

Understanding the Setter

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Choosing the Setter

A few years ago, I had to help one of our age class club tryouts, so I actually wasn't able to attend my own team's first tryout. I therefore asked another one of our club coaches to identify a possible setter for my team as I had most athletes pre-selected despite not having a committed setter. He e-mailed me later that evening with the name of an athlete he deemed, "the very best setter" at our tryout so I called her parents the next evening and offered her a spot. She accepted and a few days later I met her for the first time at our second team tryout. I was stunned. She was so slow footed my immediate reaction was to believe my fellow club coach must have purposely sabotaged my team. I called him over and asked him what qualities he liked most about her. His response was, "She has the best hands I've ever seen."

At that point I understood he meant well, and I was lucky enough to find another setter who moved quickly to the ball and our team's season was salvaged.

Choosing a setter has little to do with the setter's hands, as that can always be improved. Many other important elements to setting are far less easy to train. Here's an overview of some of the key requirements to finding a strong setter.

Ideal technical skills of a strong setter:

1. **Foot Speed:** Simply put, setters must be able to get to the ball, cover every hitter and play defense. Foot speed is probably the most important athletic ability of a good setter. Agility footwork exercises with the use of ladders can certainly improve agility and foot speed, however, it will never turn a slow-footed setter into a quick one. They are fast, or they are not.
2. **Hand contact:** The only way to ensure consistent contact with the ball is high-repetition practice. Have your younger setters spend an average of 10-15 minutes per practice against the walls for the first third of the season. If the walls in your gym do not allow for setter training, have them practice with a partner.
3. **Blocking:** The setter is a primary blocker. However, since the setter is often one of the smaller athletes on a team, coaches will regularly start them in position one as the lead-off server. This places them in a position where they must be a strong lead-off server and an effective blocker when rotate to the front row. The life of a setter....

Personal traits of a winning setter:

1. **Leadership:** The setter is the offensive captain. The team's confidence will be determined by their confidence in their setter and a natural leader raises the confidence of the entire team.
- 2- **Winner:** A setter who sets an example for never giving up and chasing down every ball will have the effect of making everyone on the team work harder not to let them down; especially if they are well-liked by the rest of the team.
3. **Confidence:** The ideal setter must be confident in her training and in her ability to deliver the ball. As previously mentioned, a team's confidence is impacted by their confidence in their

setter. If the setter struggles with poor confidence she will not likely earn the trust of her team.

4. Intelligence: The ideal situation for any team is one in which the setter is a self-motivated "student of the game." A setter who strives to understand the systems of play, why coaching decisions are made, and how to anticipate the game as it unfolds, will have more success.

5. Communication: It is essential for a setter to be a strong communicator. If that doesn't come naturally to the young setter, work with them so it does become second nature. The first thing to understand about quiet setters is that they run the risk of injuring themselves and others by potentially colliding with a teammate on the court. Teammates who do not hear their setter call for a ball may simply run into them when attempting to play the second ball. This is the most common cause of serious concussions on the volleyball court. Setters who are quiet will also "freeze" their team as teammates wait until the setter gets to the ball before releasing to their hitting lanes.

6. Calm Disposition: Emotional setters make their teams emotional. That always looks great when the team is winning but lose three points in a row and watch things change. As you train your younger setters, practice helping them adopt physical cues they can use to help them re-focus on the next point and lead their team in a controlled, confident manner.

Until next time,

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