

Getting the Most from the Club Season

Within the next month, most of your players will be finishing up their club seasons, wrapping up the school year, and starting their summer pre-season training.

For the past few months they've been exposed to the approach of a different coach. They've also, for the most part, been playing along side athletes from other schools, many of whom have been trained differently both mentally and physically.

Do you know what they have learned? The way things were taught? What key words or phrases were used to get the point across or to reinforce their learning? What technique adjustments they've been focusing on? What drills they did to work on these improvements?

If so, you're in pretty good shape right now, although your job of carrying what they've learned over to the summer and fall pre-season is far from over. If not, the next month is absolutely critical in maximizing your team's improvement before the first whistle next fall.

Let's face it, right now everybody is fatigued and ready for a break from the gym. Those of us who teach are winding down another school year and looking forward to that summer break the rest of the working world will never understand the need for. For those coaches who work in the private sector, new demands of their full-time job show up daily, leaving little or no time to sit back and reflect on what has been learned in the past few months. Your players are also ready for some time away from the game; many have been playing since the start of the new year.

This is exactly why it's so vitally important to your program that you don't let this excellent opportunity for growth slip away in the warm weather and parade of graduation parties to come. Why? Because many of those you will compete against next fall will!

Set up the following evaluation with each club player. The resulting improvement in each one's "carryover" to the

summer and fall will significantly increase your team's improvement by the start of the high school season.

Club season evaluation

Please answer each of the following questions completely and honestly before your meeting. Then make sure to bring it with you to the meeting. *Remember: the key to self-improvement is honest self-evaluation!* Please phrase your thoughts in complete sentences.

1. List each skill you feel you improved at this club season. For each skill you list, state the following:
 - a. What part of the overall skill you improved at.
 - b. Any suggestions your club coach or teammates gave you that you feel helped you to improve.
 - c. Any drills you did that you feel helped you improve.
 - d. Any mental exercises you did that you feel helped you improve.
2. List each skill you feel you did not improve at: be honest here! For each skill you list, state the following:
 - a. What specific parts of the skill did you have the most problems improving at?
 - b. What suggestions did your coach or teammates give you that you feel didn't help you?
 - c. What suggestions did your coach or teammates give you that you simply ignored or didn't honestly focus on enough?
3. Did your coach use any drills you liked and think would help our team if we used them?
4. Which teammate of yours did you admire most? What qualities does she have that make you say this?
5. Which teammate of yours did you admire least? What qualities does she have that make you say this? (Please practice constructive criticism here!)
6. Did your coach help your mental game in any way? If so, how?

7. Did your coach hurt your mental game in any way? If so, how? (Again, be constructive in your comments!)

Preparing for the meetings

Allow three to four days' time before the first meeting is scheduled. This will give the first few ample time to fill out the questionnaire correctly without just rushing through it. I suggest starting with incoming seniors and working your way down the ladder. Allow at least thirty minutes for each meeting.

Be prepared to take notes at the meeting. Jot down specific points the player mentions in relation to each question. Before writing something down, ask the athlete if they agree with what you want to write. If they do, excellent! If not, work with them to come to a "common thought." Remember: it's *their* evaluation. They need to have a sense of ownership in what is being written.

Evaluating the answers to Questions 1-3

The goal of each meeting is to identify not only what they improved at, but specifically what they did that produced this improvement. It's also important to identify which methods their club coach used that worked, as well as those that didn't. By doing this, you and your player can develop a plan involving a series of goals focusing on specific ideas on which they need to continue working, and also target areas needing a fresh approach.

It's also an excellent opportunity for you to "pick the brain" of their club coach and pick up new ideas to use yourself! Whether it's a new drill a player of yours loved, or a key word or phrase that was used to finally help your player "see the light", if it helps them to improve, use it!

I am a firm believer in the "bottom line" theory. In other words, I don't care whose idea it is: if it helps my program, I'm going to use it!

Just think, if you have players working with six or seven different coaches this club season, that's six or seven different sets of ideas to which you now have access. Maybe you have more, maybe less; the point is to use all available resources to help each of your players improve as much as possible as quickly as possible.

Evaluating the answers to Questions 4-5

Each of your players has been working and competing with athletes from numerous other programs over the past several months. Their teammates have invariably practiced the same approach to training and competing learned at their school. So, it's reasonable to assume they have been exposed to at least a few different work ethics, levels of commitment, attitudes towards teamwork, and mental approaches.

This is the perfect opportunity for you to reinforce those concepts you strive for in your program, as well as to provide them with a perfect, hands-on example of why some approaches "just aren't for us."

Many times they will provide you with excellent examples of others doing things just as you expect, and nine times out of ten, these examples will come from their teammates from winning programs. (Hey, it's no secret or surprise that the similarities among winning programs run very deep.)

It's also a great chance to build respect and admiration among your own players for those who "do things right" in your program. Many times, this can later be brought up to help smooth over those little personality conflicts that pop-up during the course of a season. In addition, a strong impression of what it feels like to play along side a teammate who doesn't conduct themselves well becomes etched strongly in their minds. Each experience of this sort builds a stronger commitment in each of your players to "never be like so-and-so."

Evaluating the answers to Questions 6-7

We all have players that love our approach to coaching – and others who don't. The information your players give you now can help you to improve your relations with the ones you just don't seem to "click" with.

If a player really enjoyed working with their club coach, it's important to find out why. Although we all sometimes run into a situation that's only going to be "so good" in working with an athlete in our program, many times a slight, painless adjustment in how we work with that one

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OVR Teams Excel at AAUs

Led by coach Carlos Chia, the Cincinnati Bullets 17's team was victorious at the 29th AAU Junior National Girls' Volleyball Championships. Three Bullets were named AAU All-Americans: **Michaele Blackburn**, Libero; **Stephanie Blackburn**, also the tournament MVP; and **Emily Withers**, Setter. The tournament was held at the Disney's Wide World of Sports™ complex and at the Orange County Convention Center near Orlando, Florida, on June 13-18, 2002.

Premier Black Mavericks finished 3rd in the 18's division. Playing for Premier Black Mavericks, **Ashlei Noflinger** was also selected as an AAU All-American.

The Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) is a large, non-profit, multi-sport organization dedicated exclusively to the promotion of amateur sports and physical fitness programs. For complete results and for more information on AAU Championships, visit www.aasports.org and follow the "Sports" link to Volleyball.

Volleyballs and Carts at Special Region Prices

The Ohio Valley Region is offering **Molten Pro-Touch, Super-Touch, and VB Lite** as well as **Baden 15-0 Lexum**



(the official ball of the OHSAA) volleyballs at a **special Region price of \$35 per ball**. These top-quality leather volleyballs are ideal for both tournaments and practice. Free drop shipment for lots of 36. Customer pick-up available in Kent, Columbus, and Dayton/Cincinnati.



The Ohio Valley Region is also pleased to offer the **Molten Tall Ball Cart at a special Region price of \$120**. This wheeled cart will hold over 30 volleyballs.

Prices do not include shipping. To order or for more information, contact the region office at 888-873-9478 or by e-mail at wyzynski@ovr.org.

In the September issue of *OVR The Block*...

We'll have results and stories from the 2002 USA Open and Junior Olympic Volleyball Championships (send us your accounts and photos by the end of July!). We'll also have important updates for the 2003 season resulting from the Board of Directors' August retreat and other summer meetings. And, as always, *OVR The Block* will feature insightful commentary from our officers and board members, complemented by member contributions. Contact us at editor@ovr.org if you'd like to submit an article.

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player can makes things more enjoyable and productive for all involved. Remember: no matter how right we feel we are in our approach, every once in awhile a slight tinkering with our mannerisms and reactions can greatly help a young athlete improve their performance. After all, we are the adults here!

On the other hand, if your athlete's experience was not an enjoyable one, it's essential to learn why they feel this way. Many times this can alert you to possible "danger areas" in working with this young person that you will want to avoid at all costs.

Summary

The main reasons the vast majority of your athletes play club are to have fun and improve at the game they love. Learning from their club season experience helps everyone involved. Good experiences need to be identified, and goals need to be set to continue that positive growth. Any experience that is learned from immediately becomes a positive one! So coaches, put aside that fatigue we all feel at this time and get to work: your efforts will produce many benefits that will carry on through your program for years to come!

— Dave Cross

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www.yesicansports.com

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