



USA Volleyball

Creating and Growing Great Volleyball Programs

By John Kessel, USA Volleyball Director of Membership Development & Disabled Programs

Starting a successful volleyball program only takes the passion and spirit of one person to begin. This article shares decade's worth of ideas that will help any and all programs in new ways to help the game thrive. It is important to keep in mind the number one principle in this – This is a team game, for the kids...

As you gain ideas to grow your program through the materials of USA Volleyball, make sure to connect to USAV, with each player, teacher, and parent. We will continue to create new ideas, programs and role models through our National Team programs, both Olympic and Paralympic, and want to be connected to every person in the volleyball family. We need your help to do this. The programs you assist should be part of your school or club program's newsletter/communication system as well. If you are a school team, offer special nights or free passes to your competitions for these non-traditional groups to connect to you. Connecting and follow up – the key to helping grow the sport. <http://www.usavolleyball.org/FreeNewsletter/> is where to sign up.

Costs and transportation for many of these ideas needs to be determined by what is best for your region. Getting the organization to bring the kids to your training is certainly the easiest. Bringing your players to some of the training options, and using the group's facilities to save money for your program, is another.

MVP CD DISTRIBUTION

The Million Volleyball Participant (MVP) CDs are being used by thousands of programs to help grow the game – they exist for JO Boys, JO Girls, Youth, Beach, Collegiate, Players and Disabled development. They contain animated drills, posters, videos, and dozens of articles, including this article. Regions have copied the CD and given them to every club, or every school in their state. Clubs have used them to bridge the gap that sometimes exists between their program and the scholastic and other member organizations. They are given out at short coaching and player clinics. Marty Miller out of the Iowa Region has his young players write a thank you letter to their PE Teacher for helping them, and as a gift, they give the teacher a MVP CD, a great example of empowering the kids rather than adults doing all the work. Regions mail them to anyone interested in starting new programs, as the recipients get decades worth of experience and ideas at virtually no charge. These kinds of outreaching all are part of servicing the programs and growing the game.

THE IDEAS

COACHING TO LEARN – That which you teach, you learn. You will be a better player if you coach...both these statements are something every coach and teacher agrees are true. Yet if you query nearly every Jr. Olympic Volleyball Club, or high school program, as to how much during their season do they let their athletes coach kids as part of practice, they answer is invariably “Never...” or “In our summer camps we do...”

One of the videos on the MVP CDs is of Lions Cup – the elementary school championships of Japan. In my time working with the Japanese schools, I was amazed to see practices after school being led first by the 4th-6th graders, as they coached the 1st-3rd graders for 30-45 minutes. Then the younger kids would leave and the school coach would work with the older kids for the second half of practice. Half their training time found these older elementary kids learning by teaching the sport to others.

What some clubs have started to greatly benefit from is the same concept; letting their older kids during their season and practice, routinely coach kids younger than themselves. A club of 4 teams would train younger kids, for one hour once or twice a week. The club might have their 18s teach within their club, helping those kids who are going to follow in the footsteps of their program. That is a great thing, but even more impactful is to reach out to youth outside your program. For example, make the first Tuesday of the month, for half a

practice, time for your 18s players to coach kids who come to their practice from other kids groups, who want to learn/experience good volleyball. The next Tuesday the 16s teach the same program group of young kids, and so on through the month before the cycle begins again. To the kids coming, every Tuesday is volleyball training, while to your program, each team only does this once or twice a month. Add in a Friday night 3-hour jamboree event once a month, or one on Saturday morning to make an all morning “practice” and you have a great youth program feeding the future of our sport, while helping your players be better as well.

KIDZ KOURT

Kidz Kourt is a USAV program to involve USA volleyball player’s younger brothers, sisters & friends in a fun and educational volleyball experience while at a tournament. All kids from 3 to 12 years of age that are interested can be involved. The goal is to introduce young kids to the skills of volleyball through recreational play, making them become aware to the lifetime possibilities of this exciting team sport. Kidz Kourt can take place in any area deemed suitable and safe. Examples include:

- a. An extra court;
- b. An unused meeting room in the convention center or gymnasium that is clear of tables and chairs;

All that is needed is a safe space, a net, and some version of a light volleyball, along with a supervising adult to instruct and guide their games. If you are playing at a college, see if the padded wrestling room is available!

LITTLE BROTHERS-LITTLE SISTERS-LITTLE FRIENDS

Using the “teach to learn” volleyball principle, your program is requested to start including once or twice a week training of around an hour, for the younger children of the families in your program, and their friends. The team sizes can vary between two, three or four – and teams need not be the same numbers of players to compete (i.e. three person teams can play vs. four person or two person teams). The courts of course should be smaller and the volleyballs lighter than regulation. At times, the older players should step in and play with teams, primarily in the setter position so they can improve errant passes and deliver better off the net sets to the younger kids.

FAMILY VOLLEYBALL OPTIONS

In the 1980s, Family Volleyball was promoted by USAV and sponsored by Sugar Free Jello. The game was 4 vs. 4 and teams could be comprised of mom and/or dad and their children and child’s friends, if there were not enough family members. As the sport has grown in the junior age groups, new ideas for families have evolved.

Father and Mother’s Day doubles competitions are growing in popularity both outdoor league division and tournaments. Vail’s King of the Mountain event is a good model – Friday afternoon, juniors get a clinic on playing the doubles game with the rule differences and playing fast fun five minute games against as many other junior teams as time permits – Saturday, the juniors play age group doubles, while parents watch or visit the area – Sunday (Father’s Day), Father Son and Father Daughter competition takes place in 18 & under and 15 & under divisions. Father’s with two or more kids are allowed to substitute the kids freely, even point by point, as long as the oldest child’s age division is competed in. Daughters can play in the son division, at the oldest child’s division, while sons can play in the Father Daughter division as long as they are two years younger than the age group.

Other programs have sprung up doing Parent Toddler volleyball, much like the Day Care model listed further down in this article, using balloons, balloon balls and superlight balls like the 70 gram First Touch by Molten. Family night volleyball takes on many forms – the chance to give the parents their own date nite, as the kids play in pools of three competition is one form. At the other end, having a full participation by all family members for example groupings of K-3rd grade, 4-6th grade, middle and even high school. They learn officiating, do fun games and team building exercises, and play on teams with one or both parents, with a no jumping rule for the parents often used. Sitting volleyball, the Paralympic sport, is also an option. Scoring can be regular rally scoring, or “best 2 out of 3” point scoring (where the official/scorekeeper tosses in 1-2 balls after the served

rally ends, so that serving does not dominate the game). Another program idea is to have the kids do clinics or even league play, while the parents are given sessions separately by the program staff – teaching the purpose of the drills being done, insights in the skills, and other programming and training ideas. Some programs have found parents being taught in these sessions to move into an assistant coaching role within the season. The ideas do not stop at high school, but other programs have family competitions at the collegiate level, and in club alumni games, as well as post college.

ADD BOYS

Since much of the sport at the youth level is directed at girls, adding boys, in either a coed training fashion, or as a team, is also strongly encouraged to enhance a program. Your program can do this by helping the middle and elementary schools to add girls AND boys teams for inter-school training and competition. Your players and parents can help guide, coach and train the school leagues.

Adding a single boys team to the mix of your team training and area competition also adds a lot. This is best first done at the 10-14 year old level, where the boys compete on the girls' height net. The boys can play same age group, or up one or more age groups, depending on what the rules of the competition are and what is best for your program. These little brothers and other boys need your program to get the chance to play this wonderful sport of a lifetime.

POOLS OF THREE COMPETITIONS

This format is an important middle ground of maximizing play per event, and can be used in several ways. Single match league events, as found in most commonly in kids sports, generally take less than an hour to compete, plus travel time to and from the event. Standard tournaments of pools of four take 10-or more hours to compete, with half the pool getting just three matches, about three hours of play, during the entire day. In pools of three tournaments, you can stage 3-4 groups in a single long day, with the competitors getting three matches in a 3-4 hour time span. In pools of three seeding rounds, a tournament, such as a Father/Daughter day long event, can break out the teams into finishing flights of 2-0, 1-1 and 0-2 pool record teams, and provide a much better finish to the event for all competing. In pools of three league play, you can stage a league niter, with as many matches played in a normal weekend tournament for most, on a weeknight, from 5:30-8:30, still getting kids and families time for homework after school, dinner and family time. Hold it on a Friday night, and you can even start a bit later, with less impact in family life. Indeed, when such city leagues are held, the parents can get a movie night or time to shop, while the kids are playing or refereeing non-stop.

You can also set aside once or twice a month longer practices from 8am to 12:30pm. The first three hours your teams run the three team pool tournament for younger kids – for 3,4, or 6 person teams, providing refereeing, direction and coaching. Then your team practices for 1.5- 2 hours. Still half the time of a tournament, and packing in both teaching to learn and learning to play in the same half day. This same three team pool concept can be used to run “short” tournaments for more local area teams, where the family only has to give up half their Saturday or Sunday, not their whole day as four and five team pools create. Of course, an event can be six teams on two courts, with a one match cross over happening after the pool is over, the losing team of the first round staying to referee the final match.

It is also the experience of some regions, like Heart of America, that some teams want to play hard and long – so they have events with pools of six on three courts- with no referees, just the old way of “honor calling” each contact and the play. The teams get in FIVE matches, in essentially a the same number of hours. This is a different form of a half day tournament.

ROUND ROBIN ALL COURT COMPETITION

Many programs are not aware of the easiest way to create a round robin competition. The same concept that is shown below, can be used to make entire gyms of courts become one big round robin event, where games are played in 1-10 minute time spans, depending on the numbers of courts and teams in the round.

For a four team round schedule

1v4 - 1 (highest seed if known) vs. 4 (lowest seed if known)

2v3 - 2 (second highest seed if known) vs. 3 (third ranked team)

Then KEEP team #1 in the same place – on the court or in the schedule and rotate the rest of the teams counter clockwise...so the next round is

1v3

4v2

and finally

1v2 (the highest seeds battling at the close of the round)

3v4

Now that that concept is seen, you can do the same on a single court, divided into four kids courts for eight teams by a double net longways down the middle of the regulation court. The courts are about 4 meters wide by 4-6 meters deep.

8	7	6	5
1	2	3	4

When you whistle to end the game and move to the next “match,” after 1-10 minutes of play (ties at the whistle play one more sudden death point), you would then get

7	6	5	4
1	8	2	3

And so on....

ADD EXTENDERS TO BADMINTON COURTS

If you use a gym which has badminton standards and courts available, raising the nets gives you GREAT kids volleyball courts for 7-14 year olds. You simply buy thick walled PVC pipe of the right diameter that can slide over the top of your badminton standard, and be stopped after sheathing the standard a certain distance. Now put the badminton net up to a good volleyball playing height for the age group you are working with, and play using the badminton court lines as your court lines. They are wonderful two, three and four person courts for kids and for older kid to warm up and train on. If your badminton standards are portable, you can move them to the endlines of the normal badminton courts, tie two badminton nets together, or use a rope, and run them down the center of the badminton court. Now you have THREE little kids volleyball courts. These littler kids may not even need the standards to be extended, as the badminton net height is perfect for letting them spike and even block and have fun on a lowered net. The endline is the new kids court sideline, and the 2-meter badminton lines are the other sidelines. The sidelines are thus the new endlines, or you can extend them with markers to be longer if desired.

CREATE WALL STANDARDS

The BEST and least expensive way to double the number of nets in your training area is to put up wall rope standards. What you do NOT want to do is put an eyebolt in at the “right height” but instead to put one eyebolt up high, at 10 feet or so, and another one on the floor baseboard. Then simply trucker’s knot a rope from the top to the bottom eyebolt, flush against the wall. Now you can tie your double long net/rope (as you are going down the middle of your regulation court, at a distance of at least 70 feet or more) to the rope on the wall. To change the net height, just slide the net rope attachment knot higher or longer up the wall rope. Slanting this rope from one wall to the other for varying ages (and height players) is also encouraged.

START JR. OLYMPIC BEACH PROGRAMMING

As a separate discipline, kids and adults can play for any USAV beach program you create, with generally no club restrictions. A USAV membership lasts through October 31st. RVAs have an outdoor/summer and outdoor league membership options, so new players can join USAV at a reduced charge, or you can use one event memberships in the \$5-10 range per event. Let them play, grass or sand, two vs. two – guide them but give them a break from coaching, and let the game teach the game, by playing and problem solving on their own. Self-referee, self score, self teach, and have tons of fun.

SHORT COURT

Short court, playing inside the 3 meter line to start – full width, doubles or triples and even as a warm up for four to six persons – with teammates rotating in, and the team rotating after every net crossing is yet another great warm up game and competition.

VARY THE NET HEIGHT

Changing the net height, or the net, can make for many great options, much like the extending of the Badminton nets noted above. In many of these options, you can *slant* the net/rope, with one side being higher than the other, to allow for kids of different heights to have different challenges.

The first option we suggest is to lower the net or rope, and play the game of sitting volleyball. String rope about a meter high down the center of a regulation volleyball court, with the regular net not up. If you have put up rope standards on the walls down the middle of the court for other training as noted above, you can just use those to anchor the nets/ropes to. If not, you can have two kids holding the rope sitting in chairs, and changing the chair sitter/holders every few minutes.

What you have are THREE almost regulation sized sitting courts – which are 6 meters wide by 5 meters deep on each side. The endline and 3 meter lines are now the sidelines for courts #1 and #3, while the 3 meter lines become the sidelines for middle court #2. The rope running down the center of a 9 meter wide regular court, means the endlines now are 4.5 meters, just half a meter off regulation, and fine for everyone playing, no need to extend it. Tie a sock or a let a flag football flag hang down over the court edge as the “antenna” and kids will play for a long time. It teaches you to play overhead much better, and the shortened court speeds up your reaction time. Play teams of 4, 5 or 6.

The next option is to get into a tennis court. Most the world plays outdoors on concrete if they are lucky, or on dirt. These fenced in courts are GREAT outdoor training places for youth and junior volleyball. String TWO nets or a long rope, linked together down the middle of the tennis court, anchoring to the fence, and leaving the tennis net up as a divider net for the two courts. Chalk on the court any sized court you want, just have a 2 meter buffer zone between courts, and from the sideline to the fence. Kids programs are easily run in such a training area, weather permitting.

You can also just have the kids play over the tennis net, letting them really pound and spike like Calvin and Hobbes. Give them one bounce. Playing over a table with a balloon ball even works. Letting the younger boys

hit on a women's height net is important when kids are young, as they want to have the fun of spiking down, so all lowered nets allow this and "capture" kids the way the dunk does in basketball.

Finally, put the net or rope up higher. For girls, putting it up to men's height means the players learn arm swings that hit the ball in over an about 8" high block, the height the majority of younger players get their blocking hands above the net. When I played with the Denver Comets pro team, my coach/teammate Jon Stanley (father of 2004 Olympian Clay Stanley), had us hit over a pair of linked badminton nets which were strung from antenna to antenna. This long net was about two feet high on the sideline, and dipped to 18 inches in the middle for those quick hitters. We all learned an arm swing that hit over a two foot high block and into the court, a VERY valuable way to swing for a spiker.

BUILD A SAND/GRASS COURT

Many parents call USA Volleyball asking for advice for the best way to advance the skills of their child. As there is no personal equipment to really buy to improve one's performance, the answer comes down to playing the game more. Thus the best equipment to buy is a court – portable or permanent. On sand or on grass. Then, let the kids play. No coaching just let the game teach the game. Let them have fun, create their own games and scoring, solve their own officiating problems. Arranging for a regular time and place for everyone to bring their own courts, so you create a multi-court gathering, will make things even more fun. If you have a large grass area, cross 2x4s into a tall "X" as a standard, widening the bottom legs to make it lower or narrowing the leg distance apart to raise it. Then run either just rope, or linked inexpensive nets from being staked into the ground, across the field for a distance (with more "X" standards to hold things up if needed), and then stake it back down. Invite kids from different schools and programs to come over and let them all play mixed, coed or single gender, and create their own games, leagues and scoring options.

One great example of this is seen in the Van Zweiten family of Florida. They built a lighted sand court in their back yard, and since then have sent three of their sons to National High Performance camps and FIVB international beach events. One son was selected as the best high school boys indoor player in the state, and that same year went on to win a silver medal in the FIVB World U19 Beach Championships. Their youngest won, at age 10, the U15 Regional beach title and participated in the National HP Camp. This chance to contact the ball each time it crossed the net, by playing doubles, and to read and learn to play over the net, greatly improved every area of their indoor play. Karch Kiraly, selected by the FIVB in 1995 as the greatest player in the world in the first 100 years of the sport, started by playing doubles volleyball with his father, against adults. He did not begin the indoor game of six person, with far fewer contacts for learning, until he was older. By then, he had had tens of thousands of over the net, gamelike reading, ball contacts, making a solid foundation to build his world class indoor talents upon.

HAVE AN AREA OR STATEWIDE VOLLEYBLOOM DAY

Get with the USAV RVA and work to set aside a day in the fall or spring, when every member of your program goes out on the same day to teach the game to a new group, no matter how small or large. Connect with any group of people, kids or adults Teach balloon ball in a Senior Center or to a Day Care – Help the PE teachers teach the game better with your new ideas from the CDs and this article. Leave copies of a MVP CD with each group, since you can copy the CD inexpensively and freely. Be their local expert or mentor. If every USAV member connected with just 5 other kids or adults, we would hit the Million Participant mark!

ADOPT A STARLINGS USA PROGRAM

There are some 40 Starlings USA programs, for economically disadvantaged area youth, around the USA. This group is a Member Organization of USA Volleyball, like the Girl Scouts, and other youth groups, but volleyball is the way life's lessons are taught. Connect with one in your area, or consider helping start a new program. USAV/RVA Grant monies and/or reduced fees are available to help with this growth area. Go to www.starlings.org for more information.

START AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL OR MIDDLE SCHOOL STATE/CITY CHAMPIONSHIPS

If you built it, they will come, is the concept from the movie Field of Dreams. The same is happening in states and larger cities around the America, as USA Volleyball leaders create season ending events for school teams. The key ways for this to be a big success is to first find an available multi-court playing site, as having everyone playing under one roof is crucial. The event needs to be at the end of the traditional school season volleyball period for your state or city – be it fall, winter, or spring. If volleyball is not offered as a school program, contact the PE teachers and ask them to field and train a coed or single gender group for a few weeks to then compete in your Championships against the other schools.

STATE GAMES

The National State Games are held every other year, while most states have annual state game competition in volleyball. You can schedule playing in these events for your program, as they provide a great way to meet new volleyball players and programs from all over your state. If you live in a state, which does not have volleyball in the State Games, please consider contacting your State Games office and volunteer your program's assistance to add volleyball, including USAV one event membership, to the sport offerings. Options of course include offering 6 person indoor, four person on grass, doubles on sand, coed and single gender, youth and adult. Go to www.stategames.org for more information on this programming opportunity.

BJERRING/COMPETITIVE CAULDRON TOURNAMENTS

This format takes your whole team or group, and has them change partners each week to play doubles with everyone else, who also has a new partner for that round. Playing short games to 10 points or just 5 minutes, a team of 12, playing doubles has six teams, taking five rounds. Play can be done on two narrow courts per net (with a 2 meter buffer between the two courts), that go full length, with two teams out “refereeing” each game. If you can run two nets down the middle of a regulation court as noted in this article and done for youth games, you can put up four courts and have all playing each round. After that partnership round is over, track the number of wins and losses in each of the five rounds by each individual. Over time – as it will take 11 different mini-tourneys to get to play with all 11 teammates, you will see who plays the best, no matter who their partner is. Some programs pick their top six starters based on this information, other coaches come to learn that certain players need to be on the court due to their “winning” capabilities, even if their technique is not as perfect as a coach might desire. A separate Competitive Cauldron spreadsheet template is available from USA Volleyball for one, two and three person tournament formatting.

FOUR AND THREE PERSON LEAGUES

Every program primarily focuses on the 6-person game to maximize their court space and player numbers they feel. However, there is a way to get even more players on the same court space, while doubling the amount of learning. Make the team sizes no more than four a team, with only one to two subs. If a team is short a player, have them lose the point when that “ghost” player’s turn for service happens, but don’t make the team forfeit. Put up the down the middle of the court double nets, use the 3 meter and endlines as the court sidelines, and, space permitting, extend the regular sideline to a deeper endline with court tape, corner dot markers or just an agreed to other sport boundary line.

DAY CARE PROGRAMMING

Two options here – one is to provide the youth CD information, and help Day Care centers create small “volleyball courts” in their facilities, using the ideas of rope courts, badminton courts and the like for courts, and balloons, beach balls, balloon balls, playground balls, and light volleyballs to play with. Arrange a day to send each player out with a parent to each day care you find in the yellow pages, and have them teach the day care provider and kids the ideas for making youth volleyball fun.

The second idea is to invite the Day Cares to your practices, if you hold early practices right after school, much like the other Member Org connections. Create a Day Care City Jamboree, where your program and facility hosts all of them on a day the older kids are not in school, such as a teacher work day. If that does not fit, in the summer, have a 3-5 day Day Care Summer camp sessions, as part of either a camp you run in June or July, or for high school programs, as a week in your pre-season. Run it either from 9-12 or 1-4pm (mornings are better for littler kids due to afternoon heat).

USAV LEAGUE/YOUTH MEMBERSHIPS

One little used insurance option for many of these “league” programs is the USAV League insurance. The insurance can be used for events taking up no more than four hours in one day, and lasting no more than 16 total hours of competition. The intent is to get teams/programs connected to USA Volleyball, and covered by insurance, who only play once or twice a week for an hour. Costs are lower for teams of two, three and four person, over the six-person package. USAV decals can be given to every participant for less than 10 cents a person. The per person cost is determined by the USAV Region, but an average per person cost is often less than \$5 for the entire league. The many Teach to Learn programs covered here, with young kids coming to learn, can fit perfectly into this league membership, so every player, and your program is covered by insurance at a very reduced cost per child. An eight-week “Kidz Kourt” League could happen with one hour on Tuesday training, and one hour on Thursday games. It can also happen with 4-5 weeks of one hour training once a week, followed by a three hour League tournament, then 4-5 more weeks of once a week one hour training and a “season ending” three hour league Finals.

More recently, USA Volleyball has created a annual youth membership option to RVAs for players 11 & under, which still gives the Volleyball USA magazine subscription and full annual insurance, for \$15 or less. This membership does not count towards the full membership 12 and under bid numbers, and thus is not for players/teams who wish to play in the national championships. It is for local, regional and intra-regional competition

USAV MEMBER ORGANIZATION PARTNERING

Cub Scouts, Brownies, Girl Scouts, Boys and Girls Clubs, YMCAs, Park and Rec, and many other non-USAV connected youth activities groups, are seeking your program’s expertise – your players to be coaches, your facilities or theirs to be a place to teach their kids the lessons of volleyball, mentally and physically. Here again, our job is to make it best for the kids, make it fun, and to teach them to love the game and all its wonderful uniquenesses. Help then create what they need to make the sport fun in their facility. There are custom USAV MVP CDs available from the USAV Membership Development department for several of these USAV Member Organizations.

PARENT/CHILD TEAMS COMPETITION

Your program should create a tradition of hosting competition in some format or another, a kids and parents competition. For a club, this could take place any weekend that makes sense within your overall planning. For a Region or large city, this can be most fun on the weekends of Mother’s Day and Father’s Day. Weather permitting; this can be done on grass or sand courts, or for some regions, indoors for Mother’s Day. Doubles is most common but triples – where a team is a family group with substitutions allowed for other family members is an option. Pools of three, flighting out to 2-0, 1-1 and 0-2 groups for the next round of the event. As many families have more than one child playing volleyball, your regulations for the doubles tournament option should allow the team to substitute one child for another. Just make sure the team plays in the higher age group bracket, or a brother and sister combination plays in the Parent/Son division.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION TEACHING

How PE teachers instruct, provides another model which volleyball programs should be implementing more at the grassroots level – that is, one teacher for 40 kids. While the normal volleyball program ratio of coach to athlete is about 1:10, consider implementing volleyball programs where the kids are taught more by the game, and only one to two adults for supervision and direction are required. Set up 10 grass courts, or eight tennis court volleyball courts, and let the kids teach their friends, let them learn through play. Create different game option stations, where scoring and the rules vary on each small court, and rotate the kids thru the stations. Make gamelike rope pass/set/hit stations in the corners of the gym to get the kids contacting the ball more and thus learning faster.

Certainly one of the best ways to help a pipeline is to have your program spend time helping the elementary and middle school teachers of your area, make volleyball the most fun segment of all the sports they introduce and teach. That is why USAV has the MVP CDs you can copy and give out all you wish, at no charge for any of the materials on the disc. Helping these teachers of sport implement many of the ideas in this article and the others on the CDs is also encouraged.

USYVL

For the 7-14 year old level, the best program running in the USA is the United States Youth Volleyball League. Contact them to start a program at www.usyvl.org enough said, for they are the best.

THIRTY KIDS AND TWO VOLLEYBALLS

These are suggestions to create as fun and valuable a training situation for programs that only have one to two volleyballs, one “net” and one court, a common situation for many teachers in the world. . The core changes you should consider begin with doing stations. You can get 24 kids active, by playing four groups of six, playing over the regulation net with one group, while playing triples over a rope with another group. Taking two 2x4s and making them into an “X” and staking the rope into the ground, you can make lots more “nets” on the flat areas. Continue to teach the game to the other eight or more kids who do not have a ball, by creating conditioning stations, invisible ball station, or beach or soccer ball stations.

REWARDS

At appropriate times, deserving kids could be rewarded based upon Hustle (a spray painted gold spark plug), improvement (A gold butterfly, showing the change and growth), character and skills (again you can spray paint. The “best” teammate might be given a collegiate area or even USA National team replica jersey to wear for the next practice or series of practices. Give glow in the dark stars or other figures to the kids for shining so brightly on the court or accomplishing a new skill. They will turn off the lights in their room every night, and remember when you caught them doing things right and rewarded them. Have officials, coaches, administrator’s give away the popular plastic bracelets with program logo/web site as thanks for doing a great job in tournaments. Create topical awards, based on the news and movies of the month, such as Jody Webber’s kids out of Oklahoma creating the seagull award- taken from the seagulls in the Finding Nemo Movie who always said “Mine, Mine, Mine”- they used that movie reference to teach the kids to call the ball. If you can afford it, giving top kids in these areas their own volleyball is a huge push for your future.

SCORE FLIPPERS & SELF REFEREE

While National events and competition deserve two quality referees and official scorekeeping, it triples your manpower needs and increases costs. For most of the ideas presented here, having a player keep score by just flipping the scoreboard is plenty. You can also get away without even having a scoreboard, but instead having each server call out the current score, before serving. Having one referee is also enough, and many of these ideas will run great with the players self calling. Indeed, given a choice between having a referee or a score flipper, most kids would rather self referee, calling their own as part of learning and interacting, and not having to worry as much about calling out the score, as the flipper does that. Keep the costs down, and keep the kids thinking by getting the playing teams to do all the officiating, it is good at the grassroots level.

NIGHT COMPETITION

Dusk to Dawn tournaments, normally coed for two to four person teams are popular in some of the faster growing regions like Intermountain. They are played on lighted softball fields, creating nets with crossed 2x 4s of 6 foot length as standards, or of course using the excellent portable court systems for sale.

Another very fun idea for all ages, which a program can do is to put the materials together for “Glow in the Dark” competition. The 24 inch black light fluorescent tubes in holders are about \$25 each on ebay from party/disk jockey stores. You will need at least four of them, mounted into vertical stands if you want be able to move them around to various venues.

The Ohio Valley Region, where they have the largest Jr. Olympic Girls numbers, and also boys high school volleyball, wisely noted that “Football is for Friday nights in the fall; basketball is for Friday nights in the winter, we need to make volleyball for Friday nights in the spring.” Take these ideas herein, and create a tradition of Friday nights being volleyball in your area, from 5-10pm. If you are doing junior events like 6 teams on three courts, or three team pools, the parents will also be able to have something special – a night out as a couple without having to get a baby sitter for their child!

VOLLEYMALL COMPETITION

Go to where the kids are if your club or RVA has Sport Courts. Arrange time to do clinics and competition, and net off an area in the main large courtyard area of your local mall. Joe Garcia of USA Wallyball has been working on getting a portable plexiglass court for the same use in malls. Put up the portable mesh netting and a court with water barrel weighting, and you can get kids to play in front of peers, parents and grandparents. You should look into doing this also based around “wellness programming” and fitness for kids either during or after school, an area the Intermountain Region of USAV is leading the way in.

SUMMER CAMPS

This idea is the most common one performed by colleges, high schools and club programs, with players coaching. Ideas in running a great summer camp, culled from some 400 camps run all over the world and all 50 states in the USA, are found in the USAV Summer Camp information packet, email mvp@usav.org for more.

Thanks for considering and implementing these ideas – and remember, connect everyone to USA Volleyball, as we want to grow the sport for one and all.