

In this Issue

- “Things I Learned This Season”
- End of Season Evaluations
- Preparing for Next Season

# COACHES’ CLIPBOARD

A NEWSLETTER FOR OVR JUNIORS COACHES

Volume II, Issue 5, May 2012



## “THINGS I LEARNED THIS SEASON”

This issue seemed to be a great time to have you—the coaches of the largest region of USA Volleyball—to share what you’ve learned this season. Following are the things you shared with me...

### Club Directors

- Consistency is a good thing. To this I mean, consistent management of tournaments. I've seen a greater increase in how well tournaments are run, with better food choices. This is a big step in the right direction.

### Miscellaneous

- Documentation is worth it's weight in gold. Document everything!!!

### 11's

- Banging your head against a wall eventually makes a light bulb turn on in a players head...just keep banging!

### 13's

- I learned that at this age is it more how you say it than what you say. Keep being positive and give the girls a chance to develop. I witnessed some amazing transformations from the beginning to the end of season and heard to many comments from players and parents about previous coaches who screamed or were negative. At this level we, as coaches, need to be firm but positive is our instructions to our players.

### 14's

- I have been told by an athletic director in the past that anyone can coach. I told him that you can put someone in the position but no one else can do the job the way I can. I learned this finals weekend that there truly is a gift for coaching. It takes an eye for talent, reading body language, juggling multiple tasks at once, a heart for the kids, and a passion for the game to make a great coach .

### 15's

- In my first year of youth coaching, I have learned that it is so much more than teaching the fundamentals of volleyball. It is being a teacher, a mentor, and an inspirer of confidence, respect, passion, and drive both on and off the court. I have learned that my impact on young lives is extremely important and that positive coaching can make

a tremendous difference in a player as an athlete and as a person, and that is what it is all about.

### 16's

- The more information the players and parents have the better. By emailing each week what the team worked on, also helps the parents understand the game and the complexity of training. Emailing after each event and commenting on the tournament by describing what the team really did well , helps. Remember to comment on things you will be working at practice to solve some of the issues in game play. Keep it vague, and of course, don't use players names. Email early, all paperwork they may need to complete and inform of hotels, even though it may be on the club website.
- Be a smart coach, and keep learning, ask questions, learn from stronger coaches, get better and add more exciting drills, go on YouTube and learn.
- Make practice as exciting and as efficient as possible. Keep communicating with parents and kids, even the difficult ones will appreciate the information.
- More than anything, make sure the kids feel good about themselves. Use the sandwich effect, two soft pieces of bread on the outside..the praise, a hard piece of salami in the middle..the constructive criticism.

## END OF SEASON EVALUATION

Every coach is excited about the season—some when it starts, others when it ends! The end of the season is a great time to reflect upon the experiences and things learned over the past months. This is also a very critical time for the coach to reflect upon and evaluate their teaching and it's effect on player performance.

One of the ways to do this is with evaluations. If done correctly, player evaluations can provide invaluable insight related to coaching pedagogy and philosophy implementation. For example, it's one thing to say your coaching philosophy out loud to your players or even have it written down and give it to them; it is quite another to actually live your coaching philosophy in your daily interactions. One way to check the effectiveness of “living your philosophy” is to have players complete anonymous surveys with questions asking for their observations and opinions on key components of your coaching philosophy. Anonymity can help promote more honest answers. If you are asking for responses via email where you will know the identity of the respondent, be sure to

ask for honest, candid responses.

I remember a couple of years ago sitting down with a coach after a team had submitted their responses to an end of season evaluation. The coach was frustrated that the players were, in the coach's opinion, not being honest on the evaluation by stating things that were contrary to their coaching philosophy. The coach didn't understand that there was a virtual continental divide between what the coach said was their philosophy and what the players saw as the coach's philosophy daily in practices and matches. When coaches ignore or discredit player observations, they are willingly contributing to the destruction of team cohesiveness and eventual failure.

Coaches in these situations or have these kinds of observations of perceived player collusion or dishonesty are more likely to blame players for team failures and take credit for team successes. Comments may range from, "You didn't win today because you didn't work hard enough!" to "Our team won today because they executed the game plan I and my staff devised." Blame is always easier to deflect than accept and credit easier to accept than deflect. The coach of honesty and integrity who is focused on personal improvement for the betterment of the players will use player evaluations as reflection tools of their coaching practice.

Another important aspect of evaluations are those from the coach to the team and the individual players. Many coaches have a final say about the season to the entire team, sometimes at an end-of-season party or after the last match at Regionals. These final speeches range from comments on the team successes to the reason for the final loss being attributed to the inconsistency of player effort throughout the season. In either case, good or bad, these final dialogues usually provide little specific characteristics that players can identify as the key components for the season's results. Additionally, players rarely get any specific information from the coach and staff on specific improvements made and/or observations for continued improvement/development.

Working at USA Volleyball High Performance Camps is a lot of fun and a lot of hard work. Typically, the camp coaching staff is broken down into groups with a couple of coaches assigned to specific player positions, such as setters and middles. Their task for the camp is to continuously evaluate these players for a comprehensive evaluation to be given to the player after camp. Evaluations include rating where the player is at the beginning of camp, then at the end. Comments are also provided on things the player can do to improve various aspects of physicality, tactics and techniques.

Players started this season wanting to get better and have fun. Did they? Did you contribute to or hinder the part about "getting better" and "having fun?" What are you going to do next season to ensure both of these things happen?

## PREPARING FOR NEXT SEASON

The previous article addressed the importance of end-of-season evaluations and the role they play in determining the effectiveness of coaching and philosophy implementation. The end of the season—right now—is also the best time to start preparing for next season.

This is a great time to review all the practice plans and match notes you've created over the course of the season. The insight you can gain from these will provide you information about things to continue and things to change for next season. As most club coaches do not have the same players on the team from year to year, these reflections become even more critical for personal growth as a coach and teacher of sport.

Match statistics provide a plethora of data related to student performance and even student learning when analyzed correctly. I used to look at single match stats and made coaching decisions based on these snapshots with little long-term effectiveness. It was only when I learned to look at all the match stats, in sequence and cumulative, that I was able to see trends and determine player growth. Becoming a reflective coach rather than a reactive coach made all the difference in the world.

Some cautions about using stats. First, don't turn generalities into absolutes. For example, hitting efficiency does positively correlate to winning percentage, but this does not mean that the team with the most kills always wins. This also doesn't mean that the only thing you focus on in practice is improving hitting percentages. Too often statistics and research studies are interpreted to mean "scientific law" when in fact the research indicates it is not. Another example is the fact that for years research has supported the concept of whole practice being better than part practice, yet in real world performance, there are plenty of examples where the opposite is actually true. Remember, we are working with human beings and each one is unique—just like everyone else!

Lastly, it is important to do your end-of-season evaluations now while the information is still fresh in the mind. For me, if I don't write it down in some fashion, I'll probably forget it. Another source of good evaluation feedback is those around us. Mentors or head coaches can provide us with valuable insight into our teaching techniques and also our tactical strategies we used in matches. Peer coaches can give us information that might be hard for us to glean from other sources. For example, players may share comments, thoughts and concerns with other coaches that are not part of their team's coaching staff. Finally, as much as it might be hard to believe, parents can actually be a good source of information related to personnel concerns and team culture.

***Have a great summer and see you next season!***