

Volleyball Positions

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The four basic positions for volleyball include the Setter, Right-side (off-side), Middle and Power (left-side). Specialized positions that have evolved over recent years include the libero and the defensive specialist.

Setter

The setter is the quarterback of the team. She/he is the offensive captain and is ideally the smartest player on the court, a natural leader and is blessed with very quick feet. Their ability to beat the ball to its location greatly impacts their ability to deliver a quality set. This is determined by the setter's ability to anticipate the play and their ability to get to that spot quickly.

Common Training Errors: In Manitoba so much emphasis is placed on "soft contact" that many setters end up lifting the ball. For setters to deliver quality sets at longer distances they will need to lock their wrists and load their hips and elbows. How to properly set longer distances is under-trained.

Also, whereas most coaches spend most of their training on hands (wall exercises) and basic movement (setter triangles) their ability to set out of system balls and attack/dump balls is often overlooked.

Right-side

The Right-side player is opposite the setter in the rotation and defends the right-side of the court. The right-side is also ideally a two-tempo hitter meaning he/she can hit quick sets as well as high outside sets.

The Right-side is a primary blocker with most teams preferring to have their setters rotate to the back-row early in the rotation to allow the right-side player the greatest opportunity to hit and block.

Common Training Errors: A strong right-side can change with a middle during play and hit combinations of first and second tempo. Too many coaches view the right-side as only a high-ball attacker when they should be expected to hit faster sets in later years.

Middle

The Middle "blocker" is the lead blocker in the team's front-line defense and is generally a quick attacker. They are responsible for blocking all attackers and should read free-balls, down balls, and back-row attackers before others. They are expected to move quickly along the net to block all three attackers and to get off the net quickly enough to remain in the offense.

Common Training Errors: Many coaches will assign the middle blocker position to the tallest athlete on the team. The middle blockers must be fast on their feet regardless of whether your team runs a quick offense or not. He/she will need to block from one side of the court to the other and stay out of the setter's way when transitioning to hit. Foot speed and net discipline

are more important than height. Taller players who like to pass may be better suited for outside hitting.

Power

The Left-side position will normally be assumed by the team's strongest hitter in the girls' game. With passing being a greater challenge as a result of the lower net, teams will find themselves feeding the outside (outlet) hitter more regularly.

Whereas the middle blocker can remain in the offense more in the boys' game, the power hitter in the girls' game will inevitably end up taking on a significant role in the team's offense. A common rule of thumb in the girls' game is, "the team with the highest kill efficiency among its Power hitters probably won the game".

Common Training Errors: With the focus on hitting, many coaches overlook the importance of both Power hitters passing effectively. When some power hitters falter with passing, coaches will regularly hide them in passing and ask others to step in and pass. If your Power hitters are going to make it to a post-secondary volleyball program they will need to pass. Emphasize that at all times. Always start with them passing and hide them if they falter. Don't start with the premise, "It's okay if you don't pass well, we'll just get others to pass for you".

Libero

The libero is a defensive specialist who generally replaces the middle blocker when he/she is in the back row. Following the middle blocker's loss of serve, the libero will replace him/her in the back row. No need to announce a substitution.

The libero is hopefully the best passer on the team, and he/she will ideally run the passing line. They will also normally play defense out of position five so they can run in and play the second ball when the setter was required to play the first ball. If the right-side blockers are small the coach may opt to have the libero play defense out of position six (middle back) and allow the right-side to play the second ball if the setter defends the first ball.

Common Training Errors: Many coaches over-train the libero in defense. Defensive skills involve one-step at most while passing serves often involves movement to the ball. Liberos that are over-trained on defense may end up lunging on serve-receive, and otherwise using defensive techniques to pass serves. Both skill sets must be trained equally.

Defensive Specialist

The defensive specialist, unlike the libero, is an athlete who is subbed in; normally for the right-side blocker. In an environment where coaches have unlimited substitutions, the coach may decide to use that opportunity to sub in a defensive specialist for their right-side player. This substitution, like the libero coming in for the middle blockers, will normally happen when the right-side player rotates to the back row. However, unlike the libero, the defensive specialist can be used to serve should the coach prefer.

Common Training Errors: Just as with the liberos, the defensive specialist must be well trained in passing and not simply defensive skills. That being said, passing may not be necessary should the left-side players and the libero are strong in these areas.

Until next time,

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