

Responsibilities of a Bench Coach

By Erin Radford
VISION Elite Coach

As a coach within VISION Elite Volleyball Club we work in a unique environment. Unlike other programs where a coach is entirely responsible for the training during practice and bench coach during competitions, not to mention the need for mental training, nutrition and conditioning, here we are part of a coaching team. We are all responsible for our singular contribution to the team's success. As the team's bench coach, I am responsible for coaching during competition.

Bench coaching includes game planning; scouting; stats; pre-game rituals; post-game analysis and in of itself is quite a load... and very rewarding. Here below is an overview for all you bench coaches on elements involved. I hope it helps you achieve more success with your team.

Provide a Safe Physical Environment

a) Encourage the whole team to look for dangers/obstacles on, and around, the playing area. If the dangers are moveable, remove them from the area (ex. spilled water, team or other sports equipment on the floor, benches, bags, etc.). If fixed, make sure players are aware of the safety concern, and plan accordingly.

b) Discuss CONCUSSIONS, and team/club protocol.

c) Discuss court safety.

i. Importance of calling the ball. (avoiding collisions and possible injury)

ii. Importance of a safe playing area. (no balls, or other equipment, left on the floor/court - tripping hazard, etc.)

iii. Net Play. (importance of staying off the net, and avoiding traveling under the net - injury potential for both teams)

Communicate in a Positive Way

a) Have PATIENCE, especially when coaching young/beginner athletes. There will be many errors in the beginning, and kids need to know they will not be penalized for making mistakes.

b) Be ENCOURAGING, help motivate your athletes, and encourage positive thinking. A players attitude is as important as their skill! A confident, positive attitude will not only help an athlete on the court, but will also extend into other areas of their life. Encourage individual, and team, AFFIRMATIONS.

c) Use " I "and " WE ", not "you".

i. "I think we need to call the ball more, during our next set."

NOT

"You need to call the ball more, during our next set."

d) Use " AND ", not "but"

- i. "The next team we play beat us last game, and if we play our best, I'm sure you can win."

NOT

"If we play our best, I'm sure you can win, but the next team we play beat us last game."

e) Use "I WILL", not "I'll try".

- i. "I will make my next serve." *AFFIRMATION*

NOT

"I will try to make my next serve."

f) ASK QUESTIONS, avoiding yes or no answers. Get players insights around skills, drills, and during game play.

g) Be demanding and disciplined, but NEVER Demeanor. Help to build an athlete's self-esteem, by using constructive comments, and SANDWICHING A CORRECTION WITH COMPLIMENTS.

h) Be CONSISTENT

- i. Demonstrate beliefs. Model them in practice and reinforce when seen.
- ii. Demonstrate and encourage athletes to believe in themselves.
- iii. Respect. Developing the mind and spirit, will go alongside the development of physical volleyball skills during an athlete's time with you. Teaching respect for themselves, others, and the rules of the game, are just a few of the opportunities a coach has to pass down this lifelong attribute.
- iv. Coaches are human, we all make mistakes.

Pre-Game

1. Be motivational, and enthusiastic. By heightening athlete enthusiasm, you can pull players together to work as a team and help each other on the court.
2. Speak to your team in a calm, and relaxed manner. Away from distractions.
3. Stress the importance of having fun, trying their best, and showing good sportsmanship.
4. Focus your talk on areas that players excel in. Create goals, or challenges, for your match. (ex. Players are only allowed one missed serve during the set... Using 3 contacts for every play... etc.)

Directly Prior to Match/During Huddle

5. Briefly discuss any scouting notes you may have on your opponents (good serves, strong players, etc.). Include the athletes in scouting, especially during warm-up (short vs. deep servers, hitting tendencies, etc.).

Mid-Game

1. After a (first set) win

- a) Applaud efforts.
- b) Challenge to raise the bar, to avoid complacency.

2. After a (first set) loss

- a) Don't dwell on mistakes.
- b) Focus on positive aspects of the match.
- c) Divert focus to the game, not the score.
 - 3 Contacts
 - Hustling
 - Giving our Best for Every Point

3. Deciding Set?

- a) Focus players attention to their successes during the match thus far. You want your team to return to the court with a positive, confident attitude.

4. Switching Strategies?

- a) Keep It Simple! Don't overwhelm players with changes,

5. Player Opinions and Observations

- a) Ask your athletes what they noticed during the match. (Holes, tendencies, etc.)

6. Importance of Staying Hydrated

Post-Game

1. Focus on FUN.
2. Mistakes help us LEARN and happen at all levels. Accentuate the positive.
3. Highlight displays of good SPORTSMANSHIP.
4. Ignore the score. Players are more important than wins and losses.
5. End on a POSITIVE NOTE. *AFFIRMATION CIRCLE (each player)*

Teach the Rules of the Game

- a) Coach smarter, not harder. Attend online, or in-person, coaching clinics.

- b) Understand (and teach) the rules of volleyball. Rules for a match, may differ slightly from tournament to tournament. Game/tournament specific rules will always be posted/available for review before your match.

i. Net Height

- 13/14u - 2.15m
- 15u - 2.20m
- 16u+ - 2.24m

ii. Triple Ball rules are in effect for age classes 13u, and under

iii. Fair Play rules are in effect for age classes 14u, and under

- iv. Overhand Passing (off the serve) is allowed in ages classes 15u, and up
- v. Libero is allowed in age classes 16u, and up
- c) Understand (and teach) court positions, rotation, and court lines/boundaries.
- d) Understand (and teach) offensive and defensive set-ups. These will start at a basic level, with progression into more complicated systems as athletes become more experienced.
- e) Understand (and teach) volleyball terminology, for easier communication with athletes.
- f) Communicate any match specific rules, given to the captain by the referee, during the coin toss

Teach the Skills & Tactics of the Game

- a) PRACTICE PLANS (typically set by Head Coach and/or Instructors)
 - i. Be aware of the level you are coaching. Younger/beginner athletes will need to spend more time on skill development, and gameplay will be less of a focus. Older/more experienced athletes can focus more on volleyball skill progressions and match strategies, more frequently than basic skills.
 - ii. Skill of players. As previously mentioned, players of a higher skill level can now focus more attention to strategy, and more complicated defensive and offensive systems.
 - iii. How much are players willing, and able, to learn? Is the group, as a whole, ready for progression? Is this drill too advanced for my athletes, and do we need to step back and simplify?
 - iv. How much do your players buy into what you're teaching? Athletes need to understand the why, and how learning basic skills will apply to the game and their performance.
 - v. How skilled you are as a coach. Making sure to train and encourage proper technique, to develop good muscle memory and avoid developing bad habits.
- b) Help EVERY PLAYER on the team.
 - i. Make sure to spend equal time with all of your athletes, regardless of skill level.
- c) REPETITION
 - i. Repetition is key for developing muscle memory, but it is equally important that the quality of these reps remains high.
- d) Keep kids ACTIVE and ENGAGED. Limit the opportunities to standing around, as athletes will lose focus.
- e) Emphasize MOVEMENT

- i. Encourage constant movement with the play/ball.
- ii. It is easiest to move, when we are already in motion.
- iii. Volleyball is not static.
- iv. Teach players how to hit the floor (safely)

f) Emphasize COMMUNICATION

- i. Review importance of constant communication on the court. Not only for success, but for the safety of the athletes. There are many verbal, and non-verbal ways to communicate on the court. Encourage the chatter.
- ii. Stress importance of calling "MINE".

g) Share coaching responsibility with players.

- i. We become better athletes by coaching. Have your players teach a skill to someone else.
- ii. When given the opportunity to 'coach', players can provide their own insights of the game.
- iii. Self-assessment and Teaching. An athlete will typically be their biggest critic.
- iv. Helps players learn decision making and problem solving.

h) Athletes should have no fear of making mistakes.

- i. Make sure athletes know that practice is for practice!! They should not be afraid to make a mistake, especially when learning something new. Never punish a player for making a mistake in practice.

i) Avoid regression to the mean.

- i. Help players avoid "slacking off" or "playing down". Progress with drill modifications to make tasks more challenging.
- ii. Encourage athletes to "raise the bar" by striving for perfection.

j) Positive vs. Negative Errors

- i. Focus on positive errors. ex. A set that is too far off the net, is better than a set that is too tight... A pass that is out of system, but playable, is better than a pass that is not playable.

k) Don't penalize players (with exercise)

- i. Exercise should not be something used to punish athletes for poor performance. Exercise and fitness are important aspects of the game and will never be enjoyed by an athlete who views it as a punishment.

l) Homework.

- i. Give athletes exercises they can do at home.
 1. Approach and/or Footwork
 2. Toss
 3. Shuffling
 4. ...etc.

- m) Always start and end a practice with FUN.
- i. Start and end with a game. 2-on-2, or 3-on-3 are great options. These games can be either player, or coach, initiated.

Direct Players in Competition

a) Captain

- i. The coach will choose the team captain
- ii. In younger age classes, rotating your captain for matches is encouraged

b) Line Ups

- i. The coach will set the game line up; every rostered player must start in either the first, or second set.
- ii. Rotations/Defensive and Offensive Positioning
 - 13u (triple ball)
 - 6/6 - all athletes hit, all athletes set; setter in position 3 (or 2)
 - 14u
 - 3/3 - all athletes hit, 3 designated setters
 - 4/2 - 4 hitters, 2 setters
 - 15u ++
 - 5/1 - 5 hitters, 1 setter
 - 6/2 - all athletes hit, 2 designated setters; setter moves in from back row
- iii. Be aware of player strengths and weaknesses.
- iv. Separate weaker athletes (ex. place one athlete on line A, and one athlete on line B)
- v. Highlight skills of stronger athletes (ex. if a player is a strong hitter, make sure you line them up with someone who can set to them)

c) Fair Play and Substitutions

- i. Fair Play rules are in effect for all teams in, or below, the 14u age class
- ii. Every rostered player must start in one of the first 2 sets. No substitutions are allowed in the first 2 sets (unless a player becomes injured). If a third set is required, any player can start this match, and substitutions are allowed.
- iii. Substitutions should be used if a player is showing a lot of nerves on the court. Remove the athlete, (remaining positive) and let them know why you are giving them a chance to 'cool down'. Have the athlete report back to you once they feel ready to return to play, and you can sub them back in.

d) Serving

- i. The coach will determine what type of serve athletes can use in competition. (underhand serve, overhand serve, jump serve; float or spin).
- ii. Have weaker, or nervous, servers serve first, or early in the rotation.
- iii. As athletes become more consistent servers, challenge them to serve more aggressively (lower/closer to the net; serve to a hole, or certain position on the court).
- iv. Short vs. Deep Serves

e) Communicating

i. Referee

- direct communication with the referee is done by the team captain.
- if the coach has questions or comments for the ref, they must communicate them to the team captain, then have the player approach the referee.

ii. Players

- communicate with athletes continuously.
- direct them (when necessary) on the court.
- remind players of scouting notes made (ex. short serve, deep serve, etc.).
- positioning (serve receive vs. defensive position).
- "changing the look", or making minor changes to player court positioning.
- having trouble with a difficult serve, and getting stuck in the same rotation? without going 'out of rotation', shift passers/hide a passer, to give the same rotation a different look

f) Process and Performance over Outcome

Help Players become fit for Volleyball

athletes should be taught to enjoy exercise, never use exercise as a punishment

a) Stretching

- athletes should have a stretching routine for both before and after a practice or match
- helps reduce injury

b) Stamina

- athletes need to be able to maintain a high level of play/activity for the entire match

c) Strength

- core
- legs, shoulders, arms

d) Plyometrics

- exercises geared toward improving/increasing vertical jump

Help Develop Character

- a) Respect
- b) Responsibility
- c) Honesty
- d) Caring

Qualities of a Good Athlete

1) Leadership

- Vision
- Integrity
- Dedication
- Encouraging
- Takes Responsibility
- Assertiveness
- Humility
- Openness
- Creativity
- Fairness
- Sense of Humor

2) Good Student

3) Good Attitude

- Volleyball as play, not work
- Focus on what you're going to do (in future), not what you've done (in the past)
- Not afraid to make mistakes
- Not getting stuck on "what is"
 - Affirmations
 - Visualizations
 - Progressions
- Positive (will learn/improve faster)

The Advantages of HEIGHT

1) Blocking

- better positioning

2) Attacking

- better angle

3) Defense

- longer reach
- cover more court

4) Strength

- in general, will be stronger, due to size
- bigger/stronger hands -> more ball control

I hope you find this guide helpful!
Best of luck with your season,

Erin Radford
VISION Elite Coach

Posted April 24, 2020