

## Slide attack

By Tom Melton, a Gold Medal Squared Clinician

I used the following principles to teach the Slide to my athletes and I think we had some success with these concepts:

1. It has to be simple for me to teach
2. It has to be simple for my athletes to learn.

With that said, I **only ran second step slides**. This is not to say that it is better than 3rd step slides. It's more about what was simple for us to do and simple for us to get good at in a hurry.

I **never tried to have the hitters be deceptive with their footwork**. I wanted to advertise that we were running the slide. I wanted to give blockers something to see and think about.

As I'm writing this, I'm re-watching the Cal vs. Stanford match. Cal runs the slide with their middles and their opposite (they never run the slide with the middle going in front of the opposite, however). **Cal's hitters run the slide on a second step and Stanford runs their hitters on a second step slide. Neither of these teams tries to disguise the slide with some sort of jab step towards the net.**

The attackers need to stay off the net. I think it's really important to set this ball off the net a little bit (3 ft is ideal). I think the slide should be 1-3 ft inside the pin. By keeping the attacker off the net and allowing them to attack on an angle towards the net, the attacker can adjust to the set location.

One of the critical components of the slide is the arm work. Since the athlete is jumping off of one foot and is changing direction in the air, it's very difficult for the hitter to use a double arm lift. In fact, **I really don't like to see the hitters hands trail the hitter at any point** during the approach.

We want to use keys when teaching so I suggest the following:

1. 4 step approach: R,L, R-L (slow to fast, small to big) jump off one foot (like a right-handed lay-up). Attack on an angle.
2. Arm-work = arms ready to run but slightly forward, bow and arrow
3. Hit with torque.

I think initially, it's better for hitters to learn how to adjust to the slide that is too wide versus adjusting to the set that is too inside. I do think those issues are exacerbated by an approach that is too parallel to the net. But if you allow the hitter to get some depth and attack on an angle the hitter can use her closing steps to appropriately adjust to the set.

Keegan Cook – St. Mary’s:

Eric -

Here are some of our cues, keys, decisions, and reasons behind them.

1. Tempo - We run a second tempo slide attack. Our middles have two steps remaining in their approach when the ball reaches the setter. We initially attempted to run a 3rd tempo slide but made the change in early August for the following reasons...

i. We want our middles to **use their last two steps to adjust to the set**. Our players let us know that adjusting with just one step was very difficult.

ii. We want to **set our middles in as many non-perfect pass situations as possible**. Being able to set the ball to a one foot attacker at a 2nd step tempo expanded the range of passes from which our setter could deliver a hittable ball.

iii. I am a big believer in hitting with range. It turned out that running a 3rd tempo slide made it too difficult for our middles to attack the ball down the line. That piece of feedback was the final nail in the coffin for the 3rd tempo slide experiment.

2. Footwork - Our footwork for running a slide from serve receive / free ball transition is as follows...

i. Shuffle - I like a shuffle step to initiate a slide approach as it often marks the end of what is often chaotic movement and the beginning of something controlled. Our athletes begin their slide approaches by shuffling through the center of the court while evaluating the pass (quality, speed, etc).

ii. Right - Takes place directly after the shuffle similar to when an outside hitter takes a 3-step shuffle after passing.

iii. Left - Our timing step. I emphasize to our athletes that **they should be "entering" their 2nd step meaning they are just putting their 2nd step down as the ball reaches our setter as opposed to "exiting" their second step**. It's a subtle piece of feedback that I believe helps our athletes to make sure they take their 3rd step mindfully towards the ball.

iv. Right - Left - I always talk about these two steps as a pair to emphasize their importance. **These last two steps should be fast** as well as help our players adjust to the subtle variations in set location.

v. Approach Angle - We like our slide attackers to run at about **45 degree angle**. We use a line that dissects the court diagonally as a visual reference. The goal is to keep the set in front of our hitter so they can see the block in front of them. This angle becomes less acute for a pass farther off the net.

vi. Depth off the net - I often talk about landmarks with our athletes. For example, I advise our slide hitters to shuffle "**through the center**", **put their 2nd step "on the 10ft line"** and to "**jump from 5 feet to hit at 3 feet**". All of these "landmarks" are objective and easy to evaluate on film.

Some small suggestions that I believed help our athletes learn include...

1. *\*Play competitive games\** - One of my favorite games is Neville's with the variation of having a front row middle. In our version of this game, our middles are the only players who are allowed to attack in the front row. All other players must send a free ball across the net with their forearms on a third contact. This game gives your middles opportunities to run slides in serve receive, in transition, and in free ball situations.
2. *\*Acknowledge little victories\** - There are no little things and teaching/learning to attack slides was a frustrating process for both our athletes (and our coaches!). Acknowledging the day to day progress of our athletes was critical to keeping them motivated.
3. *\*Film your athletes\** - You can't dispute reality. Film is the most objective tool we possess as coaches. The feedback we give for footwork, tempo, arm work, etc. is better understood when shown to our athletes.
4. *\*Switch between process and outcome based feedback\** - When working with athletes in small group skill sessions, I focus on evaluating process as opposed to outcome. There is tremendous value however in giving your athletes the freedom to experiment, fail, and experiment again with no constraints on how they achieve the goal.
5. *\*Persistence, grit, patience\** - The process of learning to hit slides was an extremely messy, frustrating, labor-intensive, time-consuming, and failure-filled process. What were supposed to be easily understood concepts and details became huge obstacles to overcome. It was all worth it as there was no better feeling than watching our athletes performance in November. See below.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZqpaJDsHYmI>