



USA Volleyball
Education

How to Run a Beach Volleyball Clinic

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This article is designed to offer volleyball coaches, sports educators, and sports camp coordinators the resources to operate a successful single day beach volleyball clinic for all ages, kids and adults. This format should fit into a 2-4 hour time frame.

Before you arrive at the clinic:

Choose a park or beach where there are plenty of pre-existing nets and courts or room to erect your own net systems (go to www.parksun.com to view a sample outdoor volleyball net systems). Also make sure you have enough outdoor volleyballs to supply your players (do not use indoor balls but specifically designed outdoor balls). No matter how long a clinic, you will also need to provide water in large coolers, cups, and ice. A small first aid kit – bandaids and the like, should also be handy. For longer clinics, you should also provide tents/shelter, using EZ up tents and the like, if man made or natural tree sun shelter does not exist.

For our HP Indoor camps, we prefer to teach this session on Day Three, when they are the sorest, and start early, when the weather is still cool, and less of a chance for thundershowers. Check with the OTC trainer to make sure water and a trainer is available and ready.

The number of nets, courts, and balls depends on how many players arrive for the clinic. To determine the right number of nets and court, simply divide the total number of players by four (one court for every four players). For larger clinics, you can create courts by running a rope long, and anchoring it into the grass over a large X'd two by four. Lines are less important as corners, and the more nets you can get up, the better. Socks in a corner work for lines on grass in a pinch, while you simply drag your feet in the sand if there are no cord lines available. Remember, the Olympic/International/AVP standard court size for doubles is 8x8 meters – for grass or sand.



As for the number of balls, divide the total number of participants by two (one ball for every two players). Bring a hand pump of some sort, like a pocket pump, as no doubt a few of the balls will need air pressure adjustment. Extra needles to deflate overinflated balls is also a good idea.

Remind the players to bring water, sunscreen, a towel, and hat/visor/sunglasses, and again, for longer clinics an umbrella for shade. Additionally, it is a good idea to have a trainer on site or someone who knows first-aid with a first-aid kit close by.

Give aways, of USA Volleyball and sponsor decals, USAV Temporary Tattoos and even a bag of candy to reward play at the end of the clinic, can also be done.

As the players arrive, loan them sharpies and have the players write their names along their arms in large letters, so you can address them by name or nickname. Recently applied sunscreen can clog the pens, so if you can, get this done before they apply their lotions.

You have plenty of courts, balls, and all the players have arrived - now you are ready to start.

Introductions & Why We Are Here:

Welcome everybody and go through quick introductions. Ask them how many beach coaches they know, and how many people the SGMA say play indoor (11 million) and outdoor volleyball (7 million). So a big part of the clinic is focused on them learning the ideas and skills, so they can coach themselves. It is also important to remind them that it is ok to make mistakes, as they will be doing things they have never done before. Positive errors over negative, but errors are ok.

I. Why Play Beach Volleyball?

- a) Doubles Beach Volleyball provides the best environment for learning the game and refining every skill in the game. Two-on-two results in random, game-like volleyball experiences coupled with an outstanding number of contacts per person. The more your players touch the volleyball, the better they will become. As we like to say, "The game teaches the game."
- b) In Beach Doubles, if I cannot set very well, I am going to become a better setter because the other team will serve my partner forcing me to set every time. This is true for all other volleyball skills as well (hitting, passing, etc.).
- c) Each player must improve and master every skill of the game, as opposed to mastering one skill. Both players on a team must pass, set, attack, serve, block, and dig. This makes us better all around volleyball players.
- d) For example, Karch Kiraly, Kerri Walsh, Chrissie Zartman, and Misty May were all incredible indoor players because they played doubles beach volleyball early in their volleyball careers.

II. **Basic Beach Volleyball Rules:**

Most of the rules are the same as indoor, but there are a few differences. During this part, ask the players if can identify any of these rules differences (Socratic Method of teaching).

- a) No open hand tips. You can, however, strike the ball with the ends of your fingers (Cobra), with your knuckles, or simply use a roll shot (Demonstrate with a ball).
- b) If the ball is set over the net as an attack it must travel perpendicularly to the player's shoulder line. (Demonstrate with a ball).
- c) Players can go under the net as long as they do not interfere with their opponents.
- d) A block counts as a contact, but the second contact can be made by the blocker. The team then would have to put the next ball over.
- e) A hard driven attack may be slightly held by the defending team.
- f) You cannot hand set a serve. You need to reverse pass it, heel hit it (no fingertip action), etc.
- g) Team switch sides of the court every time the score sums to a multiple of seven (e.g. 4:3, 6:1). Games are rally score to 21, win by two. When to 15 pts, switch on multiples of five.
- h) The court is now 8x8 meters, starting after the Sydney Olympics, when rally was also added.
- i) If the line bounces, the shot was good. Remember to teach them that they get to straighten the lines when needed, lifting them up and snapping them down so they are straight, whenever play moves a line from being straight.

III. **Never Hit Where You Look:**

The Russian Scouting report on Jon Stanley in the 1968 Olympics was simple 1. Never hits where he looks. 2. Always hits where you aren't. 3. Unstoppable. Beach players need to develop this same ability

- a) Most indoor players take an angle of approach and hit where they are facing. While this strategy can be effective, it is very predicable. The beach game teaches you to be deceptive and to hit where you are not facing.
- b) There are many different ways to be a deceptive hitter. The two most common ways to hit where you are not facing are cross body and away from body/wrist away. (Demonstrate with a ball).
- c) Also, it is a great idea to practice hitting with your non-dominant hand. This is good practice in case a set is too far outside or if a player is in trouble during a rally and can use his/her non-dominant hand to help get the ball over the net. Do this daily, in warm up and play.

Warm Up: now it is time to get out on the court.

If you have enough courts and balls, have your players partner up. If there are not enough balls, form groups of three or four.

*** Picking Partners: currently, the two best men's and women's beach teams in the US have one taller and one shorter player. The taller player is responsible for blocking while the shorter one is responsible for back court defense. Say, "If you are tall and can block, find a shorter player who can play defense. If you are shorter and can play defense, find a taller player who can block." This is a good way to divide the teams so they will be competitive.

I. **Short - Court:**

a) Situate each pair such that they are across the net facing each other. The idea of the game is to bump and set to yourself and then roll shot the ball over the net to the partner; partner repeats. Remind them that they can incorporate the cobra and knuckle shots when sending the ball over the net. Have the pairs keep track of how many times the ball crosses over the net consecutively without hitting the ground. (For groups of three, the setter moves under the net to the side with the ball. For groups of four, it is simply a miniature version of two-on-two.)

b) After some time, stop the groups. Continue to have them play short court, but require the third shot over the net to be hit where they are not facing. Demonstrate cross body and away from body/wrist away shots. Also, play a timed set every warm up period where the players must use their non-dominant hand when attacking the ball over the net.

c) Please note that with so few coaches, we want the kids to return back to the joy of just PLAYING, not being continually coached. Let them teach themselves after you share these ideas on skill and strategy. Indeed, the best thing is for the coach to also PLAY, just being part of the game, and not coaching. Let the players figure out the calls, make honor calls, and take a break from being coached. Most kids get too much organized training, and not enough time to play and figure things out for themselves. We do not want to have players who, after an error, always turn to look at the team bench. We want them to problem solve on their own, and doubles, on grass or sand, helps this a ton.

Time for Some Skill Sets and Strategy:

Call all the groups back to the main court to huddle up for more teaching and demonstrations.

I. **Serve Receive:**

a) Each player is responsible for half of the court. Who has the middle? The player standing diagonal to the server.

b) Where do you stand? A good rule of thumb is to stand about 10 feet in from the endline. However, it is always easier to run forward to a serve than backward.

c) When a player is passing the ball, what does his/her partner do? Run up to towards the net to be a passing target and the set the hitter. This runs starts BEFORE the ball crosses the net, with the player not getting the serve thinking "It's not coming to me..." and moving into towards the net before his/her teammate passes. The pass should land within 10 feet of the net, but not too close to

the net so the wind cannot overpass the ball, nor tight passes do not impact you, and you control the ball.

d) Remember, the ball knows angles, and if need be, draw a set of “eyes” at the base of the thumbs on the players, so they can see how these eyes need to “look” at the target, and not the many options that will create an errant pass or forearm pass set.

e) Make POSITIVE errors first, passing “too far” towards your teammate than away from them, passing the ball up “too far” off the net, rather than too tight, and passing the ball “too high” rather than too low.

II. **Setting:**

a) Outdoor hands are allowed a bit more leeway than indoor hands. Therefore, a player can hold the ball slightly longer when setting outdoor.

b) However, many players, including many of the top professionals, choose to forearm pass set because the wind, sun, and sand make it difficult to produce a consistently clean set. Forearm pass setting is always a good option to hand setting. Teach them to get centered on the descending ball, lined up to pass the ball straight to the hitter, not side/angle pass it as the set.

c) What does the setter do after setting? He/ She should call out the open spot on the other side of the court and then covers the hitter.

d) Make POSITIVE errors. Set the ball “too far” off the net, rather than too tight. With wind blowing, setting lower is better, but make sure your teammate is ready for such lower sets, and if not, set higher so they do have time to get there, wind or not.

III. **Attacking:**

a) Hitters should take an approach relatively close to the setter, as if hitting a two ball. Outdoor sets are not high or long across the net, but more up and down.

b) Shooting: most hits are not straight down and hard driven, but rather strategically placed where the defense cannot dig or play the ball. This is called shooting, using a roll shot hitting the ball off the heel/palm as the wrist directs. Shots include: high and deep, short, line, cut, and a tool off the block. Remind the players to mix in shots as part of their offensive repertoire. (Demonstrate on the court the different shots). Remember to not hit when you are facing when shooting.

IV. **Blocking:**

a) The block is designed to take away part of the court when the opponent is attacking.

b) When to block: the blocker must decide when to stay at the net and block or when to drop off the net and play defense with his/her partner. Usually, if the attacker is far away off the net that a hard driven ball down into the court is unlikely, it is a good idea for the blocker to drop and play defense.

c. Teach the pull off move. One of the two players in each rally needs to stand near the net, and pull off each time the overpass and overset does not happen. This move is done point after point, and needs to be done so someone is there for the easy overpass errors, windy or not.

c) Hand Signs: the blocker holds his hands behind his/her back and shows the partner her blocking strategy. The blocker's left hand represents the left side of the net, and the blocker's right hand represents the right side of the net. One finger says, "I block line," and two fingers says, "I block angle." A fist says, "I am not blocking, but faking being here, then dropping off to play defense" Some teams have one more signal for "I am reading the pass and blocking this hitters favorite shot only if the pass is very good"

V. Serving

a) Float, Jump Serve: same as indoor. Remember to use the wind to your advantage. Teach them best side, due to wind. Into the wind is best side when the wind flows endline to endline. If there is an across the court wind, from one endline corner "into" the wind to the crosscourt corner impacts the right side player on one side, and the left side passer/hitter on the other side. As each team has a player you are going to serve more than the other, take the side that puts the crosscourt into the wind pressure on that player first.

b) Strategy: Who are you going to serve? Who is the better attacker, setter, or passer? Are you going to consistently serve one player short or deep?

c) Sky Ball: unlike indoor, we don't have a ceiling outdoor, so we can use the sky ball serve to our advantage, especially at high noon. The sky ball is effective because the sun gets into the opponent's eyes. The passer can become disoriented and shank the pass, and often will play a ball that is going to land out. Demonstrate on court with a ball; three styles, facing sideways, backward, and forward. Emphasize fast arm swing first, as we want very high serves, which with practice you can make accurate.

d) Jump Slide Serve – A jump serve that can be done in high wind, as the ball is set low to yourself as you slide laterally along the endline, then turn/torque towards the court to hit hard.

VI. Back Court Defense

a) Show the laydown circle of reach – lay a player down and make him the center of a circle like a compass.

b) Teach the laydown move to get the ball UP, both forward and to the side. Some players do this first without a ball, visualizing to all points of the compass.

c) Play high odds defense - most players hit cross court. Line up according to your block strategy, be still, and then react to the ball.

c) Faking - a good defensive player will make back court fakes to confuse the opposing team on his/her defensive strategy. For example, after an opponent sets the ball, a back court defender will fake right and then defend left (or where the block is not covering). However, when the ball is attacked, the back court defender is still and ready to react.

Playing Games:

At this point, it is best to let the players play for the rest of the time. Be sure to allow at least an hour for game time. Remember, "*The game teaches the game.*"

Back out on the court with their same partners: tell the players to practice the sky ball until the coach announces that it is time to start playing games. Each team will play for a certain number of minutes (three to five usually) and keep score (rally score) and then rotate to the left to the next court, leaving one team in one of the four corners to stay, while the other teams all rotate. If the game is tied at the "rotate courts!" call, they can serve one more ball to determine the winner. Have them remember how many wins they got and then see who has the most at the end of the clinic. The two teams with the highest win totals earn the chance to play a championship game to 11 for a prize, if time permits. Start by asking the group how many won one match, then two, then on up until the top winner is determined. A tie can be a fast tie break game to three points or so.

You can also use the many scoring variations shown in the IMPACT manual. Cooperative scoring is used to promote over the net ball control, seeing how many in a row three hit contacts the two sides working together can get. You can then go to transition scoring, where the two sides cooperate for a few net crossings, then go for a point once the magic number is reached. Most people know this idea from the rally for serve used in table tennis where the object is to spell P-I-N-G then go for the kill.

One fun one is called Shoots and Ladders. You start at 17 or so, and when a team gets to 24, if the opposing team gets that next point, the team with 24 slides down the shoot back to 17. You can also get a ladder point for a skill or shot you have been focusing on, getting 3 points or more for scoring with that tactic/skill. Wash scoring works fine, with a team sitting out throwing in the second ball. The players have to coach themselves in the beach game, there are no coaches there to call timeouts, fix strategies or solve the problems. So teach the players to teach themselves.

For more ideas, contact John Kessel, USA Volleyball Director of Membership Development, at john.kessel@usav.org, or go to www.usavolleyball.org