

# Pacing the sidelines

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I was asked a while back what it is like to be a coach on the sidelines during a volleyball game.

I certainly can't speak for every volleyball coach out there. You ask 100 coaches what it is like to coach the sidelines and you'll get 100 different answers. Every coach is going to have their own attitude, their own philosophy, their own way of thinking and experiencing things.

So what is it like, for me, to be a coach on the sidelines? I like to pace the sidelines. Unfortunately, depending on the venue or the circumstances that we are playing in, I may not be allowed to do that. If we are in a venue that is large enough that there is room for them to make the coaches sit in chairs, I don't like it very much. I spend more time trying to stop myself from jumping up and down out of my chair than I spend paying attention to the game. That is partially why I have little desire to be a high school or college coach. They are required, by rule, to sit during their matches. Whereas most club volleyball venues are too small, or too crowded for there to be enough room for chairs or benches for the coaches to sit, even though it is a rule there also. So I get to pace the sidelines.

When allowed to avoid sitting, I get to pace back and forth with my stomach churning and my pulse pounding so hard it makes my temples hurt. The constant ache in my knees and ankles because I have been on my feet - all day, helps me stay connected to my players and aware that they also, may be hurting and suffering. My hands will hurt from clapping. My voice will crack and tears will well up in my eyes when I try to express to a player how incredible her last play was. My brain scrambles in desperation trying to find one truthful encouraging thing to say to a struggling player who is having a horrible day. My emotions range from exhilaration to despair as I often feel like laughing hysterically, crying, screaming, cheering or scolding a ref like a rabid chimpanzee. I often want to beat my head on the floor, dance, hug a player, throw my clipboard at a parent, or explode into a spittle spraying lunatic tirade at the opposing coach. And yet, through all that, I know that I don't dare let any of those emotions show on my face or in my demeanor.

I hate having players who are on the sidelines and not on the court playing. But since a team can't get through a season with only six players, someone always has to be on the sidelines. Since they have to be there, I love having my players stand beside me on the sidelines. With them standing there I have someone to talk to or share a joke with. I can share observations about the game, our opponents and our team. I have the option to teach something about the game while the game is being played. I like being able to wander back and forth behind my players, offering advice, complimenting them or whispering an admonishment in their ear.

I love being far enough from the sidelines that I can take a few steps back away from the team and enjoy a quiet, deep, cleansing breath while I watch them jump and yell and scream as they

celebrate a great win. I also prefer to be close enough to immediately jump to the sidelines and gather them into a huddle so that we can, together, move on after a crushing defeat.

So what is it like, for me, to be a coach on the sidelines? It is the best job in the world with the best seat in the house. Because I get to pace the sidelines, doing what I love doing above everything else - watching my team play the game they love.