of sets within team system; effectively transitions and adjusts in rallies to always get a full approach; effectively hits a variety of shots including but not limited to line shots, cross court shots, tips and off-speed shots, hitting off the block, tap-back off the block, reads the block and select the best attack option, serve receive
- *Left and/or middle back defense*
- *Free and down ball passing*
- *Blocking the opponent right side attack*
- *Master of reading the setter*
- *Aggressive serving*

#### Middle Blocker

- *Attack responsibilities:* effectively hits all middle/quick options in team offensive system; willingness to continually run quick patterns understanding that relatively few sets will come his /her way; continually adjusts to pass and position of setter; effectively hits appropriate shots relative to the block
- *Blocking:* gets over the net and meets the ball on the opponent's side; thorough knowledge of team blocking schemes; effectively blocks the middle options and gets out to either side to block; directing the team blocking scheme.
- *Ball handling skills:* effectively handles the ball overhead especially coming off the net in transition free ball situations; appropriately uses forearm passing in plays close to the net; effectively handles short serves over head
- *Aggressive Serving*
- *Back Row Responsibilities*

#### Right side Hitter

- *Right Side Hitter:* ability to attack team system's right side options including but not limited different heights of back sets, miss-direct backslides, combination plays with the middles, back quicks
- *Setting:* ability to step in and set when the primary setter is out, ability to run the basics of the team offense
- *Right Side Back Row Defense:* understands and can

execute specific digging skills required in right back in team defensive system, can dig hard hit line shots can read line tips and play them accordingly.

- *Aggressive Serving*

#### Libero

- Mobile, agile, hostile
- Fearless
- Glories in preventing kills and keeping team in system
- Pure victory achieved when he/she is completely spent and the setter hasn't broken a sweat
- Outstanding volleyball IQ
- Good eye-hand coordination
- Efficient body control
- Superior vision & anticipation
- Great ball handling skills
- Excellent leadership ability with the team (communication)

## **SPORT PSYCHOLOGY 101**

Coaches spend most of their time in practice training the physical and most of their time in matches complaining about the mental. I know this is true, because when I was younger it's what I did, and as an official I see it constantly. This article will be our first attempt to cover this mostly ignored yet greatly desired aspect of team success.

#### Emotional Arousal in Athletic Performance

- If an athlete is either emotionally flat or overly anxious, performance suffers
- Performance is usually best when arousal is moderate
- The optimal arousal level for any performance depends on...
- Performer characteristics
- Demands of the task
- Participant's perception or interpretation of the situation
- Trait Anxiety - people are different regarding 'relaxed' to 'tense'
- Anxious athletes more likely to cave under pressure
- Direct their attention to process and away from end result
- For bored athletes, focus on end result
- The more complex or mentally demanding the skill, the more relaxed the athlete should be
- Help players learn the mental skill of attention control (managing their own thoughts and feelings)

#### Attention During Competition

- Athletes must be able to focus on (pay attention to) only those thoughts, feelings or environmental information that are essential for effective performance
- People can focus on only a limited amount of information at a time
- When it comes to managing attention, athletes must first learn how to identify the focus that is appropriate at a

particular moment and then be able to achieve that focus as quickly as possible.

#### Connection Between Arousal and Attention

- When athletes are bored, they are more prone to being distracted by a wide range of environmental cues that may hinder performance.
- When athletes are too anxious, their attention narrows dramatically, limiting the number of environmental cues they are able to focus on (deer in the headlights)

#### Memory in Performance Preparation

- People can maintain only 5 to 9 chunks of information in working memory and retain it for about 30 seconds
- Long-term memory is virtually unlimited in capacity and duration
- Athletes must be selective when choosing what to put in this workspace and they must use it as quickly as possible.
- Verbal/non-verbal reminders help keep this info fresh
- The best way to improve your athletes' retrieval capabilities is to create game-like practice situations that force them to practice memory retrieval

## **WHAT GREAT CLUB DIRECTORS DO DIFFERENTLY**

Knowing that there are some club directors that might be reading this, here's some adaptations from several books I've recently been reading on teaching and leadership.

- People are more important than programs
- Programs are never the solution and never the problem
- Club gets better when you hire better coaches or improve the ones you have
- Best directors constantly work to get all coaches to accept responsibility
- Treat everyone with respect
- Make coaches more excited about coaching tomorrow than they were today
- Primary job is not to coach the players but to coach the coaches
- Help all coaches in the club to be as good as the best coach in the club
- When hiring coaches, talent trumps experience in the long run and especially in championships
- Focus on behaviors then on beliefs
- Make decisions based on what is best for the player and what is best for all the players in the club
- Have the confidence to seek input in advance and feedback after the fact
- Understand that truly outstanding coaches need 2 things to make them content and motivated: autonomy and recognition
- Have strong core beliefs and live them out daily
- Get everyone to do the right thing
- Think before you speak