

The Little Things

By Rich Bozeman and VCT Input

Recently I asked the college coaches on VCT to submit "Little Things" they look for in players other than their obvious playing ability. These are things they look for when they are recruiting players for college. Many of them are repetitive (which obviously means they are important!)

I attempted to organize them into similar sections.

- How do you approach warming up?
- I look at how a player prepares for a match a lot.

- Do you encourage teammates who just made a mistake?
- Encourages teammates...
- Doesn't dwell on mistakes but instead looks toward the next play...
- I'd almost rather see their reactions to playing poorly than a highlight film. That's a more realistic perspective.
- How do you compose yourself going into and out of the locker room win or loss?
- How do you handle criticism?
- How do they react to mistakes?
- How well they respond after an error and how much they want to be that person passing or getting the ball in pressure situation (or do they shy away)?
- How do you handle yourself when you are having an off game?
- How you handle loss, getting subbed?
- Do they get frustrated, or do they accept the challenge?
- Are you emotionally constant (not manic)?
- How do they react: on the court, in the time out, before the game, after?
- We do want to see how you handle adversity.
- How do you respond to a bad call? Committing an error or two in a row? Team loses a few points in a row? being benched?
- If you're on the bench, how are you supporting your team? (How engaged are you?)
- How do you react when you are critiqued?
- What do you do with the information after it's been given?
- When the opponent is making an attempt to block and the attack goes out of bounds, do they immediately strike the "touch" signal pose, trying to get the ref to call it? (one of my pet peeves)

- Are they having fun?
- How do they manage errors?
- How do they celebrate success?

- Do you eye-roll?
- We always talk to our players about body language, especially when getting subbed in or out, when standing on the bench and especially after an error.
- Body language and facial expression after a coach gives instruction/critique/feedback/adjustment during a match (or whenever). "Yes coach, I'll try that!"
- Or..... "Coach, I know!" (Eye roll).
- I also watch for moving on after a bad call, giving confidence to teammates whether up or down, looking teammates in the eye after a won or lost point, timeout attentiveness, most of all, playing with a body/facial language and focus that says "I'm loving every minute of this!"

- How you act during the game and after when you think no one is watching because we are.
 - Positiveness, Motivation, Talking, knowing how to self correct, love of the game, RIDE OR DIE for their teammates, how involved in the game are they on the sidelines, SMILES....to name a few. ...my buggy....HEART PLAY AND SUPPORT WITH HEART!!
 - "what you do, and how you are, off the court, matters!!"
 - Always admired those student athletes that applied both life and game lessons.
 - Enhances performance and enriches lives.
 - Selflessness. Those self serving players usually last a season or if they're lucky, "get it" their final year.
 - Team before self in every way it can apply; passion to perform well, not simply win, it might seem odd I want someone who loves to practice as much as they love to play.
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- Who do you look at during time outs?
 - What are you doing during timeouts?
 - Do you pay attention during timeouts?
 - Asks questions at appropriate times,
 - How does a player act on the bench?
 - Do they energize the team?
 - Are they sulking or are they cheering?
 - Do they pay attention to coaches, teammates?
 - Are you actively engaged even while on the bench?
 - How engaged they are.
 - Are you an energy giver or taker?
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- How do you support your team?
 - Hold your team accountable for excellence?
 - Hold yourself accountable for excellence?
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- Part of the team or busy doing your own thing?
 - Along with that, I watch to see what they do when not playing, are they curled up in a blanket asleep, talking on a phone, snuggling their boy friend?
 - Is she sitting in her parents lap? Or crying after a match?
 - Is she sitting with her boyfriend between games?
 - Are they all locked up in a lovers knot with their boyfriend between matches?
 - Are you glued to your cell phone / electronic device?
 - How quickly do they have to get to their phone?
 - Put the smart phone away at a tournament.
 - How long do they isolate themselves with their headphones on?
 - Where do they go after the match? With teammates or elsewhere with friends/parents Or are they engaged with their team, maybe scouting the team they play next.

I was at a tournament the other day and saw a girl we are recruiting watching a court of players in a different division, at the end of the day I ask her if she knew someone on that team, her reply, "no, but that libero (she's a libero) is going to (not saying the school but it is a big-time program) and I wanted to see what I could learn from her." The player went WAY up my recruit list!

- When assigned to do lines, are they engaged and alert?....
- When a ball rolls on from another court and there's a lull in the action do they just let it roll, kick it off, lightly deflect it....or do they make an honest effort to grab it and get it back to its origin?
- What kind of a person are you?
- What interests you? What are your passions?
- Can you carry on a good conversation?
- Confidence in one's own ability.
- Humility, respect for others, positive attitude reflected in your actions, head held high even when the situation is going poorly.
- Maturity...leadership...responsibility. willingness to learn...not just think because you played since 12 you know it all (secret...you don't).
- Desire, confidence, respect, positivity, adaptability and humility. Things I look for when I scouted a player. Makes for a complete player that will represent any school well.
- Always looking to improve and better understand the game.
- Do they make adjustments during play?(find they open shot)
- Do they problem solve on the court or only make an adjustment when the coach tells them to?
- Their volleyball IQ.
- Do they communicate well, make good decisions, read and respond to cues early, and play fully without the ball, and conversely, do they transfer responsibility for mistakes?
- I like any sign of accountability and responsibility. A small one is chasing down a stray ball when the play dies.
- Above and beyond the normal hard work, never give up on a ball, etc...
- How hard do you go? Do you give that effort consistently, or is it reflective of the situation?(Score, opponent, etc.)
- How high do you jump? How fast are you? What kind of angles do you make when contacting the ball in serve reception and defense?
- Is the setter a good conduit between the bench and her team, and is she making great sets off of medium passes without giving the passers the "stink eye"?
- Is the Libero taking charge of the defense and providing good feedback to her teammates?
- Transitioning especially on out of system balls.
- How do you treat your parents before/after the match?
- How do you treat your parents?
- Who gets your water bottle?
- How do you treat your parents and siblings before and after matches?
- Do you get your teammates water or does your mother bring you water?
- Are mom and dad doing everything for you? (Bringing you your water, taking your trash,carrying your bags)?
- Here is my personal pet peeve: A player that yells across the court at a parent to bring them a bottle of water. If a player is to lazy to walk the 30 or so feet to get a drink on their own, how the heck are they going to survive what I am going to ask them to do?
- Mouthing off to her parents about "my water isn't cold!" or "you didn't pack the right socks" is **game over.**

- How do the parents behave????
- I've got one you wouldn't expect...how do your PARENTS act on the sidelines?!? Yes, I'm serious...when I was recruiting I would listen to the parents and how they either supported their kids, teammates, and COACHES -or- criticized them!! Now, you're saying...but college coaches don't deal with parents?!? When there are scholarships involved you will deal with parents more than you think!! If parents are criticizing everything, that usually comes back to the girls and then you have a domino effect through the team!! I've talked away from some courts because of parents and I've walked too some courts because of parents - i.e.: Atlanta Boom - they know how to support their teams and one another!
-oh...one other biggie for me...I watch the parents...I like to sit among the parents and eavesdrop, I realize that we're also getting those parents as a package deal and as we all know, it only takes one parent to start an avalanche when they know more than the coaches. I think somewhere in the middle of the night a lot of them attend secret meetings that instruct them on how to start a riot or organize a plot to get us all fired.
- Highlight tapes are alright, but we like to see them in action. Parents are part of the equation as well, but we let them know that this is not High School and that playing time could be minimal depending on how their athlete adapts to our system and techniques. There will be NO discussion of playing time, or who is playing, or strategies. We always get this question, "Do you think my daughter can play for you?" My response, "That is why we are recruiting her." If we are recruiting an athlete we feel they can fit into our system.
- One recruiting video I received you could hear mom talking to another mom about the girl's loser boyfriend. Before I could realize what was happening I already learned too much about her love life to feel comfortable recruiting her.