

# COACHING Volleyball

Club Season 2020

A Publication of the American Volleyball Coaches Association

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## Club of Choice

Standing out in a crowd

p. 16

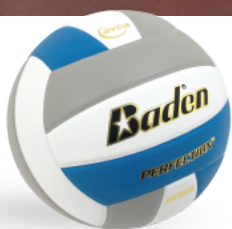
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Another year is in the books for the AVCA – and naturally, we wanted you to get a look at how we're putting our myriad resources to work. We highlight some of the new initiatives from last year and lay out a roadmap for continuing to improve engagement, education and professional development over the coming months. Also, we take a moment to introduce the AVCA Board of Directors and the AVCA staff – feel free to get in touch with us!

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From the outside looking in, the modern club volleyball scene can seem daunting to players and parents alike. With so many options, what steps are you taking to help your club stand out from the pack? The AVCA brought in a number of successful club coaches and operators to pick their brains about how they go about keeping their coaches happy, the importance of placing player development at the forefront of operations, the types of players and families that they want to bring in, and much more. Take a peek behind the curtain with us.

### 22 Be a Better Partner

Maximizing your offensive potential in the beach game can open up a variety of ways to beat your opponent. In this piece, Angela Rock explains her perspective on the art of hand setting, and how introducing the technique to your repertoire can provide the spark you might be looking for to take your attack to the next level. Developing a consistently reliable tool may make the difference between being good and great.



## On the Cover

Clubs come in all shapes and sizes. As a coach, what should you be paying attention to when it comes to furthering your own professional development? What sort of role do you want to play when it comes to offering on-court instruction? A handful of club experts sound off on a variety of topics in this feature piece.

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## PRESIDENT'S LETTER

# From the Desk of ...

Sharon Clark, Head Coach – Butler University

AS WE MOVE into the '20s and begin a new chapter, I can't help but look back over all that was accomplished in the last decade.

Of course, there is the founding of First Point Volleyball to grow the men's/boys' game. We know that for every one boy playing volleyball, there are eight girls playing our sport. This initiative will help close the gender gap. As we continue to promote inclusiveness, we were fortunate to witness a historic moment in seeing the Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (SIAC) be the first Historically Black College and University (HBCU) Conference add six men's programs all at one time. That's amazing.

We have so many coaches to thank for the explosive growth of women's beach volleyball. The NCAA's 90th championship had its debut in the spring of 2016. In April of 2019 the NAIA voted to add Beach Volleyball as an emerging sport. At the two-year college level, California Community Colleges now have 36 women's beach programs and NJCAA programs began full competition in 2019.

Our youth participation numbers continue to grow, with almost 453,000 girls currently playing in high school. The simple fact that there are over 50,000 girls playing high school volleyball in the state of Texas alone, second only to high school football in Texas (165,641) and third in California behind football (91,305) and boys' soccer (54,996), tells us that we did something right!

To say that the sport of volleyball is like a rocket that is "lit" would be a huge understatement! We are soaring so high that you might wonder where we can go from here. The future of the American Volleyball Coaches Association and the sport of volleyball is very bright. This Summer, we will showcase our elite players and coaches at the Games of the XXXII Olympiad in Tokyo, Japan.

Being the typical coach, I've set my goals on how I can help the coaches in



BUTLER VOLLEYBALL

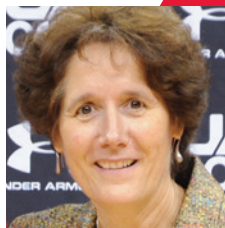
our association become more aware of their own health and mental well-being. Coaching can be a stressful and unrelenting grind. It's my hope that some of the new NCAA recruiting legislation will facilitate more effective work-life balance. While we continue to look for ways to keep our sport healthy and safe for the young athletes who play for us, we are best with our players when we feel our best.

It's time for volleyball in the U.S. at all levels to have more fan appeal to the general public. We are behind other sports in fan appeal and will need to make some adjustments to some traditions of our sport as well as find new ways to engage the non-volleyball community. In comments to the

AVCA Board of Directors in December, FIVB Secretary General Fernando Lima said that our sport has "*missed the journey of communication with fans.*" We have 10 years to move the needle and let our great coaches and athletes be the rock stars the public wants to see.

Finally, I'm open to hearing your thoughts on how to continue to not only climb, but soar in the new decade. As we tell our players, if we focus on the process the outcomes will take care of themselves.





## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S LETTER

# Our Game: Recovery

Kathy DeBoer

IT WAS AN AUGUST afternoon in 2002 when I walked out of Memorial Coliseum at the University of Kentucky for the last time. I had just been fired by the new athletics director. I was the senior associate for external affairs, meaning that I was in charge of donors, tickets and money – the currency of the department. I fancied myself on the fast track to an AD's job, having spent 10 years in the trenches of sport management, fundraising and working with power coaches. I had interviewed for the Kansas job a year earlier, and, while I didn't get it, my debut was good enough that I was certainly going to get another shot. That day, at almost 50, I had no job, no car, no phone, way too many blue clothes, and a worthless Rolodex of influential people who needed to turn their loyalty to the new guy to keep their perks.

I start with this story because when I talk to coaches about losing their jobs, the emotions of that day come back to me. I hear my words in your voices: "this is so unfair," "I didn't get a chance," "the situation wasn't my fault," "I'll never recover," "this has been my life, what else can I do?"

As coaches we practice helping our players deal with bad things – an injury,

a substitute's role, ineligibility, the lure of transferring. My observation is we are not nearly as competent in managing the bad things that happen to us.

Certainly, the days right after we lose our jobs are fraught – our loved ones and close friends rush to our defense. With only the best of intentions, they invite us into victimhood: "you're one of the only women ...," "guys never get a break in women's sports ...," "minorities are always the first to go ...". And, the beguiling counter-punch: "You need to sue them for... *you name it ... breach of contract, gender, race, sexual preference, age discrimination ...*". In the name of love, they rage, stealing the emotion that belongs to us and, at times, turning us from the aggrieved to the consoler.

This essay is not a defense of unfair firings, nor an indictment of those who go to the courts to seek redress for wrongs, or a cheap shot at family and friends attempts to make us feel better. Discrimination is real and our profession is better because of the battles fought to end it.

My point is that a bad break, an unfair decision, an unexpected catastrophe happens to most of us during our career, maybe

more than once. The hard truth is that progress to the next thing cannot happen until we stop obsessing about the last thing.

The voices of colleagues can help us: After losing his job at Ohio State Geoff Carlston focused on gratitude. "I'm oddly good, strange but excited for the next adventure," he said, "I get to give my boys a bath and put them to bed; I feel lucky to be doing this."

He also recounted unexpected exchanges: "Current and former players reached out to me, we met up for coffee, recounted stories and told each other how much we appreciated one another; it was emotional. Yet how cool to be able to show them that you can be sad, nervous, excited and grateful at the same time, to be vulnerable and teach them how to navigate this challenging path."

Other coaches who seemed at peace spoke about having done their best, about feeling satisfaction with leaving the program better than they found it, and about accepting that uncontrollable factors are inherent in our profession.

Former Kentucky athletics director C.M. Newton, the person who gave me my biggest break, also gave me the best advice for handling my firing: "*What you say right after you lose your job is the biggest determining factor of your next job. Regardless of why you were let go, you're not getting the old one back, and those with the ability to help you either line up behind you or run away.*"

The volleyball job-o-sphere is like the weather: sometimes calm, sometimes turbulent, frequently unpredictable. Our role as people in community is to help each other cope, connect, re-enter and re-emerge. We preach recovery to our players every day; let's get better at it with each other.







## IN MEMORIAM CODY HEIN

FEBRUARY 11, 1972 – JANUARY 24, 2020

A PASSIONATE ADVOCATE for the sport of women's volleyball throughout his life and Chico State's head coach for the past 17 years, Cody Hein passed away Friday, January 24. He was 47.

"Cody was a loved and respected friend to all of his colleagues in the athletic department and a wonderful coach and mentor to his student-athletes. We are all feeling a tremendous sense of loss today," said University Director of Athletics Anita Barker. "We are holding his family in our hearts, along with his current and former student-athletes and assistant coaches."

Born February 11, 1972, Hein grew up in California's Central Valley and was diagnosed shortly after birth with a serious heart condition that required three major surgeries – including replacing a portion of his heart with a prosthesis – by the age of 14.

Because doctors restricted him from playing contact sports, Hein took up volleyball in the seventh grade. He never turned back, garnering noteworthy awards, accolades and admiration during his 33-year volleyball career. One of Hein's favorite mantras was, "Tough times don't last. Tough people do." The persistence he encouraged in his Chico State volleyball players paid off on the court.

Taking over Chico State's volleyball program in 2003, he led the team to more wins than any coach in Chico State volleyball history. Hein was one of the most successful and respected coaches in the California Collegiate Athletic Association (CCAA), leading the Wildcats to six postseason berths, four National Collegiate Athletic Association Championship Tournament appearances, 49 postseason conference awards, 29 All-West Region selections and 13 All-America honors.

Hein also cared deeply about creating bonds within the team so they would work together for a common goal. The support between alumni and current players on and off the court, and now after his death, Wright said, is a confirmation of the "family" he created.

"There is so much to be said about Cody Hein: about his character, his passion for coaching, and his absolute dedication to his family. What I can say is that I have him to thank for who I am today," said senior Bekah Boyle, who has been on his teams for the last four seasons. "Cody not only taught all of us valuable lessons, but he lived the lessons he preached. Coaches can talk about being gritty and struggling to overcome adversity, but Cody lived that. He was the toughest man I've had the chance to know, and his legacy will live on."

Hein underwent his last heart surgery in October 2018 and due to post-surgery complications spent six months at Stanford Medical Center in the Bay Area before returning home to Chico in March 2019. Due to Hein's ongoing health challenges, which included regular dialysis treatments, Chico State hired Tommy Gott as acting head coach in January 2019. A Chico native, Gott had been an assistant on Hein's staff from 2009 to 2015 and was Hein's close friend.

Prior to his arrival at Chico State, Hein served as head volleyball coach at Florida Institute of Technology. His teams earned a 46-44 record over three seasons, broke the university's record for total wins in a season and ranked in the South Region's top 10.

Hein is survived by his wife, Dana, and their three sons, Austin, Jackson and Davis.



## Outlet Communication Drill

**Focus:** Communication, outlet skills, ball control

**Goal:** Side A and Side B strategize according to which zones are allowed to take second contact.

**Set-up:** Can be designed for 9+ players, drill prefers 12+. Divide each side evenly with six on each side. If there are extra players, they wave into zone 1 each time the ball crosses the net.

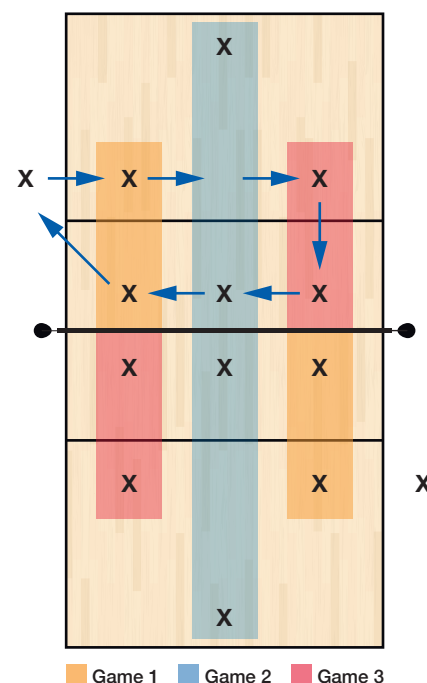
### Directions

The drill begins with a free ball to either side. This may be alternated or given to the winning side. Each rally is a point, and each game is played to 15. There are three games to be played. In game 1, only the players in zone 1 and 2 are allowed to take second contact. In game 2, only the players in zone 3 and 6 are allowed to take second contact. Lastly, in game 3, only the players in zone 4 and 5 are allowed to take second contact.

Every time the ball crosses the net, the players must rotate clockwise and play every position/zone. This changes which athletes can play the second contact during the rally to enforce communication. If a side does not have a player from the respected zones take the second contact, the rally ends and a point is rewarded to the other side. If a ball is overpassed, that side still rotates and play continues. If a third contact is blocked and covered, the side who attacked the ball does not rotate until the ball completely crosses the net.

### Variations

This is usually played as a warm-up drill. Players taking third contact may not swing. Depending on level or your focus, third contacts may be two-hand pushes or tips and roll shots. For younger teams, cooperative two-hand pushes may be very beneficial to increase communication and ball control. If your team is warmed up, and the level of play allows, then players may take true swings.



If playing with less than 12, have only one side be forced to take second contact from specific zones and switch players on each side between each game.

## 6-on-6 Radical

**Number of Players:** 12

**Number of Balls:** Steady supply

### Objective

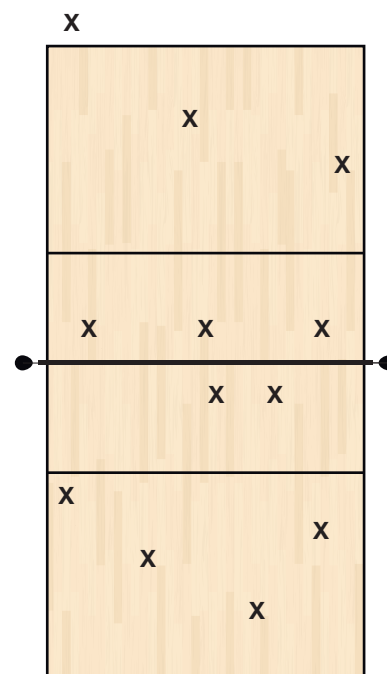
To focus on specific team tasks and through in achieving goal.

### Directions

1. With two full teams on each side, you rotate every play, playing the normal game with some adjustments.
2. For a serve and stuff block, you get four points.
3. For a serve and dig, transition for kill, you receive two points. If you serve and the other team sides out, you lose a point. If you serve and the other team makes an error, you receive one point.

### Variation

Change the scoring to focus on a skill you want your team to work on.





# Combo: Right Side vs. Left Side

**Number of Players:** 5

**Number of Balls:** Steady supply

## Objective

To practice line hitting and digging.



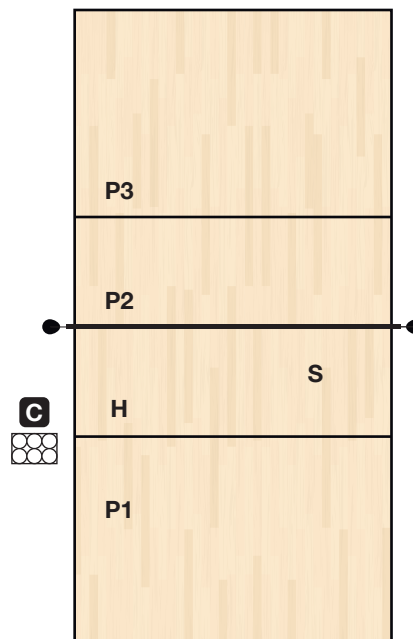
THE DAILY COLLEGE

## Directions

1. Coach (C) alternates giving free balls to each side.
2. Player (P1) passes ball to setter (S).
3. Setter sets hitter (H).
4. Hitter hits.
5. The other team's front-row player (P2) blocks.
6. In order to score a point, a team must dig a ball and then put the ball away hitting line.
7. Errors count as nothing; kills off the free ball count as nothing.
8. After the front-row player hits, the back-row player passing the ball switches with him/her.

## Variations

Have the setter set both sides or make the right their own setting.



# 20-Point Passing

**Number of Players:** Unlimited

**Number of Balls:** Steady supply

## Objective

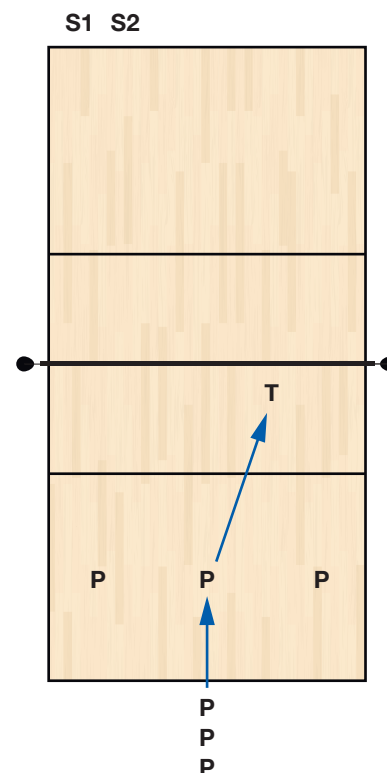
To reduce/eliminate serves that drop between passers by improving passers' communication and to duplicate pressure of game serve reception.



BYU ATHLETICS

## Directions

1. One or two servers (S) or coach against a passing team in timed competition (10 minutes or coach chooses). Passers win if they reach 20 points within time limit; servers win if they prevent passers from reaching 20.
2. Passers are the scoring team. They score one point for a pass to target or a service error. If serve contacts the floor passer, passers go back to zero. If passers do not "follow a serve out," score also returns to zero.
3. Target (T) shags ball, puts in cart and gets in passing line. Passer becomes target. First player in passing line replaces passer.
4. Fast-paced (as soon as pass reaches target, serve next ball). If servers do not serve immediately, passing team gets a point.



# Defense: Getting Out of Our Own Way

**Why the instructions “GET LOW” and “GET STOPPED” are KILLING our ability to rally in the U.S.**

By Jim Miret, Front Range Volleyball

EARLY ON in my coaching career I was exposed to the idea that players must get low and be stopped on defense to be great defenders. Since then, I often hear from my players who come back from high school seasons and college camps that these instructions are what they have learned are important elements to good defense. Obviously, no coach wants players moving around the court aimlessly or with no intent as they play defense. However, to train a player to get stopped is to work against the very athletic nature of the skill of defense. Additionally, instructing a player to get their body into a low position works against the body mechanics that will allow them to move to the ball quickly or to change directions quickly.

The intent of this article is to apply a critical eye to defensive training and the specific movement patterns of elite defenders. It is only by examining the highest levels of our sport (international and professional

volleyball teams) that we can actually learn what the high-level defensive skills are, and can determine the skill progressions that we should be working on with all of our athletes. What similarities do we see among the top women’s players in the world as they try to respond and react to the fastest offenses and attackers in the world?

As offenses have gotten faster, the adjustment time for defensive players in volleyball has consequently gotten shorter. When we examine defenders in slow motion we see several consistent themes. Most players are actually in what would be considered a high athletic position prior to contact, which is optimal for quick movement around the court. Their hips are loaded with their torso upright, they are moving quickly on the balls of their feet, and they are timing split-steps with the contact of the attacker’s swing on the ball. Close to the contact of the attacker we can see that the feet of these

defenders are slightly off the ground during their split-step, and their torso is in a higher athletic position as they prepare to move. Players in these high postures at contact will then transition into a lower body posture to play the ball, particularly if the ball is hard-driven to the floor.

Split-steps and quick foot movements are not unique to volleyball – we observe the same techniques in many other sports; here are a few examples. Baseball infielders and outfielders, while the pitch is being delivered, usually walk into some kind of a split-step movement. The split-step creates movement prior to the hitter making contact with the ball and places their feet in the air as or slightly after the ball is being contacted by the bat. In the sport of tennis, players in serve receive will often be in a constant state of motion rocking back and forth before the serve or running in place and timing a split-step around the time the server will contact the ball. These athletes are engaging the stretch-shortening cycle of their muscles (a topic covered in a previous article) to enable them to move quickly in response to the ball coming off the bat or the racket. We can observe very similar actions and movements when we critically study top-level defensive players in volleyball.

Understanding why this movement pattern is efficient (and therefore utilized by many of the top players in the world) is an essential part of the puzzle. An athlete’s hips starting in a loaded position helps that player to move quickly and effectively to adjust to the attack. Quick foot movements into a split-step help load the muscles and increases their responsiveness to move to a hard-driven spike. A player’s torso in an upright position allows that player great vision and movement freedom. When coaches instruct their players to get stopped or to get low on defense when they should be adjusting to an



NOAA



attacker's approach and the formation of the block, we put that player in a figurative box – not only are we making it harder for them to play the ball but we are also taking away their freedom to be athletic.

Think about when you are in a deep squat – are you able to move quickly or change directions easily? The lower a player's hips or shoulders are at spike contact makes it much more difficult for them to move from the one spot that they were occupying to respond to the ball. Volleyball is without doubt a quick and responsive sport. Players must make instantaneous decisions based on a complex set of visual cues. I would be remiss if I didn't mention the visual reading that must happen when playing good defense. For youth as well as many college players, decoding the visual noise that happens as a set goes out to a hitter and a block forms in front of the hitter while other defenders are sharing defensive responsibilities is a very complex visual field to decipher. Teaching players what the relevant cues are is another important factor in teaching them how to become good defenders. Therefore, proper movement mechanics are crucial to helping players execute high-level defensive skills and react to the visual cues that they are reading.

What about ankle flexion? I often hear coaches mention ankle flexion as a method for players to get low on defense in volleyball. In my examination of international video this is a move that I see used very seldom. Obviously, there is some ankle flexion as players get lower, but I don't see that as the main element to the move to get lower. The move I see being utilized most often is from the high-body-posture players who will move their hips down to the ball and their shins will be more vertical to the ground. There is an exception when a player goes down to one knee; this is when we can see ankle flexion in the other leg. However, most commonly we see players moving from the very high body posture into a lower hip position to receive low spikes.

In video examples (see the digital issue) you should see some consistent themes. Players will be in some kind of quick foot

movement, adjusting their position on the court almost entirely during the time the ball is in flight from the setter to the attacker. The closer the ball gets to the attacker, the more the player will try to time their split-step to the time the attacker is contacting the ball. In some instances, you will see players executing several split-steps in a row as the attacker gets ready to contact the ball. These athletes are in constant motion, and their feet are never really stopped during the play. They start the play by moving in a high athletic or hip-loaded position with an upright torso, and will drop their hips to play a low ball instead of bending over at the waist.

### **When coaches instruct their players to get stopped or to get low on defense when they should be adjusting to an attacker's approach and the formation of the block, we put that player in a figurative box ...**

While many of these players are starting in the same position (hips loaded and torso upright), there are many defensive techniques that can be used to play the ball, depending on the read a player makes on the ball. Again, this is a prime example of the athletic freedom players are able to express when they start in a high athletic position as opposed to a low and stopped position. Defenders will see and be asked to play a wide array of attacks in a match, so it is essential that they have different techniques to play different balls. We have identified a series of movement patterns that we think are important to playing good defense:

1. The first one is similar to a move we identified with passing, where players use their entire body to help dig the ball up into the air.

2. In the second movement pattern, players are going to their knees (or using a knee-drive) to get their hips under the ball to dig the ball up.
3. The third move we will call a side layout dig. Here the players try to keep their torso facing the center of the corners as they play a ball that is outside their body and low. An interesting technique to note here is that often-times instead of lunging to the side to play a ball, players will actually take their foot underneath their hip to help propel their body towards the ball.
4. The fourth move we call sprawl moves. Players are running to play a tip or a block deflection that is falling in front of them and they end up sprawling trying to either execute a pancake or propelling the ball up with some kind of arm swing.
5. In the fifth move, we see players using their platforms to play balls that are outside their bodies. Just as we wrote about in passing, we believe it is important to expose players to a variety of techniques and let them choose the correct technique for the situation they find themselves in.
6. Lastly are the pursuit plays. In this instance players must change direction mid-movement because of a block deflection, and must play the ball with one arm or they actually turn to run the ball down.

I don't just believe that defenders playing defense in a hip-loaded and torso-upright position is efficient, I can see that it is an effective and athletic movement pattern from the mentioned videos. With 2020 being an Olympic year, we will all have many opportunities to observe the very best volleyball players executing their skills at the highest levels. I challenge you to take a look at the different defenses and defenders from teams around the world, to see these defensive techniques in action. But most importantly, we must train our players in a way that allows them to express their athleticism. Our players are athletes, so let's give them the tools to be athletic!

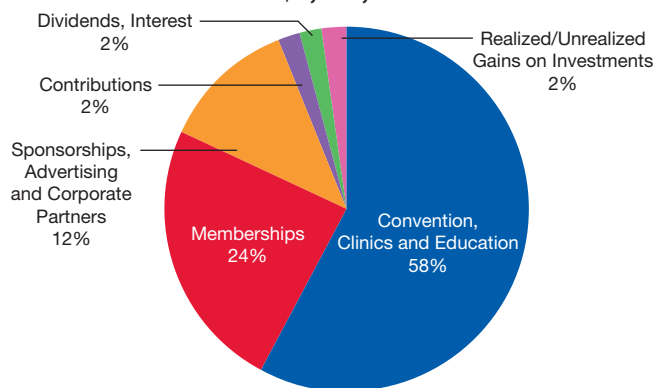
AVCA finished fiscal year 2018-19 on June 30. Per the directive of the Board of Directors, the following is an Annual Report designed to inform the membership of the sources of association revenues and the expenses allocated to various programmatic areas.

## FINANCIALS

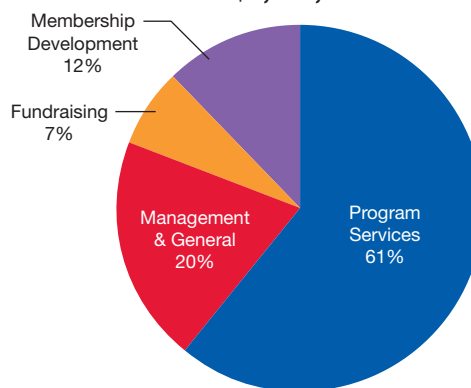
For the fiscal year 2018-19, expenses on programs and services totaled \$2,450,626; revenue and support were \$2,590,556. The financial data shared in this report is from independently audited statements. A copy of the audited financial statements is available upon request.

Balance Sheet, June 30, 2019	
Assets	
Cash and Cash Equivalents	925,396
Accounts Receivable	46,855
Prepaid Expenses	38,353
Inventory	7,399
<b>Total Current Assets</b>	<b>1,018,003</b>
Investments	1,739,091
Property and Equipment	
Website and Software	40,461
Accumulated Depreciation	-40,461
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>2,757,094</b>
Liabilities and Net Assets	
Current Liabilities	
Payables, Accrued Expenses	67,897
Deferred Revenue	262,030
<b>Total Current Liabilities</b>	<b>329,927</b>
Net Assets	
Unrestricted	2,303,919
Temporarily Restricted	123,428
<b>Total Net Assets</b>	<b>2,427,167</b>
<b>Total Liabilities and Net Assets</b>	<b>2,757,094</b>

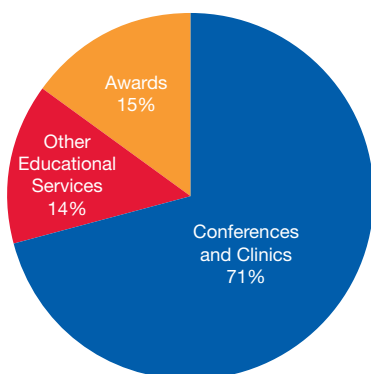
**2018-19 AVCA Sources of Revenue**  
**\$2,615,543**



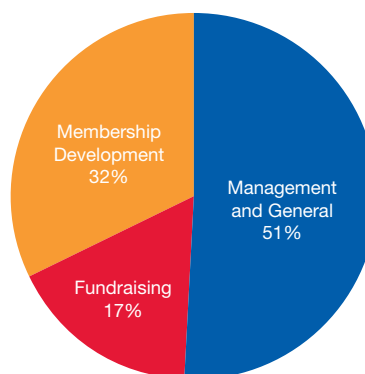
**2018-19 Expenses by Category**  
**\$2,469,516**



**Expense Detail: Program Services**  
**\$1,506,506**



**Expense Detail: Supporting Services**  
**\$944,120**





**The Mission:** To advance the sport of volleyball with AVCA coaches at the epicenter of leadership, advocacy and professional development

## IMPACTS

### Outreach: Make Volleyball Matter!

- Hosted third AVCA Broadcast summit – a gathering of programmers, producers and on-air talent from seven entities, designed to share best practices for broadcasts and promotion.
- Presentation with Holly McPeak at espnW Conference on success of women's college beach volleyball.
- Joined National Organization of Coach Association Directors (NOCAD) – a group of executive directors who run state-wide, multi-sport coaches' associations. AVCA helps support the VB programming at several of their multi-sport clinics.
- Attended 2019 NCAA Convention to push for passage of early recruiting legislation, which was approved in May of 2019.
- Met with NCAA, NAIA, NJCAA and NFHS administrators at their headquarters and/or championships to share data on volleyball and discuss growth, legislation, championships and coaching education.
- Finished payment of \$150,000 pledge to First Point Volleyball Foundation.



### Engagement: Build Community!

- New Mexico – Executed an AVCA Affiliate Partner agreement with the New Mexico High School Coaches Association in July of 2018.
- Region Affiliate Partner Program (RAPP): started a partnership program with USAV Region Commissioners to provide materials on legislation and coaching education. Signed up 12 regions in the first year: Badger, Chesapeake, Delta, Florida, Garden Empire, Great Lakes, Heart of America, Iowa, North Country, Palmetto, Pioneer and Rocky Mountain.
- Partnered with Gold Medal Squared for clinic at NCAA Men's Championship: 105 participants heard from Chris McGown, Brent Crouch, Courtney Thompson, and Luka Slabe.
- Started AVCA Advanced Career Education (ACE), a program designed to assist first-time college head coaches with the development of CEO skills.
- Developed a beach volleyball video for distribution to NJCAA administrators and worked with VB committee to get 27 schools signed up to start a team in the spring of 2020.
- Hosted our third Diversity Social at AAU Girls Junior National Championships as part of the AVCA Diversity Development Team outreach. 35 coaches attended the event while recruiting in Orlando.
- AVCA staff presented at or attended 15 high school partner clinics
- AVCA staff attended NCAA DI, DII, DIII, NAIA, NJCAA championships for women in the fall and men in the spring, and also the NCAA Beach, AVCA Small College Beach and USAV Collegiate Beach Championships.

## IMPACTS CONTINUED

### Recognition: Promote Excellence!

- Awarded 1,558 All-Region and All America Awards to college, high school and club players; selected by AVCA committees from 2,422 nominations
- Recognized 347 Coaches of the Year across all divisions and sectors
- Presented 1,128 schools with the AVCA Team Academic Award, the highest number since inception.
- Selected 12 AVCA Diversity Awards recipients who were able to attend the 2018 AVCA Convention in Minneapolis as award winners. Fundraising from the AVCA Silent Auction and private donations exceeded the goal of \$15,000.00.
- Awarded 14 Coaches4Coaches scholarship awards, selected from 81 applications. Contributions to fund the program topped \$19,000.
- Selected our 12th class of Thirty Under 30 award winners from 166 nominations.



*Minnesota cleaned up at the AVCA All-America/Players of the Year banquet.*

- Named seven Grant Burger Media Award winners chosen from 117 nominations; a record high.
- Partnered with four USA Volleyball Regions to name 18 Region honorees.
- Named 40 AVCA Region High School Coaches of the Year.

### Milestones: Track Progress!

- Celebrated the five-year anniversary of the New York Volleyball Coaches Association. Membership has grown from 82 to 180.
- AVCA membership tops 8,000 active members – a new record.
- Hosted 334 participants in the seventh annual Phenom College Prep Program. Per follow-up tracking, research shows that 77% of participants in this program will play on a college roster as freshman. Also, hosted the third Boys' Showcase with 29 participants.
- First Point Volleyball Foundation fundraising passed the \$3 million mark, and grants have provided seed money to start 17 new men's college programs.



*Talented prospects put their skills to the test in the Phenom College Prep Program.*

- Girls' high school volleyball participation passed the 450,000 mark; boys' high school passed 63,000; sand/ beach passed 2,500; these are all new records at a time when most other sports are losing participants.



## AVCA Board of Directors

### Sharon Clark

President (thru 12/31/2021)  
Butler University  
317-940-9211

### Mark Rosen

Past President (thru 12/31/2020)  
University of Michigan  
734-647-3035

### Tammy Swearingen

NCAA Division III Rep/AVCA Secretary-Treasurer  
(thru 12/31/2020)  
Westminster College  
724-946-7320

### J. Brent Crouch

NCAA Division I Representative (thru 12/31/2022)  
Auburn University  
334-703-8571

### Daniel Friend

NCAA Division I-II Men Representative  
(thru 12/31/2021)  
Lewis University  
815-836-5447

### Chuck Waddington

NCAA Division II Representative  
(thru 12/31/2021)  
Angelo State University  
325-486-6068

### Richard Gary

NCAA Division III Men Representative  
(thru 12/31/2021)  
Vassar College  
315-317-1986

### Candace Moats

NAIA Representative (thru 12/31/2022)  
Indiana Wesleyan University  
765-677-2322

### Paula Wiedemann

Two Year College Representative  
(thru 12/31/2020)  
Missouri State University - West Plains  
417-255-7950

### Kristen Rohr

Collegiate Beach Representative  
(thru 12/31/2021)  
Grand Canyon University  
602-639-6347

### Emily Hiza Kohan

Assistant Coaches Representative  
(thru 12/31/2022)  
Colorado State University  
719-469-4492

### Nancy Dorsey

High School-Interscholastic Representative  
(thru 12/31/2021)  
St. James Academy (KS)  
913-254-4200

### Brennan Dean

Club Representative (thru 12/31/2021)  
WAVE Volleyball Club  
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### Nicolette Sanlin

Diversity Development Representative  
(thru 12/31/2021)  
McKendree University  
618-537-6438

### Linda Hampton-Keith

Education & Publications Representative  
(thru 12/31/2022)

### Stephanie Castera

At-Large Representative (12/31/2022)  
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# NVA CUP

## SCHEDULE 2020 SEASON

APRIL 11-12

APRIL 18-19

MAY 2-3

MAY 9-10

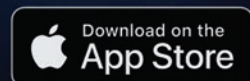
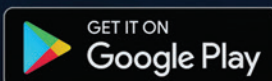
MAY 16-17

MAY 23-24

JUNE 6-7

JUNE 13-14

JUNE 20-21



NVAUSA.COM

### NATIONAL CONFERENCE



### AMERICAN CONFERENCE







# *SHAPING the FUTURE of VOLLEYBALL in the USA*

## **National Volleyball Association starts year 3**

In its first two years, The National Volleyball Association (NVA) has worked hard to become the leading professional volleyball league in the United States of America. The NVA was founded out of a deep love for the sport, and a heartache at the lackluster status quo in the popularity of the sport in the United States. Their goal is to bring volleyball to the eyes of the world in the way the sport, and its athletes deserve. With viewers tuned in cheering for their favorite teams from their home state, shouting the names of the players in the playoffs.

Today, the NVA boasts eight teams from coast to coast in two conference divisions. Athletes compete in an organized environment that brings excitement, energy and fans to the sport. By shining a light on tournaments, talent and business opportunities, the NVA is geared to advance the sport of volleyball on the national as well as the world stage. Their regular season runs from April to July, with each team playing ten matches. The top three teams from each conference then compete in the playoffs for the prestigious NVA Cup award, as well as the largest volleyball payout awarded in any national volleyball league.

This year, they have restructured to bring in some new key staff that are committed to bringing the NVA's final vision to light. A new user-friendly website, new company brand, and a multi-camera 4K live streaming platform that

will bring all of the thrilling action right to you. In addition to their exciting new tech, NVA has also implemented a more professional application process and rigorous team tryouts. With better quality athletes, comes new teams as well.

Excited to learn more about the changes? Be sure to follow the NVA on Facebook and Instagram for press releases on everything from player profiles, current standings, to event schedules. You can also download the NVA app for live stats and stream every minute of every game. If you prefer a larger screen, not a problem, the NVA also streams from their website. Also don't forget to catch them on their opening season game in Las Vegas NV on April 11th 2020.

None of this would have been possible without the fans believing in the NVA, as well as a shout out to the NVA partners & sponsors. Mikasa Corporation, the athletics company that provides official balls for football, basketball, volleyball, water polo, handball and the Olympics. 8asian, delivering 150 million monthly video impressions across channels such as YouTube, iTunes, Hulu, etc. China Southern Airlines, who provides reduced travel rates for players and personnel for all of their overseas travel. Last but not least, Singpoli, a real estate powerhouse and volleyball advocate who has supported the NVA since its inception.

# The Club of Choice

By Kinda S. Lenberg



*H*ave you ever been on a flight that seems unbearably long, where every obnoxious kid on the plane is huddled around you, like you are an inviting campfire and the airline is giving out s'mores? If you make it through to landing, the nightmare often concludes with a dispassionate flight attendant addressing the masses on the loudspeaker, saying, "We realize you have a choice when it comes to airlines, and we want to thank you for flying with us."

Of course, that is a scenario absolutely everyone who has ever stepped onto an airplane has experienced. And if you are a club volleyball director or coach, player or parent, you have heard that trite thank-you a thousand times, simply because you are in the air so much.

But should you really dismiss that message as a cliché? In reality, the idea that there are other choices out there should apply to every business, and the junior volleyball club is no exception. Indeed, there are countless junior clubs that players and their parents can choose from. What sets yours apart?

To be sure, in today's highly connected digital world, consumers have myriad ways of researching, identifying, sampling and ultimately choosing one company's services over another. Even though the numbers are by no means complete, it is estimated there are 4,500+ junior volleyball clubs in the United States and Canada, as well (according to USA Volleyball and Volleyball Canada).

So, when it comes to parents choosing junior volleyball clubs for their daughters and sons, what really sets your club apart? Why should a parent let his or her child train with you at your club versus the one down the street? What makes your club so special? Successful? Worth the money?

The AVCA sat down with four club directors/coaches to ask that very question. They are the leaders of three incredibly successful clubs in the U.S. and one in Canada. What makes these four clubs stand out among the 4,500 or so available? And what can a current or aspiring club director learn from their best practices?

## Four of a Kind

What do The Academy Volleyball Club (Indianapolis, Ind.), Missouri Volleyball Academy (MOVA) (St. Charles, Mo.), WAVE Volleyball (Del Mar, Calif.), and 403



Selects Volleyball Club (Calgary, Alberta) all have in common? Four incredibly dedicated, knowledgeable, enthusiastic, mission-driven directors that have made it their life's work to ensure their individual clubs are the best they can be. And although each club has different challenges and accomplishments, they all have one thing in common: providing the customers just what they are looking for. And this happens in a number of ways: family atmosphere, providing the best coaches, and excellent customer service.

According to the Harvard Business Review, "A happier workforce is clearly associated with a company's ability to deliver better customer satisfaction, particularly in industries where there is close contact between workers and customers" (HBR.org, Aug. 19, 2019).

And the four clubs previously mentioned know just how to keep their coaches happy while simultaneously providing excellent training for their customers – the players. Here is how it gets done.

## The Academy

Emily Hawthorne is the executive director of The Academy Volleyball Club in Indianapolis. She and Steven Peek started The Academy in September 2014. They saw a need in the area that wasn't being fulfilled by other clubs, and they took it upon themselves to fill that void.

"When we were starting The Academy," Hawthorne explains, "we had been involved in a different club. That location was in a multi-sport facility and volleyball wasn't really a priority for them. And so, they were wanting us to shrink or not grow, and we were just growing. So, we looked around and said we've got the pieces. We can do this on our own."

That was six years ago. After opening the club with 36 teams and one location, The Academy now has 105 teams (boys and girls), two buildings and three locations a mere half-decade later. The Academy leases a 70,000-foot, 11-court, volleyball-only facility in an industrial park in Indianapolis. In addition, The Academy has acquired two satellite locations, both multi-sport facilities whereby they rent courts. In 2017, Hawthorne and The Academy expanded to a second location, Grand Park, in Westfield, Ind., In 2018, Boiler Juniors teamed up with The Academy, with Legacy Courts in Lafayette, Ind., as home.



## MOVA

Lil Puckett and George Mdluli founded the Missouri Volleyball Academy (MOVA) in St. Charles, Mo., in 2013. MOVA has grown to 15 teams (boys and girls), burgeoning from its humble beginnings of six teams only six years ago.

Puckett, MOVA club director, explains she started coaching volleyball 25 years ago because her then-13-year-old daughter was recruited, and she was playing on an Open club team in the St. Louis Area. Puckett got hooked on the sport and has been coaching ever since. She began coaching other teams in her daughter's various clubs, studying the game and discovering different leadership styles. But something was missing.

"I really wasn't satisfied as a coach as to what I was getting, whether it be politics in the club, no continuity of the club, no family presence in the club, [and] parent [problems]. No backbone of the club as far as backing up their coaches."

As a result, Puckett and Mdluli set out to change all that. Indeed, there are still challenges with the club scene in the Gateway Region, but MOVA is determined to make it better.

"Our club direction here in [the] Gateway [Region] is going in a different path, where I'm not liking it," Puckett explains. "A lot of clubs are now all about business. I understand. That's fine. The club as a whole – it should be about the kids, not the club as the business. One of the reasons we started MOVA was we wanted to bring back the concerns of it being about the kids. Allowing them to believe in themselves and bringing the confidence back in them to steer them away from the path of trouble."

## WAVE

WAVE Volleyball Club in Del Mar, Calif., is consistently ranked as one of the top

30 volleyball clubs in the country. The club was formed in 2000, starting out with a mere two teams and training at the Encinitas YMCA. In 2012, Brennan Dean and his wife, Kristen, bought the club, and they were in charge of 22 outdoor teams. Today, the Deans and WAVE support more than 700 athletes (girls, boys, adults), 38 indoor teams and a number of beach teams. In 2017, with Brennan as the executive director and Kristen as the chief financial officer, WAVE saw the fruits of its labor materialize, as a new building in Del Mar went up. WAVE went from "The Tent," a 17,000-square foot facility with three courts, to a brand-new 25,000-square foot facility with four additional courts. And don't forget the three beach courts that sit in front of the new building, ready to welcome excited players under the sunny California sky.

Upon completion of the facility, Brennan, the 2018 AVCA Club Director of the Year, told *The San Diego Tribune*, "This place is a tight-knit family. Our priority is people first, things second and money third" (*The San Diego Tribune*, Aug. 14, 2017).

## 403 Selects

The 403 Selects Volleyball Club was established in the fall of 2008 and is led by Diane Johnson, who has been with the club since the beginning and has moved up the ranks from coach to board member to president. 403 Selects, located in Calgary, Alberta, offers club teams for 15, 16 and 18 girls at the Rally Pointe training facility, which is a volleyball-only recreation center that opened in 2002 with eight hard courts run by the Canada West Volleyball Club.

403 Selects, unlike the other three clubs previously mentioned, is in a unique position compared to its U.S. counterparts.

# The Club of Choice

Traditionally, the club aims specifically to recruit girls who have legitimate post-secondary goals, whether it is college in Canada or the U.S. And according to Johnson, the struggle to keep players in Canada for their college years is one of the unique challenges that Canadian club coaches face. As a result, they are inclined not to share best practices, especially with U.S. clubs.

"I think it's shifting a bit," Johnson explains, "but there's definitely a reluctance, probably more so from our post-secondary coaches in our area, because they don't want to lose kids to the U.S., right? They don't want them to go down to the U.S. and play. They want them to stay here. But my perspective is it's really what is in the best interest of the athlete."

Indeed. And the best interest of the athlete is what seems to be the cord that ties all four of these diverse – and flourishing – volleyball clubs together. Just how do they do it? What is the primary focus of each club that makes recruiting coaches and players seem to be effortless? For MOVA, WAVE, The Academy and 403 Selects, it all begins with treating everyone like family.

## Family Atmosphere

Henry Ford once said, "Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success."

All four volleyball clubs and their directors agree that maintaining a family atmosphere is crucial to the success of the organization. And the treatment not only extends to the coaches (and other employees), but also the players and their parents (as patrons).

For Puckett and her MOVA club, the concept of family and working together is the glue that truly holds the club together. And, according to Puckett, that's what brings parents and players back to the little club with the big heart.

"I will tell you, MOVA is successful because of my coaches, how they are to the kids and how we run this as a family," Puckett explains. "The [parents] see the quality that we produce and the family atmosphere that we run our club. And when I say we are family, yes we are going to have our differences, but our players, from 11s all the way up to 18s, know every single coach that is in our club because not only do we support at practice, we support in the games."

And Puckett believes that foundation is what makes MOVA such a great experience for all who walk through their doors. Basically, the MOVA team includes coaches, players and parents, and that tight-knit unit leads to success.

Dean agrees that WAVE is also founded on the concept of family. As such, the philosophy of the club states, "We are a family-owned and oriented club, and the goal of WAVE is to provide the finest possible volleyball experience to every athlete that is involved in our program – as a player, person and student-athlete."

Indeed, teaching young players to work together as a team, not only on the court, but also in life, is one of the major goals of the WAVE volleyball experience. Nurturing the all-around human being is paramount.

At The Academy, Hawthorne and her team strive to ensure players and parents get the most bang for their buck for their club experience. And they are always seeking ways to guarantee the cost is as low as possible and the return is great. The concept of a family affair is definitely seen at The Academy, as all club players and their families are provided the opportunity to take advantage of an extensive fundraising program, as well as actually working in the pro shop, at the concession stand, or at the welcome desk during practices and tournaments at the original Indianapolis facility. The Academy pays \$8 per hour for work shifts and the credit comes directly off the player's account. And it all comes down to the feeling of family permeating the Academy, especially when everyone is working together.

Hawthorne states, "We really talk about The Academy family. We know that these kids are with us – even if they are with us for just one season – it's still eight months of the year. We see them constantly. What can we do to make sure those eight months are positive?"

And like her counterparts, Hawthorne believes development of the whole athlete is the priority. Everyone from the administrative staff to coaches and directors have one goal in mind: the well-being and subsequent growth of the players in their charge.

Our neighbor to the North, 403 Selects, has gone one step further, developing an entire program to ensure the family atmosphere is felt in every corner of the club. And club president Diane Johnson credits

this unique family atmosphere as the foundation for her club's success.

"We've really tried to recognize the parent role in sport more, and not only hold parents accountable to what their role should be and needs to be, but also to recognize they are a big part of the picture. And without them, the kids wouldn't be there. And providing them support with learning and helping them. There is no guidebook on how to be a great sport parent – or there wasn't for a while. So [at 403 Selects], we have something we call PACT: Parents Athletes Coaches Together. We brand it on everything and we talk about it all the time. It's in our emails and communications. We are trying to create a real culture of togetherness – that everybody has a role to play and without one piece, the whole picture doesn't work."

In the 403 Selects literature, it states clearly, "From tryouts to the signing day, to practice and travel, you'll learn what it's like to be a valued member of one of Canada's best youth clubs. We strive to create a situation where the families at all levels are supported ... and support. Are mentored ... and mentor. Carpools and pooled resources, assistance and support, flexibility and adaptability from all levels of club participants – all for the benefit of the athletes and their families."

Here's how it works. At 403 Selects, there is a dedicated PACT committee made up of parents, athletes and coaches in each age group. Their task is to help with club operations, including such items as social media posts or culture directives. The focus is ultimately on positive interaction among all involved, heightened communication and ease in problem solving.

To be sure, a family atmosphere goes a long way in safeguarding a junior volleyball club's success. But as these four directors will tell you, there is an additional detail that must be taken into consideration. Indeed, it all comes down to offering stellar coaching.

## Best Practices = Best Coaches

Undeniably, the heart of any junior volleyball club is its coaches. These are the people in the trenches every day, interacting with, educating and molding these young athletes into the good citizens and possible athletic stars of tomorrow. There is an incredibly crowded landscape of volleyball clubs all across North America, and the



defining piece is definitely a club's coaching staff. Parents want the best instruction for their children and players want coaches that will be understanding, helpful, tough when they need to be, but most of all will teach them the things they need to know to become mature, well-rounded adults.

For WAVE Volleyball's Brennan Dean, perhaps the most significant perk his club can offer players is an unsurpassed coaching bullpen. And he is constantly on the lookout for new talent.

"There are three things we want to get out of the people that work at WAVE," Dean explains. "We want you to be passionate and driven to learn and be around volleyball. We want you to be intelligent. We want you to enjoy learning and reading and discussion. The biggest one is we want integrity. We want people that have good moral values, good ethics, who try to better the community. Try to help kids. Do it the right way for the right reasons. If you have these three things, you can be an average volleyball coach and we would be interested in hiring you and working with you to learn how to be a great coach."

And for a large club like WAVE, excellent coaches are constantly being recruited. Most of the colleges and universities in the San Diego area are represented at WAVE, and, according to Dean, "We are always looking for teachers. That is an immediate entrance into my door."

Dean says there are a number of college coaches who supplement their income at WAVE, while others are master's degree students, or those in the corporate world. Very few of the WAVE coaches, in fact, are only club coaches. And while recruiting potential coaches, Dean looks at every single person who applies.

"When I get an email or phone call from someone interested in working at WAVE, no matter what the landscape is, I always respond within 24 hours with excitement about the opportunity of meeting them. There are a couple of reasons why: I want them to know I'm organized, responsible and professional. And my philosophy is I don't want to miss the next 'whatever great coach you want to use.' If I wait a day, maybe my competitor is getting the same email."

Even with the large number of teams and coaching positions available at WAVE, it is



rare not to have a coach come back each season. Dean says it fluctuates from year to year, but usually only 10 to 15 percent of the staff will be new. And most of the time, life circumstances such as getting a new job, moving, graduation or pregnancy are the determining factors as to whether a coach returns. Retention of these quality coaches is definitely what sets WAVE apart, according to Dean.

"WAVE Volleyball has zero value without elite coaching. So therefore, elite coaching needs to be the No. 1 priority for every single volleyball club that wants to be the best. I look at coaches having a lifespan – a certain amount of years coaching. That lifespan of coaching club will be shortened if they don't get paid. If they have a team that causes a bunch of trouble. If they have to deal with a bunch of stuff they don't like dealing with. For me, I try to get ahead of all that. If there is a parent problem, I say to the coach, 'I've got your back. I support you. I'm going to choose you over the kid. Your lifetime of coaching will extend an extra three years if I handle this correctly.'"

And, as Dean mentioned, he and the other veteran coaches at WAVE will take a new, inexperienced coach under their wing and teach him/her the things he/she needs to know to provide the best possible instruction for the players, no matter the level. Dean explains at WAVE, an inexperienced coach will be made an assistant on a lower-level team to keep them around the game, making sure the experienced coach they are looking up to displays all the necessary strengths, weaknesses and coaching styles. Or, the young, up-and-coming head coach can be paired with a veteran who serves as the third assistant but is actually playing a mentor role. The new coaches are encouraged to record all the mentor's drills

and pay attention to game management and time-outs. Most importantly, they are required to ask a lot of questions. That is how Dean and WAVE Volleyball keep one of the most impressive lineups of volleyball coaches in the country.

For Junior Volleyball Association board member Emily Hawthorne and The Academy, attracting and retaining coaches is a constant process. The No. 1 thing she looks for is the integrity and character of the person as a coach.

"The main thing is the character of the person – punctuality and working with the kids in a proper way. From our standpoint, if we can give them the educational resources, we can train the right person to be on our staff. We really look at are you someone who's going to accept the educational resources we have? Are you eager to learn? To get better? But he/she must be someone that we want around the kids, most importantly.

"I really try to hire people who talk about the process of developing athletes [rather] than the ones that are more profit-driven. A coach can come in and start name dropping and telling me all their accolades and to me, that's less impressive than them talking about the progress they made with a certain athlete, practice planning or aspects of coaching. How they interact with coaches. A huge red flag is boundary issues. Are we getting too close with kids or parents? How do they interact with assistant coaches? To me, it's getting them to talk about their experience because obviously there are times my radar is wrong. A lot of times you can decipher if this is someone who we will have to watch or is not a great fit. There's been extremely talented, experienced coaches who have been brought to us and if they're just not the right fit, then we don't hire them."

# The Club of Choice

Integrity and character are two words that Hawthorne equates with the coaches who work at The Academy and doing as much research as you can regarding a potential coach is crucial.

Hawthorne states, “One thing that we learned, especially with the size that we are, first is realizing they all aren’t coaching for the same reason. In order to make it a successful experience for each of them, it’s not going to mean the same thing. For some of them it is truly [just] a consistent paycheck that comes in.”

And with more than 200 coaches, Hawthorne and The Academy have devised creative ways to educate and train new and existing coaches, especially in the crazy-busy world we all exist in these days. The compulsory in-house coaches’ meetings, for example, have gone online.

“[We have started] to do them as webinars for the people who are so busy and can barely fit in their practices. They love that because they can have the webinar open at home. They don’t have to drive to the club. They don’t have to take the afternoon. We do a lot of things web-based now. We have a coaches’ website where the information goes and it is solely coach-focused. We have all of our resources in there.”

And like WAVE, Hawthorne says The Academy also has an extensive mentoring program, pairing less-experienced coaches with veterans, with the goal by the end of the season being the newer coaches are extremely comfortable training all aspects of the game, are able to deal with parents effectively, and team management is a breeze. The newer coaches all want to be part of something bigger than they are, so Hawthorne says they host a year-end picnic and a holiday party. Some of the millennial coaches focus on social media for big tournaments and other events and having the familial or community atmosphere is what all coaches at The Academy are drawn to.

For 403 Selects, the coach selection and retention process actually begins at the end of the season. President Diane Johnson states, “We meet with all of our staff at the end of the season for an exit interview and ask them to come to that meeting with a recommendation [for additional coaches] because they’re out and about in the community, meeting coaches and

seeing coaches do a great job. So, we ask our coaches to help us with that. I try to get out in the school season and watch matches and I watch for coaches that I think have a great presence on the bench.”

And Johnson says once a pool of potential coaches is formed, then she will call them up and they go for coffee and talk. Starting the conversation with potential coaches gets the ball rolling. And then once all coaching positions are filled, it is just a matter of encouraging that family atmosphere.

There are approximately 78 athletes and a minimum of eight coaches on the court practicing during the week at 403 Selects. And, according to Johnson, having all coaches together with their teams, all in the same area, all at the same time, means they are able to utilize their coaching resources effectively for the good of the athletes.

In the Gateway Region at MOVA, the mentoring atmosphere is very similar to the other three clubs.

According to Puckett, “I bring my coaches in under my wing or that of my associate director – and especially the ones coaching for over 15 years – so they get trained. We really reiterate to our coaches that teaching is the key to growing players and teams.

“And we empower them and make them feel important because they have to feel important to lead their team. When they need training, we train them to the point where we make them love it. We teach them to teach. In order to grow a club, in order to grow a team, a player, you have to see the best in them and you have to pull it out of them. That’s what we do with our coaches.”

And Puckett truly believes that you have to appreciate what is in front of you. The club is only as good as the coaches that you have and just like the corporate world, “if you care about the company you work for and are treated with respect and [they] back you up, you will [give] your all for who you work for. I appreciate them. We have fun. We are very close-knit and I believe being close and knowing individually your coaches – what they do, like, dislike – and teaching them how to deal with parents, how to lead your team, really makes a difference in how your team is seen in the region.”

Admittedly, one common thread running through the conversation with all four club directors is the emphasis on

coaching education, whether it is at the AVCA Convention, through the Junior Volleyball Association, USA Volleyball, or any other available avenue. According to Hawthorne, the educational sessions found at the annual AVCA Convention really get the staff and coaches excited about being a part of something so much bigger than what is done at The Academy. And, according to all four coaches, providing the funding for coaching education is key to the success of your club.

“It needs to be part of your budget as much as jerseys and volleyballs,” Hawthorne explains. “Finding a way to make it happen is key. Some clubs can’t send 15 of their coaches [to the Convention] but send two or three every year. If you make it a priority, the ROI is there.”

And according to Johnson, 403 Selects is one of the only programs in Calgary that sends coaches to the AVCA Convention for professional development.

“I saw the value of being exposed to what is happening outside of Alberta in terms of coaching,” Johnson explains. “In terms of coach networking, everything. There is so much more learning than what we are exposed to here.”

And, according to Johnson, personal growth and critical thinking are what makes her coaches stand out in the jam-packed club scene in Canada. And the club’s dedication to providing as many educational opportunities as possible for her coaches to learn and explore is what sets them apart.

## The Customer is Always Right

In addition to a welcoming family atmosphere and unsurpassed coaching, the final ingredient in the recipe for success, at least for the four clubs and their leaders discussed here, is customer service. Athletes and their parents most definitely do have a choice in volleyball clubs and so you must rise above all others and find the perfect level of customer service that will not only get players on the court, but also keep them there. And from there, they are hopefully telling their friends.

Steve Jobs once said, “Get closer than ever to your customers. So close, in fact, that you tell them what they need well before they recognize it themselves.”

In today’s teeming club volleyball setting, that piece of advice has never been truer. In fact, for Hawthorne and The Academy



Volleyball Club, the perceived lack of customer service in the club volleyball arena in her area of the country (Indianapolis) was a main reason for starting her club in the first place.

"The piece that we saw, to be honest, kind of lacking in our area was the customer service aspect of it," Hawthorne states. "Making sure the experience was a positive one. We didn't want to get great athletes and just put them on a court together and go play."

According to Hawthorne, the question became, "How do we take each athlete, whether they come to us at 12s or 18s, and make each athlete better, whether it's their volleyball IQ or working on different techniques? We just want to make each athlete better. It's not that we're against winning. If we're just chasing national championships, there's only so much we can control."

"Education and customer service. This can set us apart if we do these better than our competitors. We can be a success and be pleased with what we're doing."

In her 2018 AVCA Convention seminar titled "Top 10 Ways to Grow Your Program at the High School and Club Level: Presented by JVA," Hawthorne explains that the branding process of the club is key, whether you are starting from scratch or have inherited a club. According to Hawthorne, this is where you play to the strengths of your personnel and determine what the market in your area not only wants, but ultimately needs.

"The Academy name says it all," Hawthorne explains. "This is a volleyball school." The Academy is training via a club-wide curriculum with a laser focus on the athletes, which was a need in the market. In addition, providing fun events like Volleyfest, whereby The Academy players and coaches are "locked in" overnight in the gym for games and team building, is not a necessary event, "but it keeps us working hard and playing hard," Hawthorne explains.

The true customer service aspect of it all for Hawthorne is making it a positive experience for the parents, as well. In Hawthorne's opinion, paying the club fees and trepidation over travel should not be a worry for parents. A focus on customer service allows "you to work on your weaknesses. It's personal development that lets the coaches think about what they don't know and who they are not. Then,



ultimately, as a club director, you get better yourself or you hire your weaknesses."

Steve Jobs would be proud.

And at MOVA, Puckett also heeds the philosophy that the athletes come first. The club's mission is to focus on dedication, responsibility, team cohesion, persistence and service to others. The emphasis is to ensure the young players are not only the best volleyball athletes they can be, but they also are taught positive life skills that can be taken with them far into adulthood.

"We're not here to get rich off this," Puckett admits. "We're here to make the kids shine and see them through to the adult world to be confident in themselves, whether young gentlemen or young ladies."

And, according to Johnson, 403 Selects is not primarily "win" or "banner" focused, either. They are athlete-development focused. And in what she terms a "pretty cutthroat" club volleyball recruiting arena in Canada, "Kids and parents are shopping for the greener grass. When I grew up playing in Alberta, you just played. You found a program ... and I'm still friends with those people. You don't see that much anymore, which is sad."

And as a result, Johnson says 403 Selects focuses on developing and training the whole athlete, with exposure to the mental components, as well as the technical and tactical aspects. Nutrition and general health are also an important part of the formula. Johnson is a wellness consultant, with an unsurpassed knowledge of holistic nutrition and recovery practices.

"It's the whole picture," Johnson states.

Brennan Dean of WAVE Volleyball Club definitely agrees. In addition to serving as the club director, he has more than a decade of professional counseling experience in the San Dieguito Union High School District,

serving as head counselor prior to coming to WAVE. He definitely understands the human interaction component, realizing the customer service component is key, as it is essentially "the importance of connectivity and connection between the coach and player," Dean explains.

And WAVE offers year-round training programs for boys and girls, indoor and beach, at a variety of skill levels. To that end, WAVE's mission is to produce players who are not only technically skilled, but who also have aspirations to play volleyball at the highest levels possible.

The club's mission states, "WAVE cultivates a strong work ethic, a passion for competition, and a commitment to teach culture to enable players to fulfill their potential."

## Ultimate Take-Aways

Dr. Tony Alessandra, author of 29 books and one of the leading experts on human communication and management in the workplace, says, "Being on par in terms of price and quality only gets you in the game. Service wins the game." Undeniably, the four club directors have found this golden rule to be true and each strives to make it a reality in their day-to-day operations. A family atmosphere, providing the best coaching and excellent customer service are all what have made these four clubs rise to the top.

To be sure, the products and services available through the myriad junior volleyball clubs in North America can easily be replicated. However, the true competitive advantage comes from having a combination of high-level programs, people and, ultimately, quality service. Once that is achieved, no one has to be reminded there is a choice out there in junior volleyball clubs. The choice has already been made. Is yours the club of choice?





# Hand

## Be a Better Partner

By Angela Rock



**A** few years ago, when I published my book, *Angela Rock's Advanced Beach Volleyball Tactics*, I had only just started to get involved in the college beach coaching scene. In 2017, I was fortunate to hold an interim position as the head beach volleyball coach for Saint Mary's College in Moraga, California. Although I had been coaching professional teams for many years, this was my first opportunity to lead a collegiate beach squad and put into practice the ideas I had acquired from coaching and playing at the professional level. I was a hand setter during my career because I've always believed that hand setting is superior to bump setting and can make the difference between good players and great players, and certainly between a win and a loss.

extremely flagrant ones) to add even more incentive to hand set every day when practicing. We also had practice drills where the players must hand set their normal reps, and of course doing all the regular serve receive and transition-setting drills in our efforts to have our team become regular hand setters in matches. We had the same situation I had experienced at Saint Mary's – not one player on the entire FSU beach team would consistently set with their hands during matches, and this was a talented group of beach players. We had a CCSA Conference Championship team, finished in the top five at the NCAA Tournament, but our team had limited enthusiasm to hand set.

So the question remains: Is it necessary to hand set? Secondly, does the time spent train-

and professional levels. That player, in order to be successful, needs an accurate, consistent set that she can put away. She needs not only the aforementioned items, but the flexibility to ask for a set in a variety of locations to potentially gain an offensive edge. Any player that ends up getting served every ball greatly appreciates a partner who possesses the skill to hand set.

Hand setting also allows my partner to be in a position to option the "on two" ball. I have led numerous coaching sessions where I implement hand setting drills which teach players to chip over on two, without jumping. Imagine the things your offense can do if you can attack on two from a standing position (as a hand setter you can easily chip the ball because your hands are already up.) Team offenses can have more attacking options when hand setting is used. Yes, optioning over with a bump set is done too, but it does not compare to the accuracy, deceptiveness and flexibility of hand setting.

While I was at FSU I was tasked with recruiting. I love recruiting and had the pleasure of attending showcases all over the country. What I observed with the up-and-coming players is the steady increase in use of the hand set in camps, clinics and competitions – I was extremely happy to see this from the younger players. The majority of top recruits were hand setting whenever possible, and I believe that these young players will change the makeup of the current college athletes. They do not seem to have the constant fear of doubling the set and are building up the confidence to hand set as the norm, and not the exception.

Lastly, hand setting allows for the set to have various tempos, hit a precise location at a specific height, and it is easier for the hitter to read. As the height of women playing the game increases, the ability of a hitter to move the set around to create a little advantage against a big block can give a sense of empowerment to the smaller players. Running the same old "up and down" set is particularly bad when your opponents have seen it 20 times and the blocker is not required to take even a step to adjust to the hitter. The evolution of the game is here, and in the next five years I believe you will see all top programs and teams hand setting much more frequently than bump setting. ☺

# Setting

When I began at Saint Mary's I thought that I would have every player on the team hand setting by the end of the season. In turn, this would allow all the teams to run a sophisticated offense that, of course, would be predicated on us hand setting. I was wrong. The team was highly athletic and very coachable, and they were more than capable of hand setting; however, during matches, something always stopped them and they chose to bump set. I never did a survey with the players about why this happened, but my speculation was that they obviously did not want to risk throwing the set in a match. I thought it was interesting because we did spend time every practice reinforcing hand setting, but once play began I would have one, maybe two, players actually set with their hands. The idea of being called on a throw was more of a deterrent than the advantages of hand setting in their minds.

Fast forward to 2019 – I am the Assistant Coach at Florida State University working for Head Coach Brooke Niles. We implemented *No Throw Tuesdays* to encourage our players to use their hands without the worry of committing a double. Then we went as far as basically not calling doubles at all at practice (except of course the

ing to hand set benefit the player, team and program? My answer is an unequivocal yes.

I believe that offensive schemes are going to continue to evolve, and because bump setting is not a precise skill it won't be used as much as the game continues to evolve. Of course, in windy conditions, out-of-system passing, or a pass made with lots of spin, will all require a bump set so the skill will always need to be part of a beach player's repertoire, but on a regular, in-system pass, the hand set will be the primary setting choice.

During the 2019 season, I noticed during my FSU competitions and observation at the junior level competitions that fewer and fewer throws were called. The loosening of the beach rules have played a significant part in the growth of hand setting. When beach began, any minor spin would be a double – *old school* players never hand set. Now the refs let minor spin, deep-dish sets and side setting go for the most part.

There are some basic thoughts I have about the game of beach volleyball. The most coveted partners are those who are the best setters, and typically the best setters hand set. The strategy for most teams will be to serve one player, maybe not at the junior level, but certainly at the college

# Information Station: Use Tech to Educate the Audience

David Portney

WHAT MAKES attending a volleyball match so much fun? The athleticism, skill set, strategy and promotions are just a few of the reasons our sport has enjoyed tremendous growth in attendance over the last few years. Are any of these visible to the audience watching on TV or a mobile device?

I understand resources are finite when it comes to broadcasting a volleyball match. We often don't have access to the types of cameras and technology we see in more highly rated sports like football, basketball and softball, so what that means is we must be more intentional about dedicating the resources we do have to showcasing the most important facets of our game. It doesn't matter if it's a TV broadcast at a Power 5 institution or a local high school or club stream. I'll spend the rest of the article hitting on how we can improve in the four aforementioned areas.

Athleticism might be the most underrated aspect of our sport, which sounds preposterous to us because we live it every

day. However, to those who live outside our bubble, until they see it, they don't fully appreciate it. If possible, try to avoid the trap of setting up a single camera at the top of the bleachers that make your athletes look like ants on the screen. Bringing the camera just a bit closer to the floor will show off the leap from your pin hitters and the amazing digs from your libero. If you have the luxury of multiple camera broadcasts, always have at least one camera at floor level.

Showcasing skill set is similar to athleticism. The closer you can get, the better you see it. However, there is a way to supplement this to ensure your audience has a better understanding of what makes volleyball more than setting the ball high in the air and have your most athletic player swing at it. Recording brief segments with your players and coaches prior to the match showing the most basic skills like how to pass, make an approach, and blocking technique can go a long way in informing your viewer. By keeping these pre-recorded segments to a

minute-plus, you can air these during breaks in the action. These are a lot of fun to film for players and coaches, and as long as you have a cell phone made in the last few years, the quality will be plenty good enough (try to shoot it in a quiet gym).

Strategy is probably the most difficult part of a broadcast because it takes time, but the next serve typically occurs mere seconds after the last point ended. However, you need to try because an informed viewer is an engaged viewer. If you are fortunate to have announcers on your broadcast, make sure at least one of them knows the game well enough to explain rotations. Sometimes, mostly for student-run productions, this isn't possible, but if that's the case then the home coaching staff should take the initiative to teach them the basics. The better the viewers understand how volleyball works, the more empowered they become to learn about the game.

Promotions are another part of our sport that have really taken a step up. If your broadcast allows, make an attempt to show them in a similar manner as the match itself. How much fun is it to see average fans come down to the court and try something to win a prize? Of course it might not be volleyball, but ultimately we want to entertain. An additional benefit is that showing the fun atmosphere of your venue might help convince viewers on a screen to head over for a match.

The feasibility of some of these suggestions will ebb and flow depending on what kind of resources are at your disposal. No matter where you fall in that spectrum, it's important to be creative and continuously evolve. It can seem daunting, but if you're able to home in on improving just a few aspects of your stream, it will go a long way in improving the visibility of your program.



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# Putting Butts in the Seats

By Krista Vansant, Assistant Coach - Indiana University

WHEN WE ARRIVED in Bloomington, we sat down as a staff and made attendance improvements and changing perception a stated goal. After our second season in Bloomington, we have jumped into the top 15 in attendance nationally, averaging 1,809 fans per match – a program record. This is a 131.9% increase over the past two years. I would be remiss if I didn't send out a huge thank you to our marketing department, our administration, the students and the community for helping us reach these numbers! We definitely couldn't have done it on our own. Throughout the last two years, I have learned so much about marketing a program, so here are some of the major components that we felt were important when we were changing the perception of Indiana Volleyball:

## 1. Vision and brand

- a. Meet as a staff and develop the atmosphere and the vision for what you want your event to be. Coach Steve always talks about it as reverse engineering. What do you want it to look like, feel like? What do you want the parking to look like? How do you want the student section to look and sound like? Do you want the band? These are questions you can brainstorm to answer, and then determine what and who you might need to build towards this and make your vision happen!

- b. The first 30 days are the most important. This doesn't have to be when you are taking over a program, but it could be from the moment you make the decision that you want to increase attendance and make the experience important.
- c. Every school has a "thing" (Indiana Basketball). Once you discover it, don't try to battle it. Make it part of your vision, work with it instead of against it.

## 2. The first 30 days

- a. Athletics department: You want to find gateway people within your athletics department to help you accomplish your vision. Assign roles to these people and give them deadlines on what tasks they have. The people who have brought you in want you to have success. Some of these gateway people include:
  1. Marketing: Get really connected with your marketing representative or people that are looking to make a name or grow their experience and resume, so that when you have ideas you can bounce them off of them. They can help with budget and execution of the promotions or giveaways.
  - a. If you don't have a marketing staff member who works directly with your program, there are really smart students that are trying to get their foot in the door and



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- will do anything to help you build something awesome.
2. Media and Communications: Social media is the best way to market your event. Using social media to your advantage is key – graphics dedicated to your event, tagging and tweeting at influential people on campus to try to reach more people. Social media tells the story of your program to the public.
  3. Community: People in the community who love your sport and will help bang the drum in your favor. Make the event inclusive for families (“Ice Cream Night” or “\$1 Hot Dog Night,” etc.). Create an easy and fun place for families to bring their kids for a couple of hours.
    - a. What is your target audience? Certain programs are looking for older people, some look for families, some look for young students.
  4. Student Section: Build a committee of students who want to get into marketing or PR who can be ambassadors for your program. They can give you ideas from a student’s perspective on what would attract other students to come to the matches. Fire them up! Let them contribute ideas and use what they say in your promotion strategy.
    - a. Not everyone can be the men’s basketball student section leader, but they can be the volleyball student section leader and feel like they have a part in building something special.
    - b. Work with these gateway people to determine your “launch date” as if you were going to open a new restaurant or hotel and all of the details that surround it. Most likely this is your first match of the year, so go big. You want to have a great first impression. If the product and the experience are good, people will want to come back. It helps build a curiosity and buzz surrounding the program.

### 3. Promotions and risk-taking

- a. Students: Students love free stuff. This could be anything from t-shirts to pizza to iPads. This is where the committee comes in because they can help with promoting this to their friends. Student tailgates are very popular because they include free things. Don’t be afraid to make relationships with local businesses as long as the administration is okay with it. We like to give something free to the students for every game.
- b. Families: Like mentioned above, families can make up the bulk of the fans that attend matches. Kids will want to come back if they like the concessions, love the atmosphere and players, etc.
- c. Risks: Take risks when thinking of promotions. Think outside the box. There are going to be people who dislike what you do no matter what, so taking risks and understanding why it failed (if it does) are very important. It is just like what we tell our players about trying a new skill, failing and learning about why that happened.



INDIANA VOLLEYBALL

### 4. Non-volleyball materials

- a. Atmosphere: If the volleyball isn’t exactly where you want it to be, you must focus more on the atmosphere. Think about what it would feel like to go to a match and as a player to play in that atmosphere.
- b. Ease of attending the event: This can be anything from parking to how comfortable the seats are to the number of bathrooms in the arena. It is always good to remind fans that the weather is always great inside.
- c. Accessibility: If you can let fans get to know the athletes and staff as people, they are more likely to feel connected to the program and will show support at matches and throughout the community. This can be done in various ways: chalk talks, press conferences, player autographs and photos after matches, open practices, etc.

### 5. Importance

- a. Recruiting: If you are a player/recruit, is the program and environment a fun place to play? How the arena feels and how it looks all matter when the volleyball isn’t where you want it to be. Recruits must feel like the sport is valued in the athletics department, and by extension so will they.
- b. Support: This can come from many areas, such as the administration (where it starts), community and students.
- c. Uniqueness: Think outside the box and take risks. Don’t try to be the “B” version of another program.

Overall, we are in the entertainment business. Go back to thinking of it as opening a hotel or restaurant. You want the launch to be huge, so spend most of your time thinking about the grand opening and how you want it to feel and look. When it turns out great, the curiosity takes over the town, then FOMO (fear of missing out) hits the community. Lastly, think outside the box, be unique and really go for it!

## Connect to the Cause

By Adam Obringer, Side-Out Foundation

THE DIG PINK Dig-A-Thon has a motto to “Do The Hard Stuff.” This motto is not only meant to get the club community connected to be a part of the Dig-A-Thon, but it is a reminder of the power the sport of volleyball has to make a difference.

This power was something that Virginia Elite Volleyball Club’s Executive Director and 18s Assistant Coach Lexi Patton wanted to bring to her club. “Every year we create a Dig Pink shirt for our club so athletes and coaches can wear them on ‘Dig Pink days’ for tournaments,” said Patton. “We were very familiar with The Side-Out Foundation throughout the years. As a club, we always *said* we dig pink but we weren’t actually contributing to any cause.”

### Beginnings of VA Elite’s Dig-A-Thon Campaign

The Side-Out Foundation introduced the Dig Pink Dig-A-Thon in the spring of 2018. It was an opportunity for club teams nationwide to be a part of the Dig Pink movement. This was the foundation’s chance to offer something different for the club community to take ownership of while competing weekend after weekend. For Virginia Elite, this was its opportunity to contribute and connect to Side-Out’s cause.

Helping the decision to participate in the Dig Pink Dig-A-Thon, Virginia Elite had a special connection to the cause. One of its own players, Maddie Bonifas, had lost her mother to breast cancer. Patton gave Bonifas the opportunity to lead the club’s campaign. With the whole club buying into the campaign, Virginia Elite was ready to make a meaningful impact through the Dig-A-Thon.

The club supporting Side-Out’s game-changing stage IV breast cancer research through volleyball was an exciting time for everyone at Virginia Elite, but Patton understood the importance of the research being funded. “I work in the clinical research space for my regular job. So when I learned



about the kind of research Side-Out was doing, it was just incredible.”

### Setting Up for Success

Virginia Elite started right away by working with one of Side-Out’s Team Support Representatives, Eleanor Kent. “It was just so easy,” remembered Patton. “Eleanor was very helpful in walking me through and setting the campaign pages up. Once the pages got going, it basically ran itself.”

For volleyball clubs during club season, the idea of taking on an initiative like the Dig-A-Thon may seem overwhelming. Club directors may feel they cannot take on anything else, but that is the best part of the Dig-A-Thon. Side-Out gives clubs everything they need to be successful. Teams receive their own fundraising page, a team support representative, and resources to help promote their campaign.

With everything in place, it was up to the teams to just play! As a bonus, a club-wide competition created by the directors and coaches between all of the teams gave the athletes even more incentive to compete for every dig and hit fundraising goals.

### Power in Community and Competition

Despite the competition between teams, the Dig Pink Dig-A-Thon gave Virginia Elite the chance to come together as a club community. Friends and family of the club came forward to talk about their experiences with breast cancer and how they were

connected to the cause. Patton recalled the moments throughout their Dig-A-Thon experience: “You really saw the community coming together. It was great to see.”

When it came time to finally dive for the digs, Virginia Elite went all out. Three of its six teams recorded 200 or more digs. As a club, Virginia Elite contributed 1,107 digs to Side-Out’s Dig Pink Dig-A-Thon goal of 150,000 digs. Between pledges and donations, the club also raised \$6,626 dollars for Side-Out’s stage IV breast cancer research. As of April 17, Virginia Elite’s 17s team (\$1,860), 13s team (\$1,559) and 16s team (\$1,225) owned the three-highest fundraising pages for the Dig Pink Dig-A-Thon in 2019.

### Dig-A-Thon Reflection

Virginia Elite’s second year with Side-Out and the Dig-A-Thon led to results that no one expected. The individual teams welcomed the chance to compete harder against their opponents and each other within the club, but the Dig-A-Thon also brought the club together for a common goal.

Patton had some final advice for clubs that may be on the fence about participating: “Just jump right in! It is a great way to spur some inter-club competition for a good cause. With Eleanor and Side-Out to help guide you, it’s a win-win!”

The Dig Pink Dig-A-Thon runs until the end of June and your team can still join! Teams can sign up to start with the Dig-A-Thon and help Side-Out reach its goal of 150,000 digs by visiting [side-out.org/dig-a-thon](https://side-out.org/dig-a-thon).



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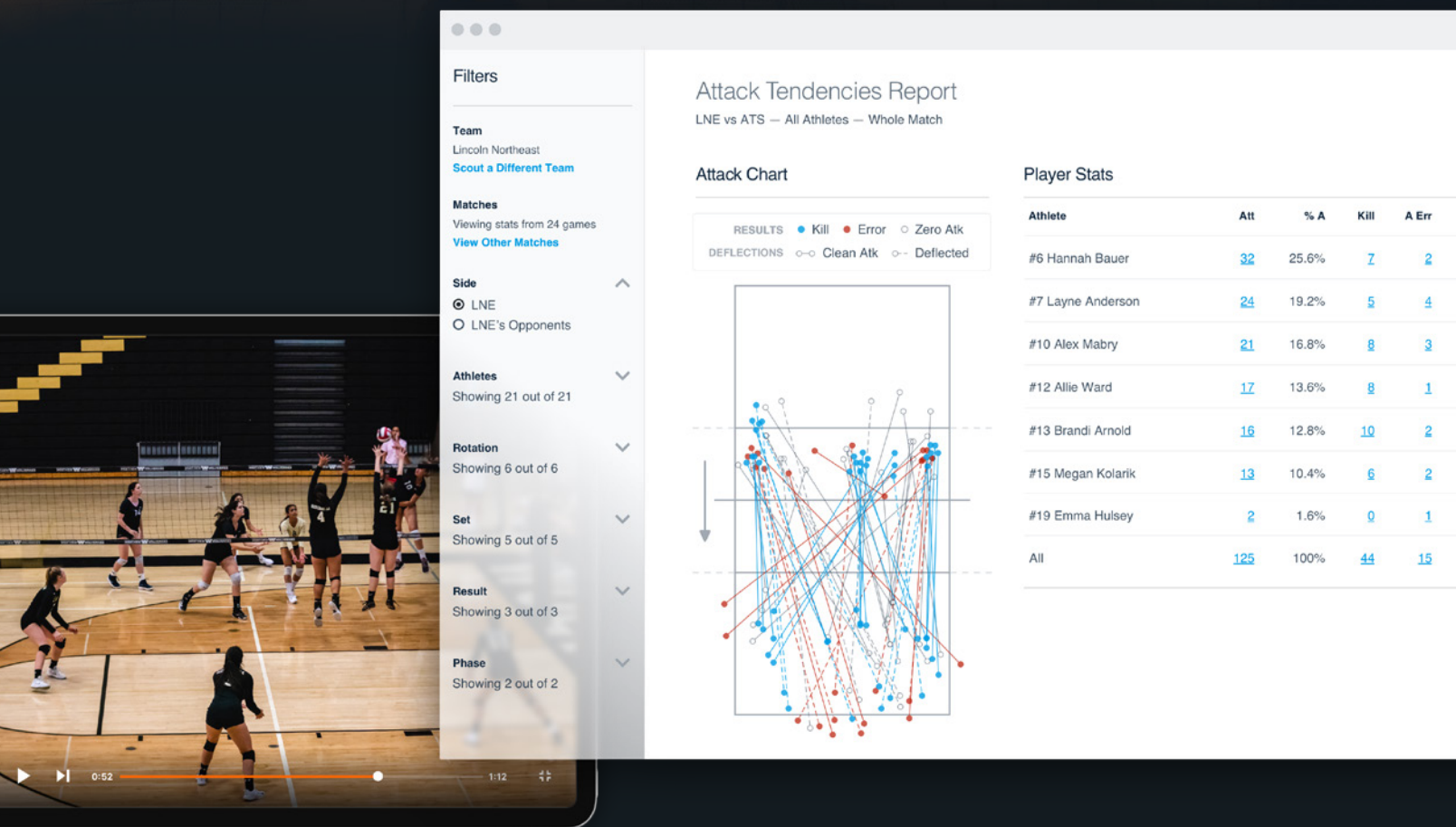
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