

# Growing the Game Together Volume 2



2013-2014

Insights into the science, facts, & principles of sport and volleyball

**USAVolleyball®**

[usavolleyball.org](http://usavolleyball.org)

***By John Kessel***

## Table of Contents

John Kessel's Biography.....	03
Blogs for Players.....	06
Never Let Someone Steal Your Confidence.....	06
We May Win & We May Lose .....	08
Coach Albert Einstein's Great Quotes .....	11
The Game Will Find A Way.....	13
Videos Used in My 2013 Teachings.....	17
To Live in Excellence .....	20
Holiday Gifts for Volleyball Leaders & Athletes.....	21
LTAD- A look at Stephen Curry's Longshot Journey by E:60.....	103
Blogs for Coaches & Club Directors.....	24
Blogs that are Making a Difference.....	24
Volleyball Coaches & Trainers Facebook Group.....	27
STOP Teaching Technique.....	30
STOP Doing Drills.....	35
STOP Cutting Players.....	39
Evolution of Blocking Drills.....	42
Never Let Someone Steal Your Confidence.....	06
We May Win & We May Lose .....	08
They Learn by DOING.....	44
Learning vs. Teaching .....	46
My Top Things I Must Have as a Coach.....	48
Change Your Words, Change Your Gym.....	50
What is Truer than Truth.....	52
The Game Will Find A Way.....	13
Videos Used in My 2013 Teachings.....	17
Decide Slowly .....	53
Winners Stay On.....	55
Heaven or HELL.....	56
Relentlessly Positive.....	58
Pattern Interruption for Improving Coaching .....	60
Two More Myths.....	61
300 Coaches and 600 Players.....	64
Where is your White Board?.....	66
Blogs for Parents.....	68
For the Kids' Development, Not the Parents... ..	68
Blogs that are Making a Difference.....	24
Blogs for ALL.....	71
From Doha to Dubai- Things Learned & Shared.....	71
Why my Mom would have been a GREAT Volleyball Coach .....	77
Hall of Fame Induction Speech.....	80
Lessons Learned from the Ski Slopes.....	83
John Kessel's Top 25 Books to learn From.....	84
Space Dive.....	86
Due Settimana Nella Italia.....	87
Pole Vaulting and Ebay.....	90
Growing the Game after an Earthquake.....	92
Kia Orana.....	95
Giving Back to Those Who Serv.....	97
Decades of Growing the Game.....	99
Bradman and Bubba.....	107



## JOHN L. KESSEL

Since 1985 John has been working for the National Governing Body of the sport, USA Volleyball (USAV), now as Director of Sport Development. He serves as the staff liaison for Disabled Programs, USA Deaflympic Teams, Starlings USA, National Parks and Recreation Assoc., the YMCA and over 30 other Affiliated Organizations working with USAV. He is Secretary of the NORCECA Technical and Coaches Commission, and Director of Development for World ParaVolley. He was Team Leader for the 2000 USA Olympic Beach Volleyball Teams in Sydney, which brought home one gold medal, and for the 2004 USA Paralympic Women's Sitting Volleyball Team in Athens, which came home with the bronze medal. In 1995, *Volleyball Magazine's* special Centennial issue named him one of the 50 most important people in the sport in the past 100 years. In 2013 the American Volleyball Coaches Association inducted him as their 60<sup>th</sup> ever member of the AVCA Coaches Hall of Fame.

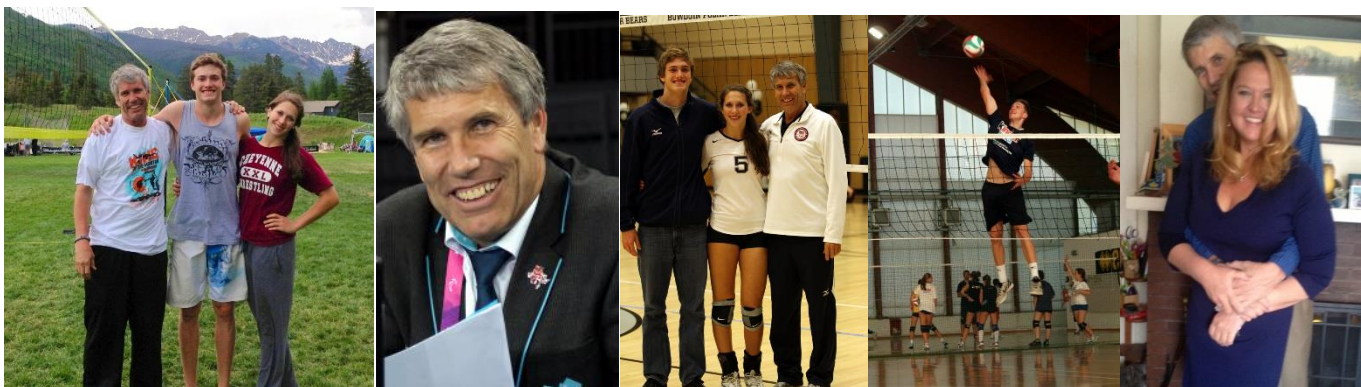
He has been coaching since 1971 at the collegiate level or above, including Women's U.S. Open titles in 1986 & 1987. A sought after international lecturer, he has conducted seminars in all 50 states, and in over 50 nations, in such diverse nations as China, Denmark, Bolivia, Thailand, Qatar, Cook Islands, Barbados, France, Germany, Egypt, England, Italy, Japan, Iceland, Puerto Rico, Samoa, Canada, Guatemala, Venezuela, Greece, Israel, Australia, Jamaica, New Zealand, Holland, England, Belize, Trinidad Tobago, Ireland, Tonga, Belgium, Haiti, Vanuatu, Costa Rica, Fiji, Poland and El Salvador. He is also a busy author, with over half a dozen USAV books, including the IMPACT coaching manual, the Jr. Olympic Volleyball Program Guide, and most recently the Minivolley 4 Youth, Youth Coloring Book, and countless articles. His blog called "Growing the Game Together" is the second most popular blog of the hundreds found on the US Olympic Committee's Team USA website and he promotes the "Grassroots" Button on the USAV website with material, posters, and information for clubs, schools, coaches, parents, players, and officials. He has received many awards, including USA Volleyball's Honorable Mention in 1978 and 1986, the Harry Wilson Distinguished International Service in 2004, the George Fisher Leader in Volleyball in 2006 and in 2007 was named a Sport Ethics Fellow by the Institute for International Sport.

From 1982 to 1990 he was Director and Coaches' Coach of the Albuquerque Junior Olympic Volleyball Program. For a month in the summer of 1991, he was one of four featured speakers at the first ever International Youth Volleyball Coaches Symposium in Olympia, Greece, attended by over 50 nations, and he repeated that role in the International Volleyball in the Schools Seminar in Canada in summer of 1995 and in Canada in 2007. During the Centennial year of volleyball he was the principal speaker at the Centennial Advanced Teaching and Coaching Seminar in Beijing, China. He was on staff for both the 1984 and 1988 Olympics, and served as producer for both the 1996 Centennial Olympics for indoor volleyball in Atlanta, and subsequently producer and announcer for the 1996 Paralympics in Sitting and Standing volleyball. For 1999-2000 he was director of the U.S. Olympic Challenge Series, the Olympic qualifying series, which included an FIVB World Tour Grand Slam stop in Chicago with \$400,000 in prize money for that one stop alone. He also served as head coach/team leader for the 1999 and 2003 USA Pan Am Games Beach teams, with a silver medal, and 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> place finishes in the four events. In 2004 and 2005, he directed the National High Performance Beach Camp, worked his 10<sup>th</sup> US Jr. Olympic Beach Volleyball Championships for USA Volleyball in Hermosa Beach, an event he started in 1994 with Dale Hoffman of the California Beach Volleyball Association, and worked with the AVP.

For over a decade he served as one of 8 members of the International Volleyball Federation's Technical Commission, as Secretary, and he remains a FIVB Level IV Instructor. Since 2001 he has served as Secretary on the NORCECA Technical and Coaches Commission, developing clinics and the "Leave a Ball Behind" Program to enhance zonal volleyball growth, and directed a two year State Department Sports United Grant to assist coaches in six NORCECA nations in 2011-12. He helped run the World Sitting Volleyball Championships in 2010, and the Director of Development for the World Organization of Volleyball for the Disabled (WOVD – now known as World ParaVolley) for 2012-2016. He served on Jury at the London 2012 Paralympics for Sitting Volleyball and will again be on jury in June 2014 for the ParaVolley World Championships. He pioneered USA Volleyball on the Internet, helping Tom Jack develop the original site, one of the first 1,000 websites listed on Yahoo, and still contributes the usenet group Rec.Sport.Volleyball. From 1987 to 1991 he was the tournament director for the U.S. Jr. Olympic Volleyball Championships and began the U.S. Junior Olympic Beach Volleyball Championships in 1993, directing them until 2000. He also designed and directed the Nike VolleyVan program with 4 years of daily clinics in the lower 48 states, and currently directs the MVP project, working to get a "Million Volleyball Participants connected to USA Volleyball. For that, he developed a series of CDs, with animated drills, skill posters, videos and dozens of articles for growing the game for youth, juniors and adults, now containing 7.5 GB of information on the 2013-2016 USAV Sport Kit DVD.

As a player he has participated in 16 U.S. Open Championships, and was a 7 time Regional Champion. He also has played professionally with the Denver Comets in the old International Volleyball Association, and a year in Italy for the Alessandria Volleyball Club. Recently he competed for the Time Lords in the 55 & over division, 36 years after his first US Open in 1973. In 2004, he finished in the USA Outdoor National Championships, in the top 15 of the Men's BB, playing with his son, Cody, and has won several King of the Mountain Father Son Doubles tournaments in Colorado. He returned to Junior Olympic Volleyball coaching when his children wanted to play, and his daughter McKenzie's 13 and under team in the Stellar VBC won the Bronze medal at the 2007 US Jr. Olympics in Minneapolis, MN. She was a member of Cheyenne Mountain High School's volleyball team which won four straight state titles in 2008-2011 and now plays for Bowdoin College 2012-2016. He coached his son Cody's 2010 Palmer High School team in the Colorado State Boys HS league. Cody was a member of the 2010 USA Junior National Training team, and is a starter for Princeton's men's varsity program, making All American in his sophomore year and leading the nation in kills per set. John also has coached lacrosse for the Cheyenne Mtn LAX Boys and Girls teams since 2000.

His main goal is to help make coaches more efficient, positive and creative, no matter what level - 7 year olds in an elementary school program or National team players and programs. He challenges old ways of thinking and help coaches create what they need, while having fun in the process. John has a BA in Biology and Economics received from The Colorado College in 1974, and from 1996 he was a single dad, raising his kids alone. His pastimes beside volleyball include fly-fishing, writing, skiing, lacrosse, mountaineering, upland game hunting, deep-sea fishing and travel. John can be reached at USA Volleyball – 719.228.6800 and [john.kessel@usav.org](mailto:john.kessel@usav.org)





## Current Activities:

International Volleyball Federation Level IV/Course Instructor (since 1986) [www.fivb.org](http://www.fivb.org)

Director of Development and board member for World ParaVolley. (WOVD) – [www.wovd.info](http://www.wovd.info)

Secretary, NORCECA Technical and Coaches Commission, 2000-2016. [www.norceca.org](http://www.norceca.org)

Jury member, 2014 ParaVolley World Championships –Sitting Volleyball Paralympic Qualifier.

USA Volleyball Director of Sport Development - Staff liaison to the USA Deaf National Volleyball Teams and the World Organization for Disabled Volleyball, Special Olympics International, National Parks and Recreation Assoc., Positive Coaching Alliance, Girl Scouts USA Sports, Starlings USA, YMCA/YWCA, and many other national volleyball programs (including the Leave a Ball Behind program), and the USAV Diversity, Grassroots, Sports Medicine and Performance, and Disabled Volleyball Commissions - [www.usavolleyball.org](http://www.usavolleyball.org)

Author of The Coach's Encyclopedia, the Coaches Guide to Beginning Volleyball Programs, The Junior Olympic Volleyball Program Guidebook, Collegiate Recruiting Guide, IMPACT Manual, IMPACT Plus Manual, Summer Camps Success, Thoughts & Quotes for Coaches, Kessel's Krazy Kollection, Places to Play, Minivolley 4 Youth, USAV Boys/NIRSA/Youth/Beach/Disabled/Girls Development SporKit DVDs, and more.

USOC/US Paralympics – Sponsor Trainings, Olympic University lecturer, Symposium speaker for Developing Amazing Leaders (2007-14), Paralympic Military Sports Outreach training for coaches and players, Tournament Director – Wounded Warrior Games (2010-2013)

USAV Blog “Growing the Game Together” the 2nd most popular blog on the USOC TeamUSA website the last 4 years. - <http://www.teamusa.org/USA-Volleyball/Grassroots/Grow-The-Game-Blog>

USA Coaches Accreditation Program Level III Charter Cadre Instructor since 1988.

Positive Coaching Alliance Double Goal Coach Instructor – [www.positivecoach.org](http://www.positivecoach.org)

Keynote Speaker/Clinician for USA Shooting's National Symposium, US Synchronized Swimming International Symposium, USA Track and Field's National Pole Vaulting Summit, Vail Ski and Snowboard's Annual Coaches clinic (6 times), and 24 State Volleyball Association's annual clinics.

Keynote Speaker/Clinician for FIVB World Volleyball in the Schools Symposiums Tokyo, Japan – 1985; Montreal, Canada – 1995, Saskatoon, Canada - 2007; Bangkok, Thailand - 2013

Clinician for the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, Native American Sports Council, National Parks and Recreation Association, AAHPERD Regional & National Sessions, Boys and Girls Clubs of America, Boys Scouts of America, National High School Federation, AVCA, YMCA, YWCA, USA Disabled Sports, Athletic Business Convention, Positive Coaching Alliance Against the Grain, Character Counts Youth Summit, Girl Scouts USA, NCAA National Youth Sports Program, Police Athletic League, USA Volleyball/US Olympic Committee national clinics, USAFA National Character and Leadership Symposium, Olympic University Lecturer on Listening and Change topics.

Head Coach - USA National Development Camps -18 years

USAV Regional Official, since 1975

Member of Mensa, AAPHERD, National Strength Coaches Association, American Volleyball Coaches Association

## Never Let Someone Steal Your Confidence

March 24, 2014

Over the weekend I got an email from a coach/friend from another country, with the subject line “Needing Advice” – In short, his daughter’s team won every game/set she got to play in, and lost every one she did not, yet the coach played her less as the tournament went on. At tourney’s end, she (not the parent), spoke with the coach, who said she was as good as the other players who played more. Her response was two-fold with the first part being - “Well your actions speak louder than your words....” Food for thought for every coach saying such lines – like the current commercial on why Pinocchio would be a poor motivational speaker, it is too bad coach’s noses do not grow when speaking to their players. The second part of the response is what I want to address here however – for she said *“Well I had little confidence in myself before the weekend, you’ve made sure I have none left.”*



Like a movie flashback, I found myself pulling over the car after a lifetime family friend and great volleyball player, Kristin Richards Hildebrand, said “I’m so stupid...” I [wrote this “letter” to her](#), but until now did not say who the athlete was. Kristin babysat my kids Cody and McKenzie when they were little, and like any extended volleyball family friend has been a part of their lives since they were born – Knowing that this pic will make them cringe, you can see Kristin’s spirit in this pic with them (for the record, Mac is now 5’10” with no braces or glasses, and Cody is 6’5” and has a “fan club”... ) Since then Kristin lost her mom - the beyond wonderful Lori Richards to a valiant fight with cancer, married a great person who happens to be as good a volleyball player - Ty Hildebrand, and has gone on to play professionally in many nations. She also just happens to start and captain our USA Women’s National team. So some of my response to ANY player doubting themselves is found in my letter to Kristin.

I told my friend I would write his daughter via my blog, as I see this problem of coaches stealing the love of this game away from their players too often. I addressed it from the coach’s side with this article – [Primum non nocere](#). This one is for any player who is doubting themselves. As Marcus Garvey wisely said *“With confidence, you have won before you have started.”*

First off, every player needs to focus on what they can control – by choosing a team sport, you lose control of many things – your uniform, your position, your playing

time and much more. The key things you CAN still control include your - 1. Attitude 2. Effort 3. Communication 4. Conditioning 5. Serve 6. Learning. I covered these keys and a couple more in depth in [this blog](#) to my son as he headed to Princeton.

You see, every problem you encounter, including this one, has three parts. It has a past, a present and a future. Can you control the past? No, so a third of your problem is gone. Can you control the future? If you think yes, truly control it, then let’s go into the stock market, make money for USA Volleyball to grow and start pro leagues here in the USA. The fact is, you can’t control the future, so another third of your problem is gone. What you have to focus on is simply right here, right now. The present. Today. This hour. So with that focus in mind, here are a dozen confidence keeping tips for any player.

1. **Become – Don’t Compare** – Too much time is spent comparing yourself to others. There will only be one champion or six starters. What needs to happen is that you work to become the best you can be. If you compare yourself there is always

someone taller, smarter, faster, etc. than you. And remember, NEVER let someone tell you, you can't – just because they can't.

2. **Body Language Matters** – When you are on the court, if you hang your head or let your body show frustration, disappointment or any unconfident action, because you play volleyball, every one of your opponents see it. Not just one person “guarding” you like in other sports – every other foe is looking thru the net to see your actions, as is their team bench. Stay outwardly strong. Amy Cuddy has [this important stuff](#) to say about body language.
3. **Evict the Excuse Family** – Every time you give yourself an excuse, you are weakening yourself, and failing to take control of your physical and mental skills. Whatever happened, happened, and no excuses are needed, just resilience to move on the next point and always striving to perform your best.
4. **Work to be Better, not Perfect** – To expect perfection is both very selfish and totally unrealistic. The process is what matters, and errors are part of learning. Work on getting better each and every day of practice or competition, and your average will go up. You will still play half the time below your average. So just stay the course when that happens as it will. During this process, don't worry about what the coach thinks. Hard to do, but important to do – just work to be better. Better, after all is the enemy of good.
5. **Refrain from Paralysis by Analysis** – You can't play well if you are constantly analyzing every action. Save that for practice, and when you go play. PLAY.
6. **Ask yourself - What's the Worst that can occur?** This is a game. There is far more to life than sport, and far worse things in life than missing a serve or losing a game. Enjoy the chance to compete and move on, win or lose.
7. **Act as if and it will be, reality for you and me** – It's that simple. Henry Ford put it this way – “Whether you think you can or think you can't, you are right.” Act confident and you will be more confident.
8. **Be Relentlessly Positive** – You see, every failure is just a stepping stone to success. Today's circumstances do not determine your success, unless you stop believing in yourself. No matter what others say, stay your course of what you believe in – and that is you.
9. **GRIT and Growth Mindset Matters** – To see setbacks as part of the learning process develops a core part of confidence, and that is resilience. Listen to this grit research from [National Public Radio](#) and [to this interview](#) by Carol Dweck on the value of a growth mindset as these are building blocks of true confidence.
10. **Use the Power of Music** – There are so many songs that simply remind you through the joy and power of sound how lucky you are to be even practicing in a sport you enjoy or even love. When the match is over, listen to those words if the words of a coach are not empowering or building your confidence. You get to pick the music you want to listen to, not the coach.
11. **It's not About Winning or Losing, it's About what is Important** – By choosing to play sports, one fact will always be happening – half the teams playing lose. Every match, set, game, point, there is a winner and a loser. Accept that fact and focus on what is important – the lessons beyond loss or victory, but how you conduct yourself and give attention to what is important to you.
12. **Be Honest with Yourself** - There are probably other things you can do to be more confident beyond these ideas, however it all starts with being honest with yourself. As Vince Poscente said “*Be honest with yourself, and you will find the motivation to do what you advise others to do.*”

If you have some other tips for stopping anyone from taking your confidence, we would love to have them shared in the comment section. Citius, Altius, Fortius and best wishes on and off the court.



March 06, 2014



*BUT NOBODY IS GOING TO OUTHUSTLE US....* That has always been my motto, so much that some of my teams have heard it so many times in huddles they say it in their sleep I bet. What I have to say with great pride is how I saw my son put words into action last week in the first Princeton victory over Penn State in 36 meetings – I think Cody was about five years old the last time the Tigers defeated the Nittany Lions (and for those wondering what a Nittany is, [CLICK HERE](#)).

You see, when you choose to do a team sport, the outcome is simply out of your control. You can play your best ever, as Cody did the weekend before getting 26 kills and hitting .553, but this is a TEAM game and the Tigers lost 0-3. This time the TEAM won, with everyone playing in the positive, and the Tigers won the serve-serve reception battle. Stats show 11 aces and only 16 errors compared to Penn State's two aces and 11 errors. What does not show in the stats is the number of overpasses the Princeton serve generated, which were turned into one contact kills by the Tigers at the net, something I would estimate to be six for Princeton and a couple for PSU. Thus the reception percentage for the Tigers was .978 vs. .864

This however is especially about hustle – for it makes up for many a mistake. It is in every player's control – how far and fast you are willing to pursue a teammate's errant pass – and it ties into one of the most important articles I feel I have ever written – "[From Positive to Perfection](#)." When you dig or pass a tough jump serve, you can pass it low 30 feet, and everyone watches it zoom by, or you can make a 30 foot error and dig/pass the ball UP. [Tony Ensbury](#), the Princeton libero, is superb at this – moving into the danger zone with no fear and doing whatever it takes to make his dig go UP as the photo which then gets us back to hustle...for Cody went from right front to into the Princeton Band in the stands waaaaaay beyond left back. "Relentless Pursuit" it is called, and you can see it in any of the "X" Digs in "Y" Minutes video clips on YouTube – [my favorite being this one](#).

My second favorite statement to develop in athletes and their leadership skillsets is "*Hustle beats talent when talent doesn't hustle.*" I have written before about "What a Player can Control" – but the incredible importance of hustle just cannot be overemphasized. It is an attitude. It is something as a coach you can catch them doing right, praise, and even celebrate and honor. I carry a roll of 2"

wide painters tape in my coaching tools ([CLICK HERE](#) for the rest of my stuff) and we will stop practicing at special times when a player exhibits the level of hustle or learning that deserves recognition. At the point of action, for instance a distance of pursuit off the court that is wonderful, I put down a "Hollywood Star" – the painters tape first and a written note by marking the name of the player, date, and reason for the star. A round of applause and then we continue on with practice, looking to catch them doing things "extra



right.” The first time a player rips a jump serve, or successfully performs a new skill in training can also be a reason for a Hollywood Star. As most programs share the court, you can peel the tape off the floor at practice’s end and mount it on posterboard to keep, or “store” them inside the pole padding, or on the wall of the storage closet. In both beach and other training, I have also tapped a players arm, catching them being good, with a dry erase marker during practice, and see who I caught hustling, or leading in other ways the most.

The other idea I have used is “Glow in the Dark Stars,” as volleyball players do not have helmets. You can get them online in containers, small to large plastic stars. You take a fine sharpie and write on it the date and reason, and give them out at the end of practice. They are for when you have seen the effort desired, new ideas or leadership shared, a new skill finally attempted or achieved, or whatever else matters to you as a developer of better people. They get put up in their bedroom and shine each night showing when you caught them doing things right, long after the season is over. Indeed, I have had players scrap them off the wall/ceiling and take them to college.



One of the unique things about our sport is that while the court itself is defined at 9x18 meters, once the ball is served, the playing space turns into the whole world – or until a wall, bench or crowd stops you. This first picture I took of Cody running into the Penn State bench from his side of the court, was followed just a few points later by him making a 75 foot dash into the Princeton Band the other way. Then still in the same set, my friend John Titus took the second picture of Cody pursuing yet another errant dig into a group of John’s 15 and under team who came to learn

from the match. So who led Princeton in digs that match? Yeah, Tony and Cody...as defense is how you get a lead in our sport, by digging—setting---and killing the ball, you get what we used to call a point, not a sideout. Cody got two of the three up, not the PSU bench attempt, and none of those saves counted as a dig – it is just a teammate doing one of the most important parts of the game of volleyball – BETTERING THE BALL. This too is hustle, saving or setting an errant pass or dig, and making it better, or saving/killing an errant set from your setter or any teammate doing their best with the second contact. GREAT teams better the ball.

One of our best USAV coaches at the Juniors level, BJ Leroy, says his hustle line is *"The easiest thing to do in this game is work to work hard... hitting, serving passing digging blocking setting are HARD...Hustle is easy."*

In the end, this is really about developing character and leadership in each of your players. I can tell you that Cody’s teammate Tony, who made our USA Junior National Team last summer, came in to those practices an hour early, and stayed after practice was over, to get more reps and learning. I know that George Anders writes in his book The Rare Find (thanks djc), that Michael Jordan, yes, THAT world’s best basketball player ever, when he was a freshman in college would ask scouts questions like “What should I do to get better? What do you think of my game?” Working hard in something you love makes it easy. Keep the flame of wonderment, joy and curiosity alive, even when practicing, and keep learning from every mistake that is simply part of the learning process.



In closing, when you get out there and do things that matter, you will no doubt have doubters, critics who will even hide behind the anonymity found online. Take heart in a leader who came long before you and shared these important words, and keep striving to do what is right in worthwhile causes that you love- both on and off the field of play.

*“It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his*

*place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.”*

— [Theodore Roosevelt](#)

So be true to yourself, focus on hustle and effort, be honest, sincere and humble – to others...but most of all TO YOURSELF. In the end, that is what matters most.

A parting shot of Princeton celebrating that I took at the match's end that my bet every coach here has a similar moment in time from your work with both teams and individuals. Congrats to you all and feel free to comment to let us know how else we can better teach growing the game together and the importance of hustle.



If you want to see more of my motor drive pictures from seeing Princeton play five matches in eight days, head on over to any of these links:

[Penn State Univ 2014 – Sets 1-4](#)

[PSU Set 5 and Celebration/Talks to Fans](#)

[Saint Francis 2014 3-0](#)

[NJIT 2014 3-0](#)

[Sacred Heart 3-1](#)

[Harvard 2-3](#)

## Coach Albert Einstein's Best Quotes

February 14, 2014

I love to read and learn from people much smarter than me. Dr. Daniel Kahnemann, Jon Brockman (visit the [www.edge.org](http://www.edge.org) often and you will be thankful even if your head spins at times), John Wooden, and Albert Einstein are examples. Below is my current list of quotes attributed to Mr. E=Mc2 which made me want to be coached by him in anything....and that he worked for so many years at Princeton means I got to meet him as an impersonator on a train from seeing Cody play last season...fun...

[You have to learn the rules of the game. And then you have to play better than anyone else.](#)

[Learn from yesterday, live for today, hope for tomorrow. The important thing is not to stop questioning.](#)

[A person who never made a mistake never tried anything new.](#)

[If you can't explain it simply, you don't understand it well enough.](#)

I never teach my pupils, I only provide them the conditions in which they can learn.

[Everything that can be counted does not necessarily count; everything that counts cannot necessarily be counted.](#)

[Make everything as simple as possible, but not simpler.](#)

[The true sign of intelligence is not knowledge but imagination.](#)

[The only source of knowledge is experience.](#)

[It is the supreme art of the teacher to awaken joy in creative expression and knowledge.](#)

[Anyone who doesn't take truth seriously in small matters cannot be trusted in large ones either.](#)

[Logic will get you from A to B. Imagination will take you everywhere.](#)

[If people are good only because they fear punishment, and hope for reward, then we are a sorry lot indeed.](#)

[Once we accept our limits, we go beyond them.](#)

Genius is 1% talent and 99% percent hard work

Most teachers waste their time by asking questions which are intended to discover what a pupil does not know, whereas the true art of questioning has for its purpose to discover what the pupil knows or is capable of knowing.

[Most people say that it is the intellect which makes a great scientist. They are wrong: it is character.](#)

[Weakness of attitude becomes weakness of character.](#)

[The only real valuable thing is intuition.](#)



I think and think for months and years. Ninety-nine times, the conclusion is false. The hundredth time I am right.

I have no special talent. I am only passionately curious.

Intellectuals solve problems, geniuses prevent them.

The only thing that interferes with my learning is my education.

It is a miracle that curiosity survives formal education.

Education is what remains after one has forgotten what one has learned in school.

Insanity: doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.

I think Coach Einstein would have been a very good volleyball coach, given what insights he shares in these quotes...as they all apply on so many levels, relatively speaking or not. Of course, there are two sideouts to every story....thanks to the old school volleyball crowd. Let us know how we can help you grow the game together.

## The Game Will Find A Way

December 15, 2013

This blog serves to announce a *new* section to USA Volleyball website, [The Game Will Find a Way](#). This page is just one of the many great offerings under the [USAV Grassroots](#) section – our request is for your submissions of photos showing you and others creating ways to play our sport of a lifetime – despite not having an official court, or even ball.

I awoke in Ft Walton Beach, FL this week, to dawnlight in this part of Florida that somehow resides in the central time zone, which means morning comes very early, 6:19a officially, even in late November (and it gets dark early too – 4:45p, as you will see in bit). It was not however the light, but the joy of kids voices playing volleyball on the USA Beach CAP court that we set up the day before.

Phillip Bryant, the piped piper of all volleyball here in the Gulf Shores Region of USA Volleyball, is creating great events here in this part of the gulf – from hosting the junior and collegiate sand championships in the spring, to this coaching education program. Ali Lamberson and Jon Aharoni are here to teach the Beach CAP program, Bill Neville and Don Burroughs for indoor CAP, while Phil, Sam, Dave, Dan and others are here doing a concurrent quad and doubles person tournament for the kids. I came down two days early to do clinics for kids and coaches, flying out at 6am and just getting ahead of a snowstorm back in Colorado that caused over 150 car accidents that same morning. Day one included a three hour clinic for 35 kids in an after school program and a three hour coaches clinic. The gym had only one net, but by the time Phil and I were done, we had six youth courts set up, using nets and ribbon, so each grade got to play and practice on their own court. When the director of Park and Rec for the city came by he said – “wow, I have never seen so many kids on task...”

The next day was a beach training and a treasure hunt for kids. Beaches with courts always set up allow for volleyball players of any age to go play and learn when just three other friends are available. I covered this important change in gym tradition- keeping just ONE volleyball court up permanently in every gym in the world – in my blog “Can We Please Have a Net?” Treasure hunts however require ingenuity and some shovels – as we buried balls, water bottles, shirts and more into the sand earlier during the day, leaving only ribbons sticking out of the sand. That evening, flashlights glowing in hand, some 30 kids searched the courts to find the buried treasures, after an inspiring talk from the head pirate talking Phil. There may still be a ball or two in the sand I think, if you get to Ft Walton, dig around. Jon showed a fun beach knock out warm up game along the same lines, where players sprint to grab volleyballs on the other endline, with 1 less ball each time than there is per athlete. When you get to the final two competitors, the others bury the last ball, and make dozens of fake ball burial sites in the sand, and watch the search elevate to new heights for the final volleyball.

The highlight of the weekend, other than sharing beach volleyball teaching secrets with everyone attending the clinic, was playing on the double sized court we built. Using a four nets on a rope system to make a 60 foot single net, and 2x4s made into “X” type standards, and joining two normal courtline sets into one, twelve course members played volleyball on the sand. I filmed it to show adults what it feels like to be a young child playing on an adult court. You can see the final video [here](#).

So please send in your links to videos, or your photos showing how the game found a way to be played over a “net” wherever you might have been in this wonderful world. Just a few of the examples I have seen are below, to give you an idea of what others have done to play our sport for a lifetime in places that might be seen as less than “ideal.”



Cook Islands, over a tree limb playing 1 v 1 – check out the “referee” in the blue shirt.



East High School, 4 v 4 over a chainlink fence at Karch Kiraly's alma mater.

Vanuatu kids playing 3 v 3 with a rope "net" and bamboo for their X standards.



US Air Force Academy "Arnold Hall" with 16 ParaVolley courts set up with ribbon "nets" and chairs with 50lb free weights on the seat for "standards" – and blue painter's tape to line the courts.



Cody and McKenzie Kessel playing in Alaska on grass with 2x4 X standards and a rope net – and shoes and socks for lines...I think it is about 11 pm...lol.



South Carolina Palmetto Region – 2 v 2 monarch of the court – “Losers Become the Net” version (click [HERE](#) to see the versions of this great warm up/recess game being played on sand in Italy, grass in Vail Colorado, and a parking lot in Cheyenne, Wyoming.)



Doubles in a soccer stadium in Poland, a soccer net top bar is just about the same height as a men’s net.

A cul-de-sac game over a rope in Boulder, Colorado.





A balloon game of 1 v 1 over containers as the net – check out the great 1 meter back row attack line!



Pisa, Italy 3 v 3 MiniVolley with a ribbon.

The FIVB has 220 nations as members, including USA Volleyball which was one of the 12 founding members of this International Federation. They also see great ways of the game will find a way in their new posting [HERE](#). It is so great to be a part of NORCECA, our zone, and the FIVB in growing the game together worldwide.

So send in those ideas on how to grow the game to [john.kessel@usav.org](mailto:john.kessel@usav.org) – especially the video links and photos of how the game found a way in your area – tell us where and who and we will share on the grassroots section featuring all your contributions.



## Videos Used in My 2013 Teachings

December 18, 2013

In my annual tradition of giving back to the sport in December, click through these videos which I have on my laptop and use in my clinics and practice sessions both at home and around the world....Most of these I previously shared in our USAV Sport Development's "Growing the Game Together" newsletter which we put out twice a month. If you are not getting this newsletter, contact [info@usav.org](mailto:info@usav.org) and ask to be included. Enjoy!

**Gonzalo Morales from Peru** – A five year old shows the power of "street play," in this case, learning to use a skateboard. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9FknWZTh8Gg>

**Understanding Talent** - This film was developed by sportscotland to help young athletes understand what 'talent' is and how you can get good at sport – a choice, not genetics. This is a must show at your parent meetings this fall. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LfUvchfrcS0&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LfUvchfrcS0&feature=player_embedded)

**The Myth of Wrist Snap/Rolling the Wrist** – Malcom Gladwell addresses this myth in tennis, and notes how information from world class players who can perform but not be able to explain accurately what they are doing. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fXGragWF00M>

**Wright's Law** – A very unique teacher named Jeffrey Wright uses wacky experiments to teach children about the universe, and in a way coaches can emulate, uses his own personal story to teach them the true meaning of life. See the video at <http://bit.ly/UFPs6L>

**Imagine** – For great video series set (<http://bit.ly/19gripY>) regarding pushing your own limits, Darren Roberts from Red Bull UK spent two full years working on the video series with Danny Macaskill. It started as a concept, was sketched on a piece of graph paper, then evolved to the final production you can see here: <http://bit.ly/16Jdt0Y>. Be sure to watch the "bloopers" at the end and <http://bit.ly/1cLuAVY> for behind-the-scenes clips.

**Play Without Thinking** – Texas Tech Head Football Coach Kliff Kingsbury throws out the playbook in this great video (<http://es.pn/168X0nE>) look of a different, more creative, more intuitive way to play football. Employing unorthodox practice techniques and a blinding pace, Kingsbury, who at 33 is the youngest head coach in the BCS, is trying to get his team to play on a very pure and instinctual level. "We do not have a playbook," says Kingsbury in the film. "We draw it for 'em and they write it down and we've found they learn it better."

**Beach Volleyball Partnerships to Ponder** – A very funny clip featuring Kerri Walsh Jennings in a partnership with a rather interesting male teammate. <http://bit.ly/12jVjp7>

**Let's See how the Adults Like it** – Imagine what a 10-year-old feels like playing on a full size court and net height. In this video (<http://bit.ly/1dVSgmR>), a group of adults experienced what it is like to be one of the kids playing soccer on a full size pitch, by using a supersized goal and field of play at St. George's Park, Scotland. This inspired me to film a similar video for USA Volleyball, which can be seen here: <http://www.teamusa.org/USA-Volleyball/Grassroots/Videos>. USA Hockey will film a similar video this winter at its USA Pond Hockey Championships, bulldozing a double sized rink and building oversized goals for the adult to skate and play on.

**A Journey to Mastery** – ALL coaches should share this one with their teams and staff – even though it is about mastery of the yo-yo: "If I make enough efforts with a huge passion, there is no impossible..." <http://huff.to/143To9p>

**Waiting for Lightning** - Maybe the best video on deliberate practice of the decade – I bought three copies online to give out as gifts and teach with. <http://www.waitingforlightningthemovie.com/#home>

**Volley All Festival Examples** - This is the period that the FIVB promotes their Volley All Festivals – if you click on the slide show you will see some great examples of how other nations are growing the game around the world! [http://www.fivb.org/EN/Development/Volley\\_All\\_Festival.asp](http://www.fivb.org/EN/Development/Volley_All_Festival.asp)



**The Little Team** – A Spanish coach forwarded this video (<http://bit.ly/17U2IfR>) to USA Volleyball Sport Development and we passed it along to Dan Coyle at [www.thetalentcode.com](http://www.thetalentcode.com), who shares his thoughts and link to this great video about sport for children. It is well worth the viewing!

**Escaping Education's Death Valley** - Sir Ken Robinson outlines three principles crucial for the human mind to flourish -- and how current education culture works against them. In a funny, stirring talk he tells us how to get out of the educational "death valley" we now face, and how to nurture our youngest generations with a climate of possibility. View it at <http://bit.ly/10IJ7e2>.

**Every Kid Needs a Champion** – Rita Pierson, a teacher for 40 years, once heard a colleague say, "They don't pay me to like the kids." Her response: "Kids don't learn from people they don't like." A rousing call to coaches to believe in their athletes and connect with them. [http://www.ted.com/talks/rita\\_pierson\\_every\\_kid\\_needs\\_a\\_champion.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/rita_pierson_every_kid_needs_a_champion.html)

**100 Digs in 2 Minutes** – This version has GREAT slow motion to see what is happening at high speed to dig the ball UP!, plus who doesn't like Cotton Eyed Joe? <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k2ZccARBZuc>

**Karch Kiraly's Google+ Hangout Video Interview** – Last month eight lucky fans got a chance to spend time online with Karch asking questions no doubt just like yours would have been, and Karch responded with great insights as always, Check it out at: <http://www.teamusa.org/USA-Volleyball/Features/2013/April/22/Watch-Karch-Kiraly-Google-Hangout.aspx>

**SNL Parody of Coaching Skills** – In IMPACT we apply the "TV" or "YouTube" test to see if a coach's conduct is appropriate to even be seen broadcast. Also known as the "Gramma Test," it asks what would your grandmother say if she saw a video of you doing whatever. Recently actions by a collegiate basketball coach brought Saturday Night Live to parody a coach's "skills" at teaching a sport in a way worth reflection by all coaches of any sport. <http://usat.ly/YJoTk2>

**The Skill of Self Confidence** - A 14-minute TEDx video <http://bit.ly/10GDkEX> by Dr. Ivan Joseph that applies to all ages of volleyball players.

**For the Bullied and Beautiful** - By turn hilarious and haunting, poet Shane Koyczan puts his finger on the pulse of what it's like to be young and ... different. "To This Day," his spoken-word poem about bullying, captivated millions as a viral video (created, crowdsource-style, by 80 animators). Here, he gives a glorious live reprise with backstory and violin accompaniment by Hannah Epperson. [http://www.ted.com/talks/shane\\_koyczan\\_to\\_this\\_day\\_for\\_the\\_bullied\\_and\\_beautiful.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/shane_koyczan_to_this_day_for_the_bullied_and_beautiful.html)

**Title IX Voices** – February is Women in Sports month and this clip shares from worthwhile voices sharing their thoughts about sport for women. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1I\\_Kf7Ebrs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1I_Kf7Ebrs)

**Never Too Young to Start Right** - Sports that have closed motor program loops have an advantage in that you can start being successful quite young. Volleyball is an open motor program skill set except in serving, but this cute clip shows how fun sport can be for all in the family when starting young. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qmMbm78sEB4>

**People Are Awesome** - This inspiring video <http://bit.ly/VQXvB5> shows some of the amazing things people can do in sport and life, showing in both slow and regular motion. It is a great pre-tourney motivator for any team.

**Fantastic Volleyball Save to Point** – When coaches speak about relentless pursuit and never giving up, this save in a Canadian men's match the first week of February 2013 sets a new standard worth sharing with your team. <http://bit.ly/Y6NmKL>

**Life of a Club Volleyball Official** – Take a look at a humorous video <http://bit.ly/15995Ji> at what many club volleyball officials go through. If you missed it, my son created one on a coach/parent meeting that is also funny but true – and can be seen here: <http://www.teamusa.org/USA-Volleyball/Grassroots/Videos>

**MiniVolley in Italy** – USA Volleyball has been working with FIPAV, the Italian Volleyball Federation since 1982 on youth volleyball projects. This video shows what they are currently doing with sponsor Kinder, their national teams and youth

volleyball. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GNID8rfhEGo> USA Volleyball staff joined the youth leaders in this summer and one of this year's GTGT blogs was on the lessons learned there.

**Kids Need Structure** – Former Pentagon Chief of Staff Colin Powell delivers this excellent 20 minute TED talk on the importance of structure in kids lives – the parallels to practice and competition experiences are right on... [http://www.ted.com/talks/colin\\_powell\\_kids\\_need\\_structure.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/colin_powell_kids_need_structure.html)

**The 2012 Sports Illustrated Kids SportsKids of the Year**, brothers Connor and Cayden Long who run triathlons together are featured in this inspiring story - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Thak3gBPgXU>

**Redefine Your Mission** - U.S. Paralympics, in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, has released a new public service announcement (PSA) to urge Veterans and service members with a physical disability to get involved in community sport programs and opportunities. It features U.S. Navy Veteran Michael Johnston, a 2016 Paralympic Games hopeful in paratriathlon, who used sports in his rehabilitation after losing his left leg below the knee following a motorcycle accident in 2003. Redefine your mission, then find your sport and get involved. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dCIU3EP6el>

**Ideas in Using Pattern Interruption** - Learn about pattern interruption and other great ways to be a better teacher and coach in this recent New York Times video. <http://bit.ly/UFPs6L>

**John Wooden** – If you are a new coach, take our advice and read anything coach Wooden, the legendary UCLA men's basketball coach, has written. The same goes if you are an experienced coach. In this 17 minute video he reflects on the differences between winning and succeeding. <http://bit.ly/ZUq5U1>

**Powerful Paralympic Story** - From Liberty Mutual Insurance's Responsible Sports series, a powerful educational video on one athlete's journey to Paralympic Success. <http://responsibility-project.libertymutual.com/films/responsibility-sports-anjali#fbid=D8STAev6fCv>

**TRIPLE Six Pack** - Just fun to show your team not one, or two but three head shots from one attack, ah the randomness of the game... <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xoRNeK47yrk>

## To Live in Excellence

July 28, 2013

Lately there have been some parents and players visiting our USA Volleyball offices who are in town for High Performance camps. It is a treat to show these passionate members of our volleyball family around as they usually have no idea of how much history and work goes on behind the scenes to create both excellent junior programs (I am still wanting to return to the term Junior Olympic Volleyball and Junior Olympic Beach Volleyball, as that is exactly what happens in USA Volleyball programming), and Olympic/Paralympic medals.



I wanted to remind all in our sport, no matter where you are from in the world, that our offices are open Monday through Friday 8-5 pm, for you to come visit.



## Holiday Gifts for Volleyball Leaders & Athletes

December 21, 2012

So another calendar year of growing the game together comes to a close. Thus it is again time for some “gifts” to all of you who are coaches, club directors, officials, players and of course parents. Videos to download, books to read and things to consider for your New Year’s volleyball resolutions; hopefully all new to most of you, with thanks for USA Volleyball and the Sport Development & Region Services departments especially.

### GIFT BOOKS FROM USA VOLLEYBALL

Thanks to the hard work of this year’s USAV Sport Development interns, who learned lots more about our game by reading and compiling my last 5 years of blogs, you can now download two versions of ALL the blogs in book form.

The Growing the Game Together - Coaches & Club Director version can be downloaded by clicking [HERE](#), while its companion volume Growing the Game Together – Players and Parent edition can be downloaded [HERE](#). Unlike other “ebooks” that promise you “secrets” and more at a cost, both of these books are free, just like the USAV Minivolley book (with more than 30,000 copies in print, available [HERE](#)) for coaching 3-14 year olds, and the USAV Youth Coloring books (Click [HERE](#)) to get that for the little ones in your extended volleyball family. I will be adding several new blogs over the holiday, and the plan is to update both books as these also are added to the grassroots section of the website.

Finally, as to what book I am reading right now, it The Final Word, about the New Zealand All Black coach, Graham Henry, as we helped this great team and program and I am proud to say that a long time volleyball/mental coach and friend Gil Enoka, was also part of the Kiwis finally winning the World Cup in Rugby [www.grahamhenrybook.com](http://www.grahamhenrybook.com) ... We hope ALL these books will help you become better at the most important skill for you in the gym, being a better teacher of the game, while also helping your players with their most important skill – learning.

### VIDEOS

Last year’s blog “*Videos and Worth a Thousand Words*” [www.teamusa.org/USA-Volleyball/Features/2011/December/14/Videos-and-Principles-Worth-Many-Thousands-of-Words.aspx](http://www.teamusa.org/USA-Volleyball/Features/2011/December/14/Videos-and-Principles-Worth-Many-Thousands-of-Words.aspx) remains the same, with my top video clips I use in my clinics around the USA and the world. I logged over 100,000 miles this year, now that my nest has emptied with both my kids in college playing volleyball (McKenzie, a freshman, and her Bowdoin Polar Bears tied for 9th in the NCAA Division III championships, losing 13-15 in their match to advance to the final eight, so proud dad). These are the ones I have added to my hard drive, and why...

**Unstoppable** – Canadian Paralympic Committee inspirational video – shot in one take, I have watched this clip about 100 times and it still gives me chills and pride in the work I am doing as development Director for ParaVolley (formerly the WOVD) [www.youtube.com/watch?v=zfmckSFm54w](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zfmckSFm54w).

**Paralympic Inspiration** - New USAV sponsor Liberty Mutual filmed this powerful 15 minute clip on a Paralympian that I think every parent, player and coach should view <http://responsibility-project.libertymutual.com/films/responsibility-sports-anjali#fbid=9RCu9lrQaSk>.

**DIG UP!** – Some of you are starting to see the success which comes from teaching your players to dig to themselves/UP, not back to a partner in “pepper,” as covered in my blog “*The Evolution of Pepper*” [www.teamusa.org/USA-Volleyball/Features/2012/February/29/The-Evolution-of-Pepper.aspx](http://www.teamusa.org/USA-Volleyball/Features/2012/February/29/The-Evolution-of-Pepper.aspx) – These two new versions of international men digging the ball UP are must watches I believe for any level of team - **165 Volleyball Digs in 3**

**Minutes** [www.youtube.com/watch?v=feTX6AIetnM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=feTX6AIetnM)  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=UnDeW5ApYXQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UnDeW5ApYXQ)

**155 Volleyball Digs in 4 Minutes -**

**The Team Behind the Team** – In case you missed our USOC/USAV thank you video in advance of London 2012, we just want to say thanks to all of you for being our team behind the teams... [www.youtube.com/watch?v=BKA-Rkhn0vo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BKA-Rkhn0vo)

**Maximum Contact Net System** – part of our USAV Sport Development/Region Services outreach programming, which thanks again to Proctor and Gamble, we have been able to help get hundreds of PE Teachers and Clubs to change how they set up their nets systems and training for players 4-14 years of age. PE teachers love this way of maximizing their gym space as it also allows them to teach

badminton, tennis and sitting volleyball, all using the same “4 nets on a rope.” [www.youtube.com/watch?v=niy8AEVMoVI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=niy8AEVMoVI) Check it out, and if you want to buy one, or share other ideas with us, just email [mvp@usav.org](mailto:mvp@usav.org)

**Silent Night** – Chuck Rey shared with me this great example of a creative team tradition and support idea... [www.youtube.com/watch?v=LNo9x7KQ4ZI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LNo9x7KQ4ZI)

**The Athlete Machine** – Gotta hand it to Red Bull, they know how to creatively make a video that inspires a kid to do something they love... [www.youtube.com/watch?v=M0jmSsQ5ptw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M0jmSsQ5ptw)

**Zeitgeist 2012: Year in Review** - Another video, like the “People are Awesome” series, compiling the things the human race has done in the past year, which gives me chills...and I expect it will do the same to you too. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=xY\\_MUB8adEQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xY_MUB8adEQ)

**Blake Griffin Volleyball Spike Approach** – So as you watch this second part of the video, where you see NBA star win the dunk contest, tell me what sport he played when younger. With perfect back row attack form, we can show all volleyball players how motor programs are specific, and see how a former volleyball player uses that skill set to dunk over a car...go two minutes in and start watching his “presentation” also.. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=9BA-7csS184](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9BA-7csS184)

**Jamie Escalante – Math Who Needs It** – The passing of the great teacher, Jamie Escalante, means I want all to see how he made math interesting and fun, and how he uses pattern interruption to assist in learning. If he can do it in calculus for gosh sakes, we sure can help our players have higher” volleyball IQ” too. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=dtvC2pA7Lko](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dtvC2pA7Lko)

**11 Year Old Playing Varsity Basketball** - One of the things that “age group” competition has done, is not allow for younger players to learn by playing athletes much older than they are, including against adults. This is not something in for example the international club system, where young players play by skill level, and thus with/against adults. This clip makes me smile... [www.youtube.com/watch?v=H-IOPSSdb6w](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H-IOPSSdb6w)

**Edward Yudenich – 7 Year-old Conductor.** – I often say that coaches set limits on their players...and this kid clearly was not trained in blocked/progression form but allowed to conduct the whole way... [www.youtube.com/watch?v=BNNFtlF9CDE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BNNFtlF9CDE)

## TECHNOLOGY

I dunno, I have shared the information on these great tools in past blogs, and in the last few months shared them again in the *USAV Grow the Game Together* (GTGT) newsletter TECHNOLOGY section, yet in the clinics I recently conducted for USAV Regions in Texas, Washington and Hawaii, when I show them, these wonderful teachers of our game go – “WHAT’S THAT?!!” If you are a USAV member and have not seen the newsletter, let me know and we will look into why, as we send it to over 25,000 coaches/club directors. If you are not a USAV member and would like to get it, email me at [john.kessel@usav.org](mailto:john.kessel@usav.org) and I will add you to our Sport Development list so you too can get it – just let me know where you are growing the game in our world.

**Coaches Eye** – Mentioned in the first edition of the GTGT newsletter, it’s my favorite iPad video recording/playback app for how fast it analyzes and is do easy to draw highlights onto the screen, without any Internet connections needed. [www.coachseye.com](http://www.coachseye.com)

**Ubersense** – Also mentioned earlier this year in a GTGT newsletter, this app is another solid video program which has the advantage of having split screen display. Worth the \$5 also, no doubt.. [www.ubersense.com/](http://www.ubersense.com/)

**Bam Video Delay** - Mentioned in last month’s GTGT newsletter, it lets you set 2-30 second delays on your iPad of what is being videoed. So set it up on a clamp down the net, and have players block a hitter then go see how their timing was...along with a myriad of other uses, as it is like a Tivo unit on your iPad. <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/bam-video-delay/id517673842?mt=8>

**Pocket Radar** – Super handy size, the size of most cell phones. It is not a stopwatch like some apps, but a full-fledged radar gun. To teach great serving, and to help spikers as well, a radar gun gives accurate and specific feedback to each player, so they can intrinsically strive for what they are doing to reach higher speeds. Get it for school volleyball and share the cost with the baseball/softball/lacrosse/hockey teams if need be, but once you get one and put it into your pocket, you may not give it to anyone else! <http://pocketradar.com>

**Bushnell Radar gun** – Much larger option but lower cost for accurate radar measurements in a volleyball practice or competition. [www.amazon.com/Bushnell-Velocity-Speed-Colors-vary/dp/B0002X7V1Q](http://www.amazon.com/Bushnell-Velocity-Speed-Colors-vary/dp/B0002X7V1Q)

**Casio High Speed Cameras** – Blogged about last year, there is a new model out, the Casio EX-ZR100 - it shoots up to 40 Frames per Second and captures slow motion video at 1000 frames per second. Plus it features Full HD 1080p movie recording with stereo sound, and the ability to capture still images while shooting a movie – GREAT tool to teach the subtleties of reading an opponent's spike, set, and serve...[www.amazon.com/Casio-EX-ZR100-Optical-Digital-Black/dp/B004T4510K](http://www.amazon.com/Casio-EX-ZR100-Optical-Digital-Black/dp/B004T4510K)

**Volleyball Ace & Tap Recorder** - Comprehensive stats, Serve and pass ratings, Serve and attack charts Instant consolidations Fast one tap recording for iPhone/iPad and laptops ... [www.ace4vb.com](http://www.ace4vb.com)

**Video Occlusion** – As noted in the blog “STOP Teaching Passing” <http://www.teamusa.org/USA-Volleyball/Features/2011/March/02/STOP-Teaching-Passing.aspx> we simply must get better at teaching our serve receivers to watch the ball from before the server hits it, to right through contact. This was also shared in last year's video gifts, especially this one showing how Ronaldo can read the corner kick and even perform in the dark. We have been teaching this use of video to teach/predict where a player is sending the next contact in IMPACT for a couple of years as well. Last week at presentation by former USAV national team staffer Jamie Morrison, noted that the same thing can be done with video for players, using any video editing program, where you black out the skill set, and ask the

**VertMax** – so this one is NEW....and darn it won't be available till April – but next month I am going to speak at the National Pole Vaulting Summit in Reno, on specificity in training mostly. Peter Vint, USOC Senior Director of Competitive Analysis, Research and Innovation was in my office last week and I asked him where are we in sensors to track real time performance information. Peter helped USA Track and Field this summer (look next month for the USAV ICECP Webinar by Eric Hodgson and Steven Hutchinson in January 2013 for more) take what used to be a six month turn-around time of researchers and get most of the information to the athletes right after their training or performance. This VertMax device will do just that, letting a coach know how many times each athlete has jumped over six inches and the height of each of those jumps – so for attackers/blockers and also jump setters, some info in real time of value. [www.mayfonkathletic.com/](http://www.mayfonkathletic.com/)

**DropBox** – For the past two years my work as a trainer for the Positive Coach Alliance has used this program to keep staff in synch with the material being produced in Palo Alto. It works simply to keep a team, club or even an entire RVA in synch. [www.dropbox.com/](http://www.dropbox.com/) Jamie said the USA team also uses the cloud program SugarSynch – which puts it directly into folders, an advantage over Dropbox when working with a team or club that is across platforms for sure. [www.sugarsync.com/](http://www.sugarsync.com/)

**TIVO, Kinovea, Dartfish Oh My!** – Back in February this blog on the importance of immediate feedback and how Jim Coleman pioneered this work was posted. Worth the reminder of how to make these things happen in your gym. <http://www.teamusa.org/USA-Volleyball/Features/2012/February/26/Jim-Coleman-Impact--Immediate-Feedback-Video-System.aspx> and the value of [www.kinovea.com](http://www.kinovea.com) and [www.dartfish.com](http://www.dartfish.com) was also noted in past GTGT newsletters.



## Blogs that are Making a Difference

April 22, 2014

After sharing with you the importance of the “*Volleyball Coaches and Trainers*” group on Facebook, I went skiing for my last day this season in Vail. It’s a sport I have done all my life, and in no small way, the 54 Colorado 14ers are only rivaled by the 28 ski area options. Fresh powder everywhere, you get time to ride up in a chair or gondola, meet new people sharing your sport from around the world and reflect on how lucky you are to be alive. I wonder if we can make our tournaments change to a game, then take time to sit with the other team’s players and coaches on their bench, then in another game, they come sit on your bench, whether it goes three sets or not. Just to have time to learn about the other amazing people who love our sport too.

Looking down to Ford Field at the base of the ski area, it is hard to believe that in 60 short days, the closest volleyball event that makes this “sharing and meeting” a reality, will be happening on that snow covered grass. The Vail Father’s Day Tournament – something I started over a decade ago with my old friend Leon Fell. There you can play coed on Friday, B-AA on Saturday, then join your son or daughter if they are still in high school, to play against all the other Fathers doing the same. The story that tells my tale was shared on a blog by ESPN High School sports [HERE](#) -and I urge all dads loving this game to play with their son or daughter somehow on Father’s Day. If you can’t get to Vail, enter a doubles men’s division or coed tourney and play with your kid. You deserve it.

So did you know there is an ESPN High School blog? That got me to thinking about the ones that make a difference in my life – on and off the court. So in no particular order, I share my list of blogs I frequent to become a better person and lifelong learner that I am. BTW, I share finds more and more on Twitter so if you are so inclined @JohnKesselUSAV will get you connected that way:

[\*The Talent Code\*](#) – Dan Coyle’s New York Times best-selling book by the same name is kept up-to-date by great articles and finds by this great sportswriter.

[\*Changing the Game Project\*](#) – Soccer player/coach John O’Sullivan’s excellent blog on making all sports better for all kids – always worth the read.

[\*Teaching Life’s Lessons Through Volleyball\*](#) – by Miami University assistant coach Chuck Rey – One of the first volleyball blogs, which is still being added to by a great thinker in our sport.

[\*USAV Arizona Regions Sidelines\*](#) Written by Eric Hodgson, Arizona RVA’s Outreach Director, who also happens to lead my Sport Development Commission, Eric “gets it” and writes about things that not only matter to our sport, but to parenting, playing and making all sports better – with a focus on volleyball of course!

[\*Make Each Day Your Masterpiece\*](#) – Volleyballer4life’s ([Bryan McDermand](#)) blog on our sport that is always worth the read and ponder.

[\*Gold Medal Squared\*](#) – Hall of Fame and coaching legend Carl McGown and his staff are always up to date on the latest research and science of teaching our sport. A look back at past blogs, comments, and other sections are always worthwhile here too.

[\*Brain Pickings\*](#) - Editor Maria Popova, herself a curious mind at large, calls the site a human-powered discovery engine for interestingness, a subjective lens on what matters in the world and why, bringing you things you didn’t know you were interested in — until you are. Founded in 2006 as a humble email digest and eventually brought online, the site was included in the Library of Congress permanent web archive in 2012.

[\*Championship Basketball School Newsletter\*](#) – I have done two summer camps in Lander Wyoming, where some great kids live and do sports. The Ragan family are a remarkable clan, mom Janet head coaching VB while two of her children are in volleyball. Two others are in hoops and son Trevor’s non-blog basketball but motor learning science based newsletter is a favorite one for breaking out of the silos of my sport.

**Sports Performance and Tech Magazine** - Every issue has reads of value to any sport coach or leader. The newest edition has a focus on the spread of analytics in sports and how teams, athletes and coaches are making the most of new data driven approaches. Sections include how FC Barcelona are integrating data into their open sharing culture to maintain their winning mentality; Dan Petersen looks at the importance of mental training in the age old battle of pitcher vs batter in baseball; Richard Angus discusses how the US Olympic team are using data to improve medal prospects in the future and Simon Barton looks at how analytics have made a big impact on the young athletes at the ASPIRE academy in Qatar.

**Mind/Shift** – How We Will Learn - Launched in 2010 by [KQED](#) and [NPR](#), MindShift explores the future of learning in all its dimensions, covering cultural and technology trends, innovations in education, groundbreaking research, education policy, and more. The editor is Tina Barseghian.

**My Aussie Family** – Having lived there as Australian Tech Director, living in each major city from Brisbane to Perth, for months and keeping in touch with great leaders like Tony Naar, the Borgeauds, TC Pho, Peter Bundy and more, I am thankful for the Internet that lets me skype, email and read the neat things happening there. Like a few of these blogs by more of that nation's great leaders.

**Clyde Street** – by Keith Lyon who lives in New South Wales, studies performance analysis, and thinks of himself as an [educational technologist](#), keen to learn from the remarkable people who share their insights and experiences across the web. I love the web of information and insights he ponders.

**At Home on the Court** – by Aussie Mark Lebew – I knew Mark's dad in Oz, and he would be proud of the great international level professional volleyball coach his son has become. In 2012 and 2013 he coached Berlin Recycling Volleys to the German Bundesliga title. Mark says *"I watch and study a lot of volleyball for my job, preparing for my job and for fun. Sometimes I come across things about volleyball that interest/amuse/annoy me. These are those things."*


**Tips and Traps** – by South Australia's Dave Eldridge. I have known Eldo for over 25 years and am not sure there is a better school volleyball coach in the world, let alone all of Oz. While winning over 60 titles with Heathfield High he grows the game with his VB company and his shared writings too.

**Sports Coaching Brain** – by Aussie Wayne Goldsmith - I first met Wayne years ago at a USOC Sports Performance Conference at the OTC here in Colorado Springs. Wayne writes that "this blog does not aim to educate so much as to inspire coaches at all levels and in every sport to achieve excellent through being themselves and believing that anything is really possible."

If you got this far, you must be a lifelong learner/reader, so I am going to share one more thing to ponder. Back in 1995, CU Professor Emeritus in math, Albert A. Bartlett, taught a session on exponential learning/doubling rates. Professor Bartlett shared a lot of math and examples, as he feels that *"The greatest shortcoming of the human race is our inability to understand the exponential function."* In 2007 the lecture was posted to YouTube under the title "The Most Important Video You Will Ever See..." and over 5 million people have watched it. [The video can be seen here.](#)

See, when I first skied Vail in 1970, tickets were \$7 – or \$6 with a coupon. I took a picture at the lift ticket booth, shaking my head to see it would cost \$129 to ski all day (not a senior yet!). The good news? It is below the doubling rate seen from 1963 to 2003. What has slowed it, I am not sure, but the math lesson is sound and worth understanding on many levels and the lecture, as boring as it might be, is fascinating I think.



 VAIL	ADULT	CHILD (5-12)	SENIOR (65+)
Single Day	\$129	\$ 89	\$119
3+Days (W/Peaks)	\$119	\$ 79	\$109
Afternoon (12pm)	\$105	\$ 62	\$105
Late Afternoon (2pm)	\$ 73	\$ 44	\$ 73
Scenic Ride	\$ 32	\$ 20	\$ 32
<b>Save with Peaks!</b>			

If you have a blog that you follow which is making a difference in your coaching and how you grow the game, please share it below in the comments! Thanks for making a difference by being a lifelong learner.



## Volleyball Coaches & Trainers Facebook Group

April 15, 2014

A couple of years ago, Brian Swenty, a teacher/volleyball coach working in Vilseck Germany, was talking with me about the importance of helping US kids living in Europe with volleyball. They don't get seen well enough to get scholarships at one level, but they also cannot afford to attend an "American" volleyball camp on their parents' military income level – over \$1,000 just to get stateside, let alone the hundreds of dollars for a room and board camp.

Our solution was to bring the "American camp" to Europe, and I offered to do the first one, just for the cost of expenses. That August, some 180 kids got their US resident camp, for six days and three sessions a day, using indoor and outdoor training venues at a cost of under \$200 per player. Plus, they each got a camp shirt and a volleyball to take home for that price. If you want to learn more about that great event, [here it is](#). Since then Riley Salmon, 2008 USA Olympic men's team gold medalist joined USAV staffers Andy Pai and Denise Sheldon to do the second year. Brian is now working hard on year three and if you are in Germany in August, come on



by!

So at my [Hall of Fame Induction speech](#) at the AVCA Convention this past December, I mentioned many people, including Brian, much to his surprise. The thing is, he is the kind of member of our volleyball family who is working to make a difference in the world, not just locally. You see, during that camp we discussed the need of a Facebook group that would allow volleyball coaches from around the world to collaborate and share best practices. Brian went forward and made it so – a closed group titled Volleyball Coaches and Trainers (VCT) with the founding statement you can see on the main page stating: *"This is a forum where Volleyball Coaches and Trainers from around the world can discuss our profession openly and honestly, growing the game together."*

We have adjusted the VCT thread flow to put Videos, Blogs/my Grow the Game Together blog, and Photos into their own parts, under the PHOTO section and improve the dialoguing. While first starting this blog, another coach I have had the pleasure of working repeatedly with at Starlings USA National Conventions, David Cordes, posted to VCT. His words say better than I ever could why I suggest that others of you who read my blog should consider signing up to join the over 3,800 coaches already collaborating. I will include comments from others that followed David's post which, if you weren't convinced already (after all, it is free!), give other reasons to join the group. Thanks Brian for making this group a reality and for making a difference. Here is David's post:

*I love this group. It has provided me the opportunity to share ideas, processes, thoughts, opinions, passions, and intimately held beliefs of what is right with other people who are just as passionate about their beliefs as I am. And most of them are people that under normal circumstances that I would never have the opportunity to meet, compete against, coach with or share philosophies with.*

*As long as everyone remembers that - like the athletes we coach- we each come to where we are from different backgrounds and different experiences. Just as our paths to get where we are were different, our goals and where we are all heading are just as diverse.*

*I am a small town volunteer coach, who got nagged into coaching years ago by my 11 year old daughter. My paying job as a mechanical engineer/computer scientist is about a far from coaching as you can get. After coaching middle school for several years I started a volleyball club in our small remote town years ago because there were several girls who wanted to play more than just school ball and the nearest club was over 100 miles away and I could not stand the thought of those families driving all that distance just so their kids could play volleyball.*

*While I would love the opportunity to try coaching at the elite club or college level that would require me to leave home, my paying job and all the things I love about raising my family in a small town. So I accept that my coaching opportunities will always be limited to what I can do in this small town.*

*But even though my opportunities to coach are limited by the circumstances that I have chosen to live in. That doesn't mean that the kind of coach I can be has to be limited. Just as with the books I have read, the videos I have watched, coaching classes and clinics I have attended through the years I feel that there is something that can be learned from everyone who posts on this site.*

*From some I have gained support or confirmation that I am doing things the "right way". From others I have learned a "new way" or new ideas. And from others I have learned about ways or ideas that I will never accept or practice. Not because they are wrong or bad, but because they do not fit my situation or my philosophy. These too are valuable lessons because it is easy to say "That is wrong I will never do that." But when you ask yourself "Why is that wrong?" you force an introspection on yourself to further examine and justify to yourself your own thoughts and beliefs.*

*I love that unlike so much of the internet - there are no trolls here. Everyone who has posted an opinion or an idea here is simply offering what they accept in their circumstance as a positive belief. I welcome the views and ideas that are different than my own. I will read them, consider them, learn from them and maybe even question or refute them. But I will do so in order learn - either a new or improved way for me to think and act. Or to further confirm for myself that what I am already doing is the "right way" for me and my players.*

*Thank you [Brian Swenty](#) for getting this started and keeping it going and giving me the opportunity to connect with, share with and learn from so many similar and different dedicated coaches.*

Here are a few comments:

**Brian Swenty** You captured my sentiments perfectly David. Thank you so much for your contributions and for sharing your feelings. It is very rewarding for me.

**Jennifer Schutte Rodic** David, I totally agree. I was never a volleyball player so I had to educate myself on everything I've learned. The AVCA has been great but this group is my best way to ask for specific advice and get new ideas. Even if all the ideas don't apply directly they still spark new thoughts and new ideas for me. Similar to you I'm just a volunteer coach with a day job as a chemical engineer. But my passion for teaching and for volleyball is as big as anyone's. And I still have a lot to learn! This is a great forum to learn from the experience of others. Thanks [Brian](#)!!

**Brian Swenty** With all of my new engineering friends, I feel smarter already. ;). Both of my parents went to Purdue. Does that count for something?

**Dan Mickle** Great post David

**Ray Villanueva** thank you for this letter and great post..^5

**David Cordes** [Brian](#) where you (or your parents) went to school doesn't matter. Its what you learn while there, and what you continue to learn, and do, after you leave that counts.

[Jennifer](#) - John Dunning the head women's coach at Stanford University had never played volleyball before accepting his first position as a high school volleyball coach.

**Ray Villanueva** was just about to say about john d.....he was a math teacher at fremont high school and he fell in love with the sport and he was successful at pacific as well...

**Susan Jeske** Thank you and I second all that you have said. It is such a great feeling to have a place where there is no drama and we can freely share ideas and philosophies! Thank you for inviting me to join this group and Thank you [Brian Swenty](#) for starting us and keeping it alive!

**Maureen Tuala** Beautiful [David](#). I've lived in Ridgecrest before so I know exactly what you are talking about when you say your small town. How great for those kids to have you as a volunteer with such dedication. All the best to you and your teams. btw I'm in San Diego now but I'm moving to Victorville area this summer. If I find a Coaching position up there maybe we might run into each other.



So if you have read this far, you are a coach who is willing to read to learn – so consider heading over to the [site here](#). Who knows, maybe you will even get me to approve your request, for it is a closed group. Of course in the interests of growing the game together, you know you are pre-approved, for you read my blog!

In closing, I just taught 400 Girl Scouts ages 6-16, sitting volleyball Sunday afternoon at the OTC on the same court our USA women train on. In a four hour period – teaching 10 groups of 40 - we used the USAV P&G netband, to get 80 feet of net, vs. the set up single net with 18 feet. What else did we do in 20 min per group? How about:

1. Discussed what is the difference between Paralympic and Olympic volleyball?
2. The four rule differences from regular game
3. Watched USA vs China Beijing 2008 Paralympic Gold medal match, discussing who is eligible to play sitting
4. Watched movement as shown in an overhead view of a GER/NED men's match
5. Went out and practiced moving in all directions, ending with a volleyball skill with no ball
6. Paired up and practiced overhead passing seeing who could get the highest number of in-a-row contacts
7. Practiced torque serving between partners
8. Overhead passed to partner who spiked over the net
9. Q&A with USAV stickers and info about the World Championship NORCECA zone Qualifiers for men and women being held in mid-May here in Colorado Springs
10. Repeat 10 times...

So that was my Sunday, hope yours was as much fun and thanks for coaching. Let us know below how we can help you grow the game, together.



## STOP Teaching Technique

April 25, 2014

...And start working much more on improving what you can control as a coach to increase your players learning of volleyball skills. There, I said it. The previous “STOP” blog, [STOP Doing Drills](#), brought out the disgruntled and doubters like moths to a flame, even more than those who I failed at teaching/getting learning to happen through other STOP blogs – like my [STOP Teaching Passing](#) blog from three years ago.

When technique is taught in not only blocked drills, but progressions, we lessen the time a player has to learn the realities of the game and develop their techniques in those essential realities. It is not that I think technique does not matter; it does as it is a founding *part* of volleyball skills. What too many coaches do is spend too much time making the technique “work” in a blocked drill, and not create more time that very technique performed in the random nature of game play.

At-the Olympic Training Center Conference several years ago with Dr. Richard Schmidt, author of the best “Drill” book around – [Motor Learning and Performance, Principles to Practice](#), was asked how many trials a player in any sport should do, in a blocked fashion, before going into the gamelike realities of play. His answer was that it should be as many trials as it would take for the player to show a “very gross understanding” of the technique – and that would likely be 6-10 trials. What we see instead is thousands, even tens of thousands of repetitions in static, part and blocked training. I offer again to email any reader, free of charge of course, Drs. McGown and Bain’s paper – “*The Superiority of Whole Training*.” There those seeking first to understand, then to be understood can find about seventy reference papers to guide that understanding.

Coaches set limits on their players. Sadly, coaches also set limits on other coaches. This most recent trip to Dubai, UAE, allowed me to both give feedback to coaches and players, but to also -for the first time they said- get the coaches to share their secrets with each other. I did it both in practical sessions, where the coaches taught, and in theory classes, including a 90 minute spirited discussion on things learned at their last international clinic. When I shared the new National Thailand Schools VB highlight film that I produced with Sport Development staff (thanks again Cassie Weaver and Leslee Harms), they could not believe the boys and girls playing were 11 and under. ([CLICK HERE](#) to see this great video) I am proud of the work we did to bring and edit this film to bring this level of play to the awareness of the volleyball family. In just a month, the FIVB YouTube version has seen nearly 100,000 views! You watch this highlight film and you see players doing multiple one handed/arm saves (a skill founded in the technique of two arm forearm/overhead passing), giving free balls back in extra high ball flights (a skill, delivering at a more challenging place and time), you cannot help but marvel at these young players VB IQ.

This game is unique. What if we added fouls to it? What if we said the libero can go to the other side and distract any player – can’t touch them or the ball, but distract away - keeping it non-contact still. What if we made other sports rotate after scoring, or shoot/pass after three contacts, or jump as high as they could before batting or throwing a ball. The list is long, and I share it with you to share with your players and parents [here](#). Staying with humor – the technique of flying vs the skill – birds fly instinctively, they know the technique. What they spend a lifetime doing is developing skill. [These seagull and other birds](#) show how their flying technique is core to their skill in stealing.

I enjoy the open discussions over in “Old School Volleyball” on Facebook, where they speak about the game “back then.” The thing is, for nearly 50 years, the beach game grew, and talent blossomed in technique and skill. So as a player worked his/her way up from novice through the Bs’ to the highest level of AAA ratings, based solely on competition – just how many beach coaches were there? None, for the skill was acquired by playing higher level opponents in game play. Bubba Watson gets it. Now we have new technology, to use great SELF-teaching programs like BAM Video Delay on the iPad to give a player the power of self-feedback. Or get your partner to trade videoing using \$5 apps like Coaches Eye, Ubersense, and Dartfish Express. Coaches are important, but their real role is to empower the player, not to control.

A discussion about technique over reading has been exchanged between national team staff. Asked if they would want a player with great technique, and not so good reading skills, or great reading skills and not so good at technique, and 100% of the coaches opted for a player better skilled at reading. When you watch the great series of X digs in X min – [like this one of 133 digs in 3 minutes](#) - you see the importance of doing whatever it takes to save the ball, regardless of the “technique violations” a technical coach might find happening.

## How we coach

Attack

Control

Dribble



Defend

Shoot

Pass

## How they play and learn



Tradition is hard to change. There is a great quote by Mark Twain in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* - ***“The less there is to justify a traditional custom, the harder it is to get rid of it”***. This quote and another that shouted out to me about skill over technique ***“I have never seen a player tackled by a cone”*** came from a [great football \(soccer\) blog](#) that I would ask you to read in full - I concur 100% whether in a contact sport like soccer or lacrosse, or a non-contact game like tennis or volleyball. I have never seen a hitter blocked by empty space. When I coached lacrosse, we always had a defender hassling the ball carrier – not a cone. When we block, if 97% of the time you will be facing at least a single blocker – you develop your skill at reading the block and hitting past it, not by focusing on technique but by choosing one of many options to hit past or off the block – a skill, not a “technique.”

Please take time to understand these words from this same blog - *“When we test a player's skill level under conditions that do not reflect the performance environment, the player will alter his behaviour and base his response on the test environment.”* And this observation too - In his book *“Se På Spelet”* (See the Game) - Andreas Alm identifies a problem with much of today's technique and passing drills children as young as 6 years of age are exposed to. It develops ball watchers. *“We are ball watchers, because we have been fostered this way”*. The more traditional technique and passing drills rarely encourage use of the ball using perceptual information thus *“fostering a generation of players that through thousands of hours of repetition learn to madly and intensely stare at the ball.”* - This need to develop player's experience is also covered [in this article](#).

I have spent almost 20 years in the Paralympic and Wounded Warrior world of sitting and standing volleyball. These heroes remind me how lucky I am to make an impact in the lives of these amazing athletes and their coaches. While in Dubai doing a zonal symposium on “Modern Trends in Coaching Youth,” I introduced the coaches to Kendra Lancaster, 3x Paralympic medalist, as she drove 2 hours after work from her home to share her ideas and experiences with them (and have dinner with me after, my treat of course). Helping Mike Hulett and Denise VandeWalle coach those young women in 2004 from a 0-24 European trip in May to a Paralympic bronze medal and multiple victories over those same European teams in August at the Athens Paralympics, will be one of my favorite years in a lifetime of coaching.



Watching my son do the same with the Special Ops team in less than a month, also to a bronze medal, is icing on the cake. More importantly, he got to learn from true heroes like Silver Star medal honored soldier Michael Day, who took 27 shots and survived. These brave men make it easy to strive to be your best. You simply think of what our wounded warriors and those who gave all have done for us, and work harder to teach coaches to be better.

As this is about stopping teaching technique as much, I will share some thoughts regarding a technique that many demand, to the point of stating that players who are doing it “wrong” are doing so due to poor coaching. I have been watching hundreds of hours of play, and looking through tens of thousands of motor drive photo sequences that I have personally taken, of NCAA, Junior, High School and international women’s and men’s volleyball – and from what I can see, well over 50 percent of the players are landing on one leg after spiking, and after blocking almost as much. Yet there are coaches who are adamant that players must always land on BOTH legs in either skill set.

I completely understand that athletes with more strength, power and endurance are likely more capable of withstanding competition and training loads than others. From a technique focus, mechanically it is clear that landing force can be twice as high per leg/muscle for a player landing on one leg vs. two. Teaching the technique of landing on two legs is understood, but it is reality based? In dialogue with Peter Vint, our USOC Director of Competitive Analysis, Research and Innovation, and some national team staff about one vs two leg landing, the question was posed if it was training poor technique or reality. Peter noted that that the game is not planar. Ever. Then he went on to say:

*“That doesn't mean I support training "poor technique" but rather training in a way that not only recognizes but emphasizes the dynamic, multi-dimensional nature of the game. It is highly variable and often random. While planar training (and I'm not suggesting this is what's exclusively happening) will almost certainly provide some fundamental improvement in neuromuscular capacity, the expression of these forces will not be fully realized in multi-planar movements.*

*My point about addressing proper approach/takeoff mechanics has as much to do with perceptual skill as it does technical skill (and the physical capacity to execute them). Athletes that may consistently mistime their approach, leave early, and have to jump back out and cartwheel away from the center of the court are inevitably putting themselves in more precarious landing positions than athletes that can properly time the approach and align their approach trajectory to intercept the ball in a way that allows them to land on two legs more often than not.*

*We'd like to think the former will be injured more often and/or more severely...I've only rarely seen examples of "controlled" training that remotely addresses the velocity specific characteristics of multi-dimensional landing or even jumping. One of the best lessons I've*



*learned as a biomechanist is "in order to jump higher, practice jumping higher". I feel there is a parallel here to what Kessel and Karch speak about in terms of "the game teaches the game". This is in no way to diminish the value of having greater neuromuscular capacity. Rather, it's to emphasize the reality of the way the game is played....variable, dynamic, often random."*

In a related way, there is another technique promoted that does not address the reality of our sport. For the purposes of this section, by right, I mean the player's dominate side in skill performance. If you taught only right legged dribbling and shooting in soccer, or right handed dribbling and shooting in basketball, any coach in those sports would believe you are not doing a proper job in coaching athletes of any age. Yet in volleyball, almost every coach teaches only to the right hand. Over 75 percent of volleyball athletes injure their non-dominate knee side, based on insurance injury reports. Given what the antenna does to outside hitter demands, our national team says that balls set past the antenna are zero percent success balls – to ensure that balls are set by all players inside the antenna. As teachers of this random game, we need to increase every player's abilities to use the non-dominant hand.

Another observation on skill over technique comes from serving. Rather than let players develop a great, powerful serve to put into the court- coaches tell their players where to serve. This is inconsistent for me with my coaching philosophy of developing amazing leaders, so I don't do it, but when a golfing coach sent me his thoughts on creating a putting circus and getting his players to deal with the chaos in his sport, I replied as seen below with more science – which is about developing a servers/golfers skill, not their already known technique.

When I read your post I just flashed back to what Dr. Richard Schmidt said in his book on motor learning....in 1991 no less... page 204-205, after a picture of a golfer hitting a bucket of balls that has the caption "A common form of blocked practice, producing good performance at the time but not very effective for long-term learning" - he then writes "Repetition is deeply rooted in many traditional training methods, like the basketball coach who has her players shoot 100 free throws at the end of practice or the tennis coach who has his students do serve after serve from the same position on the baseline. Hitting a bucket of balls at the driving range with the same club over and over is another example.....My golfing friends tell me they 'can do anything' at the driving range, implying that they have risen to some new level of skill. When they return to the golf course to test their skills, though, their games are no longer better than before the driving range practice. Why?" - The answer is that blocked training is inferior in retention, and also it gives a false sense of skill/accomplishment.- In the criterion version of the skill section he then writes how the context for what you are ultimately practicing is very different from the blocked practice done in practice. One of his examples is, and again I quote "On the golf course (the criterion context), one never hits two golf shots in a row with the same club (unless the ball goes into the lake on the first one) and most shots are preceded by a long walk (or a search for the ball, in my case). In golf, the problem is to decide which club to use, how large a swing to take, how to adjust the stance on the sloping ground, and so on, requiring the solution of an almost novel movement problem, not just a minor variation of what was done a few seconds earlier as in blocked practice. Furthermore, the golfer only gets one chance to make this shot, with no possibility of modifying it on the next trial. Blocked practice at the driving range does not simulate the criterion skill very well." I played 52 holes a day growing up sometimes with a HS golf teammate you might know - Corey Pavin. Like Bubba Watson, and like I learned to ride a bike - I learned by letting the game teach the game. How can Bubba win two of the last three Masters, without ever having lessons or a coach? Yes, teaching/mentors are important, but mostly in

how good they are at guiding an athlete's discovery, not in telling them what to do.



Trevor Ragan is working hard to bring the science of motor learning to another very traditional sport – basketball – if you are still reading this deep into this blog, you will find his newest newsletter – Training Ugly, a valuable read I believe, as in the interest of being a better coach, he just recently spent several days with Karch and our US Women's team, players and staff, in Anaheim. Jump on over to [his blog NOW](#).

One final comment on developing volleyball skill founded on technique. Age group competition has grown exponentially over the years. What used to be double age groups, 18, 16, 14 and under, now is single age groups as in 18,17,16 etc. What has vanished for the most part is where kids play against or with adults. What helped develop both Karch Kiraly's skills and those of Misty May, was the chance to play doubles with their fathers, and against adult teams. I urge all coaches to get give their players a chance to develop

their volleyball IQ by playing doubles every summer against adults on grass or sand. Sure, the kids should play some junior tourneys. They just need to compete and learn from adults – even if it means they lose on the scoreboard. Remind them about sunscreen, then let THEM learn intrinsically....

a lion never loses  
sleep  
over the opinions  
of sheep

rantings of a beautiful mind

PROQUOTES

Let THEM pick their partner

Let THEM pick the side they want to play on

Let THEM pick when to call time outs

Let THEM learn from more experienced, savvy, older players

Let THEM pick their uniform

Let THEM pick their music

Let THEM pick the ball they want to play with

Let THEM call their own blocking/defensive systems

Let THEM determine their own “playset” options/offensive decisions

Let ATHLETES be ATHLETES...and support them as humans who spend part of the life enjoying being a player.

Thanks for giving back to our sport by coaching, and since you are reading this blog to the end, for being a lifelong learner. Feel free to share your thoughts and comments – and thanks for your help in growing the game together.

## STOP Doing Drills

April 01, 2014

Okay, this version of my STOP series is likely to be a tough one for many coaches, but its truth is well founded in science, just not implemented well in our teaching practices. I just watched perhaps my 2,000<sup>th</sup> “drill” on YouTube, as I seek to find any new ideas that others have created to help us grow and develop our sport. On the Kudva website, I saw drills getting viewed nearly 100,000 times which were so....so....hmmm...well my mom said if you don’t have anything nice to say, don’t say anything at all, so I will leave it at that. I could only shake my head in disbelief and disappointment. Too many coaches simply do not know the science of motor skill learning.

Want to get a good turnout at a clinic or online? – Title your session along the lines of “I promise you will have 50 more drills after you hear me talk to you.” Never mind the fact that our three-time Olympic coach Doug Beal, when asked how many “drills” he did in training, responded with “maybe a dozen.” Before the advent of the Internet, there were drill books, which went in their titles from 100 drills to 300, then 400 drills. Now you “google” in the video section the term “Volleyball Drills” and you get about 3,000,000 choices.

I watched coaches telling the viewers that “heading” set balls over the net, “shouldering” them and playing “bloody knuckles” were drills that were teaching the players gamelike timing, judgment and whatnot...coaches who actually said the term “gamelike” for a drill that had players standing with their backs to the net on one side, while teammates kicked balls from the other endline along the floor, with the blockers being told to shuffle into the way of the rolling ball – all to teach “blocking positioning.” These teachers choose to ignore the principles of specificity and opt to create even more methods.

One of the key reasons for this blog’s title is simply to ask every teacher and coach reading, to stop creating drills, and start creating **learning opportunities**. There are vast amounts of energies being spent by players to learn the vast intricacies of so many non-gamelike drills; it could probably power our entire nation’s energy system for a good day or two. The game is chaotic enough just by playing it small sided to full 6 v 6 games (or 9 v 9 for the Chinese men’s version that is so entertaining on a 10x20m court). The key though is that we need to look at what we are doing from a learning point of view – as we want players to know how to respond properly in a game, NOT in a drill. With Reading and Learning being the most important skills in volleyball, **we need to create learning of reality reading based opportunities**. It is that simple. Learning in isolated drills simply does not work. It looks good in practice, but the athletes simply have to start learning once the actual game play starts.

Consider this fact – in a game, how many points are scored without starting with a serve? Since the answer is just a rare few by an official’s card, something to consider is how many of your drills start with a serve? At one level the athletes know this, as they are always begging to play monarch of the court, or speed ball, or scrimmage – learning opportunities/games which start with a serve. It’s not that every drill or game you do should start with a serve, but it does mean more should. That is just part of training in reality.

How can you be so prescient when an opponent tips on your team, such that you could walk, not run, onto the court and save the ball, and your players watch it fall to the floor? Is it your walking “technique”? No...due to your knowledge of the flow of the game – the previous block(s) on that player, their underrunning of the ball, the score of the game and so forth - which only comes from game play, not drilling. How do you know what play is likely at key points of a game or favorite shot of an opponent at those same key times. It is learned through play.

In an attempt to transition coaches to make drills more gamelike, we have begun naming them “grills” in the **IMPACT** manual – a gamelike drill. The thing is, in the end *everything you are doing in your practices are learning opportunities – a special deliberate practice period that combines the opportunity for team building every minute, and team/individual game based learning at the same time.*

My webinar teaching of the motor learning chapter of **IMPACT** has lately brought back a question that Dr. Richard Schmidt would “answer” with to coaches at a national symposium at our Olympic Training Center here in Colorado Springs a few years ago. In this case it was not just any coaches, but a large group of top Olympic and Paralympic coaches including our own two- time Olympic medal winning USA Volleyball coach Hugh McCutcheon. I would estimate Dr. Schmidt, one of the top teachers and authors in the science of motor learning, said back “ARE YOU PRACTICING FOR PRACTICE OR FOR PERFORMANCE?” about a dozen times. In every case the coach was putting forward an isolated, blocked drill they thought had worked for them in learning their sport. We all, from Olympic coaches to elementary school teachers, regards of skill level or age, are wanting our charges to perform – in either a



competition on a world stage, or in a test in the class. While I won't go into it here, sadly too many classroom teachers are now having to teach to the myriad of tests, rather than being able to give kids problem solving reality-based teaching in every subject.

Coaches, in this practice vs. performance statement by Dr. Schmidt, there is a huge difference between a player who has technique, and a player who has volleyball skills. Drills teach technique, while games teach volleyball skill – as in “volleyball IQ”. Let me say it again- the vast majority of drills used by well-intentioned coaches teach technique, and not the volleyball skills necessary for successful performance. In addition, because of the scoring that comes in a “game” always – deliberate practice levels, that internal focus on solving novel situations and striving to get better every day, is higher in the chaos.

The motor learning principles that are core to understanding the question are specificity, implicit vs. explicit learning, whole vs. part training, and random vs. blocked learning... I have covered the related concepts of “Learning by Doing” in a recent blog by that title, including the importance of retention in learning. The problem is most drills are: 1. Run by the coach, not the players, 2. Part based in either actual technique or as related to a whole game, rather than whole and 3. Blocked for “success” in practice, rather than chaotic like the game is in its inherent randomness. The coaches are doing things that make a practice look good, but which do not transfer to the game nor are retained as well by the athletes, while giving them the all-important volleyball “IQ” of a real player.

In a discussion with Brian Swenty, who founded the great Volleyball Coaches and Trainers (VCT) Facebook group, he noted how many coaches struggle with the whole vs part principle in how to provide appropriate feedback, or what to coach and how technically. “If I don't run this drill with them passing on their knees how will they learn to keep their platforms straight”? “If we don't put kids on a box, how will we isolate their armswing or blocking technique”? and on and on.



Brian writes “*The key is something I call “Single Item Focus Video Review”. It is what you have been saying for years, but it is how I was able to justify really spending time running “Grills” instead of drills. This is particularly effective when I want to train technique as well as outcome based skill. - So, we will run the video delay software or Ubersense...I really like setting up the iPad with the video delay and making it a station. We will play our game or whole skill drill and isolate one thing we really want to see. Serving is the easiest to start with as it is closed motor and oh so important (toss, armswing, contact point, blah blah), but can be done with anything. I am still dealing with ball strikes to the stand (hasn't really happened too badly) and when rallies go beyond the 15-20 secs on the delay, but I digress. The delay works really well in the Butterfly as you can make it a station to review the previous skill then “bump” to the next one.*”

If you have not seen these and other app and “assistant coach” options–  
[check out my recent blog on the topic.](#)

During the symposium, I guesstimate the word “specificity” was said about 2,000 times. With some 30 different sports represented, the principle kept being brought up when examples which were thought to be specific would be shared, but the presenters would then note that such an example or drill was not really specific.

One of the items shown was what I remember being called a “Russian leaper,” where a belt went around the player’s waist which was attached to heavy elastic cord which was anchored to the floor. When the device would show up on the screen, the presenters were asked if it was something that would help their players. Every presenter said, “nope, not specific enough.” These were not just volleyball trainers, but top coaches/trainers in other Olympic sports that knew motor learning.

Same thing happened with the “Speed Ladder” which brings me to a quote from Dr. Richard Schmidt’s Motor Learning and Performance – Principles to Practice book, now in about its 5<sup>th</sup> edition. **“It is fruitless to train such fundamental abilities such as quickness and balance, so concentrate on the fundamental skills instead...”** Still, we live in a land of quick fixes, gimmicks, and late night television ads. So you will always see people telling you to hit this ball frozen in time, run this shuttle run or weave, or

pattern your feet through my handy dandy speed enhancement device. They can't sell their method to you if they call it a non-specific, no-skill transfer, profit-for-me device.

When Dan Coyle started his *great* blog titled, "*The Talent Code*," he tried to help coaches understand the difference between the tradition of "quickness" over the realities of reading and gathering information, writing:

*Science is showing us that our instincts about quickness are wrong. The best performers, it turns out, aren't reacting more quickly (thanks to limits of nerve-conduction speed, human reflexes are pretty consistent). The best performers are using time differently — namely, they're using it to get more information.*

*For example, let's take the classic case of a tennis player returning serve. You would instinctively think that the best returners are the ones who react the quickest. But you'd be wrong. Experiments show that the best players succeed because they wait longer before they make their swing. They use that time to gather information about the ball, the spin, the opponent's position, and make decisions about it. And in tennis — as in many other areas of life — the better data you have, the better result you tend to get.*

*In other words, being quick isn't about speed; it's about information. It's about learning how to wait."*

It is hard for traditionalists to change from drilling to game situation learning opportunities, for it just looks so messy. Kinda like when kids first start drawing with crayons, stagger, weave and fall like a drunk when learning to walk or wobbling and crashing as they learn to ride a bike. They want the "look of success" in a blocked drill, as players "pepper with control" on the same side of the net, even though those same athletes can't dig a ball in a game very successfully. When national team hopefuls at a recent USA Volleyball High Performance clinic went from pair pepper to actually digging and hitting a ball over a net, Hugh McCutcheon turned to the crowd and said "Looking a little squirrely out there," as the "skill" of pepper was humbled by the game's realities.

Over the years I hear from scholastic coaches who in their change to motor science-based and game-based training, find themselves in an interesting quandary. They are winning more, and often going to their level of playoffs, only to be struggling with their Athletic Director who, despite the success, is expecting, even demanding that they stop playing so much and start drilling more. One solution I have to this problem is that each coach should have 2-3 drills that a team can pop into when the Athletic Director drops by.

A classic drill that still gets some reality happening, is the "butterfly" drill, with the athletes doing the throwing (heaven forbid they serve, that is too chaotically "unsuccessful"). Lots of success in that running, throwing and catching – not serving, receiving or setting. Make it even more gamelike, but a bit more chaotic, by having the usual target either catch the ball like a setter (rather than the traditional catch it any way you can) or even better, set and COVER their set. Want to "risk" getting even more gamelike? Add a second passer so a gamelike decision of "mine or yours" has to be made. Even more gamelike? Run it same side of the net in "Front/Back" format so you stop setting left side to only zone four, and give every player setting the experience of back setting to zone two. Even more chaotic – just play 6 vs. 6 and make each side rotate after their ball goes over the net. And finally the most chaotic of them all – play 6 vs 6 with TWO balls – serving at the same time to start, and only winning the game when BOTH balls are dead for one side of the court – the first dead ball being able to be brought back to life by the "losing" side running and getting the ball back into play with a serve.

If the athletic director stays longer than the best controlled version of your butterfly drill, then regress back into some sort of coach controlled circle drill, or even a form of coach on three (sorry, I just can't propose coach-on-one), where the coach, not the players, are in control. Once the AD is gone, return to the player controlled games where you are out of the game and thus able to see what the players are doing in the game between contacts, and to provide questioning to individuals or small groups, while the ball(s) remain in flight.

In closing, I wish to share a favorite poem of mine, from the book *The Way of Chuang Tzu* by Thomas Merton published in 1965. I find its lesson helpful when dealing with those who choose to ignore the science in sport and not change how they teach. Maybe it will help you in your journey to become the best teacher you can be in helping us grow the game together. As always, comments welcome if they are something my mom would find of value and approve of.. Indeed, perhaps I should retitle these STOP series blogs to PLEASE Stop, after all, it is important to say please....

## THE EMPTY BOAT

If a man is crossing a river

And an empty boat collides with his own skiff,  
Even though he be a bad-tempered man  
He will not become very angry.  
But if he sees a man in the boat,  
He will shout at him to steer clear.  
If the shout is not heard, he will shout again,  
And yet again, and begin cursing.  
And all because there is somebody in the boat.  
Yet if the boat were empty,  
He would not be shouting and not angry.  
If you can empty your own boat  
Crossing the river of the world,  
No one will oppose you,  
No one will seek to harm you....

## STOP Cutting Players

March 11, 2014

We are back with another one of our STOP series, in this case a look at a practice that I hope can be changed in creative ways, to allow many more kids the chance to make volleyball their sport. This challenge to create programming that gives everyone wanting a chance to play the game, comes simply from the core of Long Term Athletic Development (LTAD) – to keep as many athletes playing a sport as long as possible. We must limit the number of kids who are cut, so that more kids can experience the lifetime sport that volleyball is. How can we be cutting kids from programs at age 13 or so, when we have a sport that has a 75 & over age group national championships?

Volleyball is a late specialization sport, as compared to gymnastics for example. Many people think that an athlete needs to specialize in a sport early in life to succeed at that sport in college or professionally. The facts are that only about one percent of high school players get a college scholarship in their sport, so the real reason for participating in any sport, volleyball included, is for the life lessons to be learned. It is fine to specialize early, if the athlete loves a specific sport. It is also fine to experience many sports and come to love a sport later.

Take a look at this “[late bloomer](#)” wiki entry to see an amazing list of those who found something they loved later in life. Specific to sport, match the athlete to their sports background in this following quiz:

### Match Quiz

- A. Michael Jordan
  - B. Larry Walker
  - C. Kenny Lofton
  - D. Cynthia Cooper
  - E. Scottie Pippen
  - F. Sammy Sosa
  - G. Mark McGwire
  - H. Hakeem Olajuwon
  - I. John Stockton
  - J. Jackie Joyner-Kersey
  - K. Chris Drury
  - L. Tom Brady
  - M. Mike Whitmarsh
  - N. Bart Starr
1. Played only basketball in college at Arizona
  2. Was only 5'11" as a senior in High School
  3. Not recruited out of high school
  4. Wanted to be a pro ice hockey goalie, but was cut
  5. Did not start playing ball until 14 years old
  6. Did not start playing ball until 16 years old
  7. Outstanding goalkeeper in soccer
  8. Was a top college basketball player at UCLA
  9. Was cut from his high school hoops team at 16 years old
  10. Eyesight as a child was 20/500
  11. Pitched in the Little League World Series
  12. Played pro basketball before winning an Olympic medal in another team sport
  13. Drafted 199th yet by his 4th season had two Superbowl MVP awards
  14. Drafted 17<sup>th</sup> round yet won seven league titles

A-9 B-4 C-1 D-6 E-2 F-5 G-10 H-7 I-3 J-8 K-11 L-13 M-12 N-14

*So what might be some of the solutions?*



These are just a few of my ideas I have used over the years, and I look forward to seeing more of yours in the comment section.

1. Create once a week training SCHOOL teams to train alongside the top school teams which practice daily.
2. Create once a week training/playing club teams. A pattern interruption here now....These first two are the places that every USA Volleyball coach reading this blog can first make a difference. Did you know that USAV national office has a FREE 8 and under membership option? That 11 and under USAV membership for just RVA play can be just \$15? Ask your region about these and other memberships like league and summer play – so we can better grow the game, and cut fewer players...
3. Practice or play at earlier or later times like swimmers and ice hockey programs do. – When I coached Doherty HS ice hockey team, as the new program on the block, we would have 11pm ice time one day, and 5 am ice time the next day – so just a five hour break in training. Swimmers often train at dawn. Why can't we change our culture a bit to be like ice hockey and swimming to have more kids being able to train early in the morning?
4. Start a before school coed training /play program to let both boys and girls discover the game. Just one adult supervisor, let the kids teach each other from how to warm up to scoring variations.
5. Have one, two or even three “training only” slots on each team – These are much lower cost practice slots you reserve in a win-win situation – your travel team is only 9-10 for competition, while your practices can have 12 players. This allows for two full teams for grills/scrimmaging, or three 4 person/four 3 person teams for double court training situations, competitions and other learning opportunities. Thanks to BJ Leroy for adding this important idea.
6. Create open gym programs any time there is a court open. I so enjoyed hearing at the last NCAA Women's Volleyball Championships that when Karch was a teen, he would break into gyms late at night, to play games with his friends. At those times, he and his friends were discovered by security guards and they would just say, “sorry, we just found the door open so we wanted to play...” On a more formal and legal front, find gym time at any facility where you can host a simple open gym for an hour or more.
7. Create open tournaments using the “Mad Hatter” option – Head over to the [Best Practices](#) section of the USAV Grassroots page and just a short scroll down from the top you will see it from the Iowa Region.



8. Create more courts – smaller ones on regular indoor courts; courts in unused racquetball or squash courts; six courts on a single outdoor tennis court which has chain link fence to create a rope wall anchor and a unique very short “divider net in the middle; multiple linked courts on grass fields; courts in cafeteria spaces. Check out our Grassroots section called [“The Game Will Find a Way.”](#)
9. Open “gyms” in the summer on grass fields – I love the Nebraska State Champion coach who put up 3-5 nets in his large back yard, put out a big container of lemonade, then went inside to chat with the parents while the kids each evening formed their own teams and tournaments, letting the game teach the game. Do the same at a park and have some doubles with parent/child teams competing. Some places in larger cities have summer volleyball spots where nets go up after 5pm till dark – like the Washington Mall in DC and Washington Park in Denver.

10. Share the gym – by running a 3-4 small net system from side basket to side basket, you can ask to expand your program by just having HALF the gym for use. It is great when the other sports' players peak around the divider net and see the joy of volleyball play – you often get some converts, in addition to not cutting the kids who first play on the volleyball half of the gym. If not seen before, here is [our video](#) on how to set up the net system at very little cost.
11. Reach out to other facility sites, what USAV calls our Affiliated Organizations, and partner to have volleyball programs to fill their activity schedule. These range from the Boys & Girls Clubs, to Jewish Community Centers, YMCA/YWCAs, and of course your area Parks and Recreation places and spaces – indoor and outdoor.
12. Enroll kids into adult leagues, led by a volleyball playing adult mentor/parent, who gets the kids first to serve and serve receive well, thus enabling the kids to hang in there against most adult level park and rec players.
13. Give volleyball a chance to be a player's favorite sport.

While I have your attention, a final plea... to add one other STOP tradition to please change – *STOP hitting and flying under the net*. This is in both warm ups and any spiking drills – usually those without a blocker. While talking with some coaches at the Penn State vs. Princeton match they spoke of their frustration with their players' inability to hit and then transition to hit again. A training I attended in Pennsylvania had a coach working just on "transition hitting." **So what if we simply started here and now attacking, landing and then immediately moving back off the net to hit again...then went and chased the ball?** No more fly towards the net on landing, but landing and flying AWAY from the net.

I am certain two things would quickly happen – 1. Your players would be much more efficient at moving back off the net after landing (rather than so amazingly skilled at flying under the net into the other court) and 2. Your players would know better how to land more off the net and thus fewer lower limb injuries would occur. It is a powerful tradition right now, one that has some players already ducked and under the net before their spike even hits the floor. It is a tradition that needs to change, so we have better skilled players, not to mention healthier ones...

Now, what are your ideas to help us grow the game together by stopping the cutting of youth players from this sport for a lifetime?

## Evolution of Blocking Drills

April 12, 2013

In the book *The Seven Habits*, author Stephen Covey says one of those habits is to “begin with the end in mind.” I can think of no skill more important to do in totally game-like situations other than blocking, in short – the best blockers get that way by blocking live hitters in real games or grills. So when coaches ask for “the best blocking drills,” it is simple – you block hitters who are attempting to put the ball past you. It is that simple as the principle of specificity must be followed. This however is a blog on how blocking drills have evolved to this point, so let’s take a look back.

When I was young, my coach would pull or lower the net to let me “feel” how it was to block. That tradition is simply a waste of players’ valuable volleyball learning time, just like it would be to lower the net for a spiker. We must train in reality, and for those kids who cannot jump high enough to put their hands above the net, not their fingertips or fingernails, we need to teach them to play floor defense all six rotations. When they can get their hands above the net, then they should, with that body and size they now have, start learning the “when and where” of blocking, since the actual technique is pretty simple – you jump with both arms and put them up (and as you get taller/better jump, over) above the net.

Then there is the tradition of “soft” blocking, where a shorter player jumps at the net with their hands folded back to intercept a ball being spiked sharply down. For sure this is a blocking technique, but you have to ask yourself, how many of your opponents hit the ball down at such a sharp angle that the soft block is possible? The percentage is very low compared to the much higher success level of having that player dig most spikers.

One other key thing to remember is that if a player is too short to get their hands above the net, they might not block, but they CAN be good attackers. One of my favorite high school teams I coached, Del Norte out of Albuquerque, NM had the Garay sisters. Claudia was maybe 5’1” with her highest jump and reach, her fingertips still were a good 4 inches below the top of the net. So I had her play middle back all six rotations, and hit bics and shoot sets and tandems, but all from 2 meters off the net. Remember that no matter how high you jump off the floor, if you contact part of the ball below the top of the net, it is not an illegal back row attack. Claudia hit near the net all six rotations as part of our offense, but was always legal in those attacks. She also never hit where she looked but that is covered in the STOP Teaching Spiking blog. The point is, you might not teach a player to block, soft or otherwise, if they are short, but you always teach them to attack and play floor defense like a waterbug in a stream.

Then there is the BOX, a tradition for both spikers to hit against a block, or for blockers to stand on and practice their “technique.” Like so many non-game like methods created not from the science of motor learning principles, but from teaching the way we were taught, learning to block while standing on a box is a total waste of time. Remember, there are two parts to being able to “do” a skill – 1. Being able to demonstrate the technique without a ball, thus showing that you KNOW what the technique is and 2. Being able to do the technique at the right place and time. You can simply have players stand on the ground and then move/jump to show you what their blocking technique is, not even with a net. Once you know they have the concept, you need to guide their discovery of timing to learn when and where to jump, against a real attacker. This short time window means that the skill of blocking starts with reading what is going on in the game. The myriad of combinations of where the setter is in relation to the attacker, how high the set is and how far off the net, the jumping ability of the attacker, the arm speed of the attacker, and so many other things factor into when and where to jump. This is never learned on a box. Indeed, when blockers “block” a coach/teammate who is standing on a box, since the “attacker” is frozen in time, the blockers must key their jump based on the slap or toss of the ball by the person standing on the box. Even though we want all blockers to watch the intelligent thing involved in the attack, the PERSON, and not the ball, since this person is on a box, the blockers learn to their when/where by watching the ball. Again I must say, a blocking a spiker on a box is a total waste of time, as it teaching the WRONG skills in blocking, not the correct ones.

There also is the tradition of “shadow blocking,” where to players on opposite sides of the net jump and touch hands together, then land, and move down the net, jump again and touch hands, in some bizarre choreographed mirror line dance. So again, if you become the Olympic gold medalist at shadow blocking, what have you taught your athletes to have as a blocking “skill?” You have taught them to jump directly in front of the attacker – which is actually the wrong place to be as a good blocker for you let the spiker swing freely cross court, and the further the attacker is off the net, the more “inside” the block needs to form, not in front of the attacker. You have taught them to jump at the same time as the attacker, which is too early for any set ball other than one put on top of the net for a joust. Every centimeter the ball is set further off the net, the blocker needs to jump more and more microseconds later. The goal is to be at the top of your jump as the ball nears and crosses the plane of the net. Finally, you have taught them to play patty cake above the net, when in reality, the more you can penetrate over the net, the more court space behind your block that is taken away for your team’s defenders.

Blocking feedback is unique, as you can block GREAT yet not touch the ball! Every other skill in our sport you contact the ball for part of your internal feedback and learning. In blocking, if you take away a hitter's favorite shot, and they tip, rather than hit, or hit out or a less effective for them shot to hit around your block – you did a GREAT job blocking. So in coaching blocking, you need to check for understanding with your players and if they jump in the right place and time, and the hitter adjusts to a less favorite shot, you make sure they know how great that block was. This timing is in thousandths of a second difference between right time and late/early. Stand on the ref platform and take video right down the top of the net with an iPad or a web cam hooked up to a laptop.

Two other things to think about creatively puts us back to who should be blocking and if a block is needed. The latter is simple, not every attack deserves a block, or the attacker may not deserve a two or even three player block, but just a single blocker. . If you had a player who could touch higher above the net than half her teammates, you likely would have her blocking on the court. What if she was your best defender by far? Why not let the other two netmates form a two person block and let your great floor defender dig all six rotations. That sure works at many junior levels, but know that our USA women's Olympic team has also done this, letting their best digger dig, even when she was at the net.

Back when I could jump, something I still get to remember now by watching my son blocking, I was told that I had amazing “hang time.” My nickname was “Sky King” as I had a good vertical but I am not able to avoid the laws of physics, including gravity. What would happen is that the taller middle blocker would close next to me and jump, but I would delay by maybe 2-3 thousandths of a second, as I read that the attacker was hitting off speed. Then as my teammate started to fall out of the sky, I would still be climbing, and would block the tip or soft shot. The fans, who only watch the ball, did not see that I delayed a tiny bit, but did see the taller middle blocking teammate falling and me still “hanging” in the air and stuffing the ball. The point of this story in a paragraph is simple, blocking is about jumping at the right time and place, based on what the attackers most likely options are as seen from their approach and the set placement – and it is always different.

In my article “[Volleyball Canyons to Bridge](#)” I ask one “canyon question” on blocking. That is, what percent of the time do your hitters spike against no block in a match...and what percent of time in practice do your hitters attack against no block. As the most valuable way to learn to block as we noted at the start of this blog, is by blocking hitters approaching and jumping, then in practice your blockers (and hitters) should be blocking at a percentage that matches that percent. If you coach 12s there will be quite a bit of time you can hit in practice against no block, but as you move up the age ladder, you should find that most the time hitters hit, they should also be being blocked.

You see, the final evolution gets us to becoming the best we can be at seeing and recognizing patterns. If you watch the Tom Hoff Great Player webinar, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-mkXj1Uf5Bk&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-mkXj1Uf5Bk&feature=player_embedded) you hear how he determines what he might do as a middle blocker on things that are both scouted and seen in 8-10 previous attacks during the match against each player. He is adjusting and learning as the match goes on, and this only comes by playing, not drilling. Blockers and diggers need to share the same “Visual Encyclopedia” that our new head National team coach Karch Kiraly addresses so well – how patterns tell you the probabilities.

So again, to be a great blocker requires improvement in the two most important skills in our sport – learning and reading. Remember the myths of reading are 1. high level athletes have superior visual systems – 20/20 vision (they don't) 2. Perceptual skills do NOT transfer across sports (they do) and 3. Perceptual skills can't be improved by practice/instruction (they can be improved). The realities are in blocking to recognize and recall structured patterns...anticipate using advanced visual skills... have efficient search strategies – seeing v. looking, other cues to look for – hand position, shoulder, etc... extract minimum essential information, superior knowledge of situation probabilities...know that perception is less affected by emotional state....

My favorite point of the importance of being a good blocker by simply blocking hitters comes from a discussion that our national team coaches have shared. When coaches are asked if they would rather have a player with near perfect reading skills and not great technique, or a player with perfect technique and not great reading skills, the answer is generally universal. So again, as the game teaches the game, stop creating blockers who are ball watchers and start teaching them to watch the hitters' approaches and remember what each attacker does. Tom Tait said it best...Let athletes be athletes, not robots.



## They Learn by DOING

February 28, 2014

One of the core concepts of motor learning is to increase the opportunities to respond. In our USA Volleyball IMPACT course, we call this increasing the contacts per hour. For in all cases, the reality is that we learn by doing, NOT by watching when it comes to acquiring skill. Indeed, the old Chinese proverb of “*I hear and I forget, I see and I remember, I do and I understand*” is why USAV Coaching Accreditation Program (CAP) courses put all the coaches out on the court to experience the drills – so they understand and increase their volleyball IQ.

I use several examples of this in the coaching clinics I do – starting first with how did you learn to walk...sure you watched countless people walk from the stroller, carrier, or crib, but you **LEARNED** by doing it, along with many errors in the process. What about how you learned to ride a bike, a skill set far more dangerous than volleyball, as children get killed learning to ride. Did your parents hire a bike riding coach? Did they send you to bike riding summer camp? Did they put you through bike riding drills? How about bike riding progressions? No, you learned by doing. Finally, “How did my own kids learn to drive?” They had watched me drive for 16 years, but did they know how to drive? No, not until they actually got behind the wheel, and gave driving a go....and how good are kids at driving when they first learn? Well just look at my insurance bill for their first year of driving, and see, how by doing, by driving, over time their driving improved and my rates dropped dramatically.

Now, let's look at the current skill robbing tradition of playing 6 vs. 6 with kids under 12. Even worse in a PE class, it is 15 vs 16 on the one court, where the average child twitches and watches for any rally, then rotates, never even touching the ball in a half hour class. When clubs take their beginners who need lots of “driving time” into competition, their roster of 12 vs. their opponents 12 players, sees six on the bench and six playing. What everyone simply seems to fail to understand is that this is essentially and simply like 24 kids learning to ride a bike, but there is only ONE BIKE, as in one ball of contact/doing the skill. Everyone else is watching. So I ask you, how long will it take to teach 24 kids to ride a bike, with only one bike to practice riding on? Yeah, way, way, way too long. Yet program after program put their youth into six on six competitions, with whatever number of additional kids riding the pine, and all of them watching but-only one person contacting the ball.

The need to get more gamelike touches in a practice period is fraught with traditions which not only have players training in un-game-like ways, they again are simply doing too much watching, and not enough learning by doing. Add in that most programs also still adhere to the tradition of the coach controlling the drills, and you see research showing that the coach will get 10 times more contacts in a practice than any one player. Yet the coach never plays a single point – they just keep stealing volleyball IQ enhancing skillful contacts from every player, by controlling most drills.

When I wrote the first IMPACT manual in 1988, I had no idea that this year would see its 26<sup>th</sup> edition being used in 2014. You see, the manual is updated annually to include the newest research we discover over the year at USAV, so a book from last year might have as much as 10 percent or more new insights and ideas than this years. Like the best coaches are lifelong learners, so is the manual's material for every new coach joining USAV. The drill design chapter has not changed from the start, however, stating that this is about maximizing (increasing), meaningful (reality based), movements (the game between contacts) and contacts (skill touches).

Ask the players – “Do you want to do a game about this skill, or a drill?” and what do you get in response? Why is the chorus “A GAME!!” do you think? We have asked, and the top three answers back are: 1. When we do a drill the coach gets most the contacts but in a game, we do as he/she is mostly out of the game. 2. A game is way more fun and competitive than a drill. 3. A game means I am playing my peers but a drill often means I am learning the moves of an old person...lol.

They know how the game teaches the game and increases their volleyball IQ and skill. Just ask around the world, what drill or game do players scream NOOOOOOOOOOOO! when you go to stop it? Universally it is monarch/king/queen of the court – or lately speed ball (a game like monarch of the court but on steroids), as the research has shown you get 22 percent more contacts per hour in speed ball (where the ball is ALWAYS in the air) versus monarch of the court. Add in that it is based in reality, by starting with the serve (just like virtually every point scored in a match), and by going OVER the net, and you start to see why they like it. The final reason however goes back to the title of this blog – in 6 vs. 6 games, half the team on each side watches on each rally on their side, and maybe even more. In smaller sided fast games of 2 vs 2, you almost always get to touch the ball every net crossing, and in 3 vs 3, you usually do. The athletes know the importance of maximizing meaningful movements and contacts, it is just that the coaches don't.

Then there is the old adage of the more you know, the more you try and tell them and the more you confuse them. In addition, the more you know, the more you like to hear yourself talk, and the more they stand around. I have seen practices where the coaches talk over 50 percent of the time, expounding on their wisdom, and forgetting that players need to DO to learn best, not be lectured. Indeed, there is a great study recently by MIT who discovered that even with their bright, passionate students, that powerpoints and lectures simply was not resulting in the students learning the topic.

This leads us to what you are seeing at our National Team practices, what educators call a “flipped” classroom – in which the players are empowered, and the coaches are there as mentors, but not ball machines or lecturers. In an article in the New England Journal of Medicine, titled “Lecture Halls Without Lectures,” Stanford Associate Medical School dean, [Charles Prober](#) and business professor, [Chip Heath](#), cite that when Stanford piloted a Biochemistry flipped class where students review YouTube lectures at home and solve problems alongside professors in the classroom, attendance ballooned from roughly 30% to 80%. More importantly their one-week study that compared a control class that earned a lecture from a Nobel Prize-winning physicist and an experimental class where students collaborated with graduate assistants to do and solve physics problems, the non-lecture group had test scores that nearly doubled the lecture group at 41% to 74%.

So I challenge all readers of my blog to grow the game even better together by flipping your gym – and letting the players not only DO in gamelike ways but do MORE. Using smaller groups, stations, nets/ribbons down the middle of the gym, and getting more balls into the air than just one. Indeed, take this concept to heart please – *that if you only have one ball in the air above your court, you might as well just be scrimmaging.* Playing teaches the game flow and increases your players’ volleyball IQ – and that is crucial to successful competition. Our National teams know this, as they play small sided games nearly every practice, to get more contacts per hour. *We have too many players who know the technique, but do not know the skill.* Please ponder that statement and empower your players to be skillful, not just technical. Drills may help acquire technique but skill is only developed in game play and competition.

All this leads to a bonus round!, thanks to Gary Horvath, a USAV CAP Level I coach, who also is a master tennis instructor and all around great ponderer. He did a wonderful study of a classic sized club, of five teams, and then with his great understanding of sport skills from not just one, but TWO rebound sports, gives the facts on what he discovered by looking at how much learning by doing was going on. [Sharing the study](#) he wrote in an email I received this week:

*The session with the most touches was conducted by a coach whose team had a reasonable finish at nationals last year. The session was noteworthy for the minimal amount of discussion (although plenty of instruction was given during the session) and the high number of meaningful touches. The mix of drills had a nice flow. Very intense, fast-paced drills were followed by slower drills.*

*This is in sharp contrast to the other 4 sessions which had a lot of lecturing and standing in line. One two-hour practice had fewer than 600 touches for the entire team. Almost half the touches came during 18 minutes of hitting lines.*

Gary knows, and writes that the sample size was not close to being large enough, but the point really is this – CHART several of your practices, see how much your players are learning by doing, and you will almost certainly find opportunities for change. If you value it, you measure it. You, or those stat happy parents in the stands, likely know your players stats in competition. Gary and I challenge you to stat your coaching in practice. Please, for the sake of your athletes.

I head at dawn to the east coast for a series of player and coaching clinics in GEVA and KRVA. Friday night I get the pleasure of watching my son Cody and his Princeton Tiger teammates battle on their home court of Dillion Gym, vs. the perennial league champion Penn State. It will be standing room only in the gym and tonight, Cody told me the new President of the university will be coming to speak to the team in advance of the match. Win or lose, I still love to watch my kids play, and be with others who love the game as much as I do – like Princeton coach Sam Shweisky and Penn State’s Mark Pavlik and Jay Hosack. Well worth sitting in a metal tube at 35,000 feet for 5 hours. Thanks to Gary again for sharing his study-ette, and please share any comments on how else you have been successful in making the change to helping your amazing athletes learn by doing.

## Learning vs. Teaching

February 19, 2014

The two most important skills in our sport are reading (as in anticipation, not hunkering down with a great book, though that skill is VERY important in life) and learning.

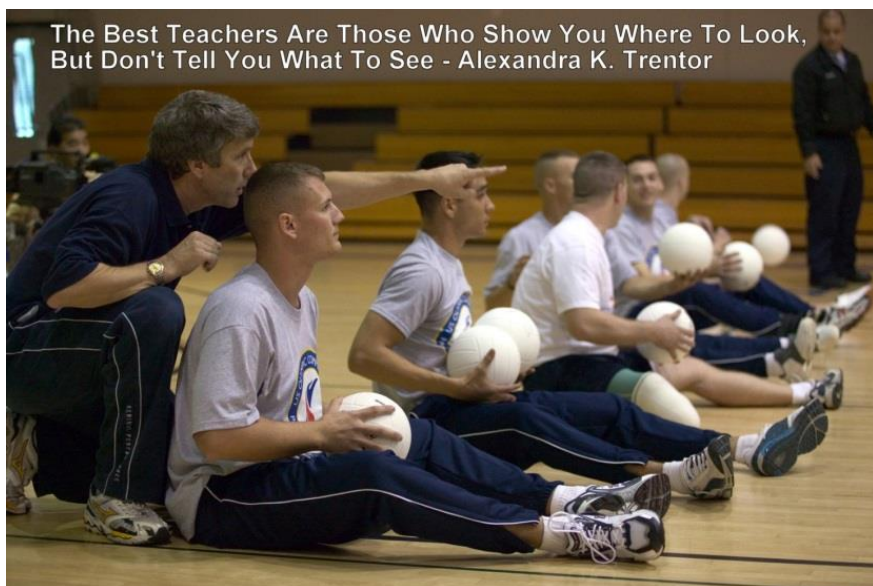
The two most important technical skills in our sport are serving (the one closed motor program we get to perform), and serve reception (NOT passing – as covered in my blog [STOP Teaching Passing](#))

The two most important quotes I have read about the above are two much smarter leaders than me, Albert Einstein and John Wooden.

*“You Haven’t Taught Them Until They Have Learned”* – John Wooden – turned into a book by a former UCLA player of Coach Wooden – Swen Nater (<http://www.amazon.com/Havent-Taught-Until-They-Learned/dp/1885693664> )

*“I never teach my pupils, I only provide them the conditions in which they can learn.”* – Albert Einstein.

There are many methods coaches use to teach our sport. Alas too many of them fail to maximize the importance of reality – and thus the importance of learning and reading for performance. These coaches would rather look good in practice, despite the lack of transfer to performance, resorting to part training over whole and blocked training over random.



The word that ties this all together is *retention* – and the science is clear on this even if coaches fail to take advantage of it in training – telling someone what to do (explicit learning) results in far worse retention of what is being taught, when compared to implicit learning (as Einstein notes above). While implicit learning could take a long time, the questioning and guided discovery techniques of a good teacher/coach results in almost as effective retention, while shortening the learning process. Thus one of my favorite quotes I share in my coaching clinics is by Alexandra Trentor – *“The best teachers are those who show you where to look, but not what to see.”* Why does this matter – It is because of the importance of reading in our sport. Why is it that every coach sitting on the bench, could WALK out and get the tip shot an opposing attacker does, yet the players fail to identify it until too late? Part of the answer

comes from not training in reality – thus I used to “coach the way I was coached” and stood at the net throwing volleyballs underhanded from side to side, as my earnest players flung themselves one side and another, teammates cheering, in a classic “coach on one” drill. I was teaching my players that the tip shot falls over the net, near the net (which it does) then shoots out from about waist height into the corners of the court. So then I got more “gamelike” and stood on a box on the other side of the net and trained “tipping drills” as my players watched me “frozen in the air and time” at a height never reached by any of their opponents. Not only do no players stand on a box in reality, what I failed to teach is reading the patterns of opponents, the WHEN a player is likely to tip. This learning of the patterns of both the game, systems and individual opponents, is really only learned by playing, never by drilling. Why else can a player walk in, both hands up, not jump, and still get their two handed tip shot to fall? Because in the end, performance in the competition comes from competitive, game speed, technical development thru game play, not from the vast majority of drills currently being used.

For five straight days, for the 10<sup>th</sup> year in a row, our top National Team and High Performance pipeline coaches shared their “secrets” with our top coaches from all over the USA and several other nations. I will share in a future blog, as I have in the past, what ideas I learned but one of the most important themes remained the importance of learning to read. So as the players shared how they learned through the chaos of random play, I “heard” our two time Olympic medal winning coach, Hugh McCutcheon speaking to the same

group a few years ago. When these top players in the nation began to play “pepper” OVER the net, with an attack jump included, things got less than perfect. Especially compared to what good players can traditionally do in pair pepper. Hugh turned, smiled, and said “Looking a little squirrely out there...” and went back to letting the chaos teach.

Over the last 20 years, the USOC has studied characteristics of great coaches. One of the most important in each of them is that they were lifelong learners. This is the same for your players – it is a long process and not measured just by outcome, nor is it linear – it is a rollercoaster of learning.

You see, letting a player’s first coach be the game, not a coach, can make a coach feel a bit unimportant. So now for my final two -- questions in this case. Ask any coach who has been teaching a few years what their players remember about them. You will hear things like fun, leadership, confidence, believing in me, and the like – and likely never “we won \_\_\_\_\_ tournament.” As I tweeted a while ago, “Coaches need to be less concerned with the X’s and O’s and more about the I’s and U’s.” Secondly, research shows that in the beach game some 6 million Americans played some form of doubles volleyball last year, on grass or sand. How many beach coaches do you know right now, and if you have been in the sport for over a decade, how many beach coaches did you know back then? Yes, playing doubles or singles in any sport when young and letting the coach be the game is important, so the patterns of play, not just the techniques, are acquired early. For in the end, the sooner we teach reading/anticipation in reality, and do things in practice that may be random, but which are learned, not just taught, and retained, not just shown in practice, the better our players will be at ANY age.

For any parent reading this, a recent anonymous quote struck gold in my eyes for this Winter Olympic period –

Your kid’s success or lack of success in sports does not indicate what kind of parent you are... But having an athlete that is coachable, respectful, a great teammate, mentally tough, resilient and who tries their best is a direct reflection of your parenting.

Oh, and yes, the Kessels in Sochi, both #28 and #81, are related to Cody, McKenzie and me. Isn’t it obvious from how they play the game? Who knows....



## My Top Things I Must Have as a Coach

February 05, 2014

1. **Three Outlet Adapter** – This leads my list because of the technology that we all use to be better teachers. Carrying a 1 to 3 adapter makes you a savior to one other fellow traveler, as you ask permission to change one outlet to 3, one for the lucky first arriver, one for you, and one for that other fellow coach or traveler desperately needing a power source. Also when you need to power up your computer AND a projector AND speakers, but only have one long extension cord, well your problem is solved. Get one for every coach in your program.
2. **White Boards** – Said it often, [CLICK HERE WHY](#) – and sure it can be my practice plan pre printed or a chalk board, but there is something about a white dry erase board that screams **ENHANCING LEARNING HAPPENS HERE...** One for stuff that needs to stay, a second for the days planning and idea sharing.
3. **Ball Pressure Gauge** – There is a term in motor learning that is very important – Appropriate Regulatory Stimuli – which I hope is self explanatory – in this instance, it is the ball, which must be checked to ensure often that it is inflated to the same pressure level of the game balls you will be playing with.
4. **Ribbon** – 1.5 inch wire edged, white fabric ribbon to be exact. Looks to every kid like the top of the net. A rope works too, or one of our 4 nets on a rope net systems. Ribbon is online for about \$10-15 for 50 yards, and less at Costco when in stock. String it from wall rope anchors, poles or even two referee stands beyond each endline, and you have 4 warm up/kids training courts for over the net pepper games of 1 v 1, 2 v 2 or 3 v 3. Then just pull it down for larger group training games and grills.
5. **Tablet** – iPad or whatever, the apps that can mirror/delay/replay and much more, bring what the used to cost millions down to just \$5 per app and the cost of your choice of tablet. See list of apps below.
6. **Tablet Holder and Tripod** – To free you up from holding it, and getting you back to teaching. Just to have it be a 10-20 second delay video station for the players to watch their most recent action is worth it alone.
7. **Net Height Checker** – An eight foot beaded chain with premeasured height mark point lets you check any practice or competition net to make sure it also is at “appropriate regulatory stimuli” so your players are getting accurate feedback on their net and other play.
8. **Painters Tape** – Blue, moderate release, or Purple –super light release. Both 2 inch wide and narrower. Temporarily mark the net bands or netting, mark the floor for where to be, mark the wall with women’s and men’s net height “bands” to make the wall a partner to train against for warm ups.
9. **Swim Noodles** – Regular six foot long ones from the dollar store to make low cost “antenna” by weaving them through the netting squares, varying colors for varied target markers on the top or bottom of the net band (slice one side of the noodle to slide it on the band), Weave them in the shape of a “support ribbon” at the top of the net to create a blocker to hit around.
10. **Whistle** - electronic to be cool, or regular to get your coach workout – This is yet another “appropriate regulatory stimuli” that also gets you to be a more efficient teacher.
11. **Hand Ball Pump and LOTS of Inflation Needles** - Needles, go on ebay or Froogle and buy a 100 pack – never have to search for another one again. Hand pump, I like the bulb pump, but the tube ones are most common, same search on Froogle gets you dozens of options.
12. **Speed Radar Gun** – There are two best options – the larger Velocity Speed gun made by Bushnell, price under \$100 and the much smaller but pricier Pocket Radar Gun, price about \$200. Both are full featured radar guns.
13. **Balloons** – 12 in white, or colored helium quality – in the party departments of any Target/Walmart in packs of a dozen or the 60 packs, both under \$10.
14. **Sharpies** – Red, Blue and Black – for marking balls, sign making, and more. While I am at it, a couple of dry erase markers too in case the ones you start to use were not sealed and are now dry for your use.

**Apps** – *Seems as many coaches don’t know all the great VB related apps out there, so here are my favorites....*

1. **BAM Video Delay** – show “mirror like” on the face of the tablet whatever the lens is set to show, but by rubbing your finger on the face of the tablet, you can delay longer or shorter up to 2 minutes. Player does whatever on the court, then before the 15 seconds, or whatever time set amount, goes over to the tablet to see their skill performance. Coach does not need to be present. <http://www.orangeqube.com/bustamove/>
2. **Dartfish Express – or Ubersense, or Coaches Eye** – fast replay video options for in practice feedback, which includes the ability to draw lines/angles, and more to assist.
3. **Scoreboard** - Simply turns your tablet into a “flip score” device easy to read from across the court. <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/scoreboard-free-version/id496758984?mt=8>
4. **VBStatsHD** – Does all the stats/video synching you want and more – not cheap – but not expensive at \$30. For those who want a powerful app. - <http://peranasports.com/?portfolio=vbstatshd-demonstration>
5. **ACE Stats/Tap Recorder** – Low cost fast stat software. <http://www.ace4vb.com/smart-device-store.html>

## Computer programs

1. **Kinovea** – A video player for all sport enthusiasts. Slow down, study and comment the technique of your athletes or of yourself. It is 100% free and open source. <http://www.kinovea.org/>
  2. **KeepVid** – A website that allows you to save YouTube and other popular video websites material onto your computer's hard drive, as mp4, Wmv, and flv files of various level of quality and thus size. [www.keepvid.com](http://www.keepvid.com)
- Feel free to comment to tell us your must-have additions, and if you want a head start on getting these ideas and information, follow me on twitter @JohnKesselUSAV

## Change Your Words, Change Your Gym

January 22, 2014

I recently was at the NCAA Finals for Women's D1 and four words jumped out at me that I have always found of importance, but which were being repeated in session after session. To hear others using these four words in genuine ways, makes me think we have turned a corner in volleyball. Now, many coaches around the world are making the changes needed to become better teachers of the game.

One of the words was "Gamelike." For too long coaches have said "this is gamelike" when in reality it was far from it. It reminds me of a YouTube drill I chanced upon years ago where one group was kicking volleyballs, as the other group was at the net, standing backwards. Their job was to shuffle in front of the rolling volleyball to stop it from crossing under the net, by intercepting it with their heels and/or calves. The coach kept saying "this is gamelike" as this most un-volleyball-gamelike charade went on, believing, I would have to assume, that if he said "gamelike" enough, the viewers would believe him. After all, since it was on the Internet, it must be true. At the convention however, more training examples being shown were actually gamelike. Still, too many partner examples shown for my personal motor learning science based beliefs, but definitely more gamelike training overall.

The other two words were a phrase "Growth Mindset." Readers of my blog became aware of this important pair of words years ago, when I first shared Carol Dweck's research. At this convention it was a strong topic of discussion and reference, and that is again great to see, for it is important in developing better learners of anything, including sport.

The power of our words, as it is the most important part of our coaching impact, that of giving feedback, is worth more study by all coaches. In our IMPACT manual I have shared for over 25 years why we need to change the words "Don't" – to what you want, as you can't teach a negative; "Try" as it gives the person an excuse for not doing it, as Yoda knows full well; "But" – for it shuts the door on whatever words you shared just before that word, while "and" lets the words still be heard; and "Can't" for there is nothing you will ask them to do that is impossible, it just has not been done 10 of 10 times yet. It is likely they will start at 1 of 10...however, it can still be done.

The word was Mastery. When I was writing the first IMPACT manual, I sat in a kitchen area of Bill Neville's home, with him and Mike Flemming, I knew the word I wanted was IMPACT, as that was the intent of this must take course; to impact coaches in a positive way,. I was not sure what words to make the acronym from. I think it was Mike that found the word Mastery as we were going through the dictionary to find the best words for each letter. And once I heard it, that was that. Karch speaks to the USA Women's National team training athletes about just getting a little better every day. Others spoke about "the process" – and in the end it came down to focusing every day on mastery, for that is an anchor word to all programs seeking to help athletes be the best they can be.

There are so many other negative, demotivating words and phrases in sport and in life, that we really need to cut out. There are a couple of interesting gals in the United Kingdom who focus on this area, Liz Green and Andrea Gardner. Liz calls herself a "pioneer of positive change" while Andrea told a short story in a clip called Change Your Words, Change Your World..." thus the title of this blog. You can see the two of them talk about their ideas in this 30 min. video...

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Fc0NaeckM4>

To see three 1-2 minute clips that Andrea created, their links are shown below. In all three examples, you can see how a change in wording makes such a big difference in the life of the persons making that change. Take about 5 more minutes to ponder these three, and feel free to share in the comments section any examples of wording changes you have made in your gym that made a difference in your teaching and your athletes' learning.

Change Your Words, Change your World

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hzgzim5m7oU>

Time to Make a Difference

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jnwQYwAnud4>

How Many Balloons have you Burst?

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZPZR5PzP8HM>



## What is Truer than Truth?

January 05, 2014

The answer to this old Jewish proverb is “the story.” Every coach needs to become a better storyteller, as humans simply remember the facts and important parts of what you want to teach, when you weave it into a story. You have been wired to do this since you were very young, when morals and important ideas were shared with you by bedtime stories. Who went to bed being told bedtime facts? Back at the dawn of civilization, and even before, the elders taught the future of their family by storytelling. Cave paintings were stories being told. It is no different with the athletes you coach, whether on a team or in individual sports – they will learn better as you become a better story teller.

Music in its own right is a form of storytelling. Weave music into stories and you can remember the story for the rest of your life – take this opening “Well this is a story about a man named Jeb....” Every movie of course is a story, no matter how short the movie is. So use the power of story in your own words, that of others in movies and song and develop the leadership of each and every player you contact. It’s important, and it’s one of the best ways to make a difference in the lives of your athletes – by sharing the stories that matter, inspire and empower them to be the best they can be. You will see this story telling soon in every Olympian who competes, medal winners or not. And for those who are working too hard to get through my past blogs, here is a summary of where the stories as told by videos that impacted my coaching over these recent years, can be found. Perhaps the most important is in the video of the IMPACT of coaches....found among other videos in this section of the USAV Grassroots page:<http://www.teamusa.org/USA-Volleyball/Grassroots/Videos> My blog lists are below.

2011

<http://www.teamusa.org/USA-Volleyball/Features/2011/December/14/Videos-and-Principles-Worth-Many-Thousands-of-Words.aspx>

2012

<http://www.teamusa.org/USA-Volleyball/Features/2012/December/21/Holiday-Gifts-for-Volleyball-Leaders-and-Athletes-2012-Edition.aspx>

2013

<http://www.teamusa.org/USA-Volleyball/Features/2013/December/18/Videos-Used-in-My-2013-Teachings>

Finally, there is a recent article in the *Harvard Business Review* June 2013 issue. I strongly suggest every reader take the time to digest entitled “How to Give a Killer Presentation” These “Lessons from TED” by the curator of TED, Chris Anderson contain ideas on framing your story to the top ten errors you need to avoid in giving a presentation. It is a gem of an article, filled with both stories and ideas which will make you a better coach, and also, a better teacher for your athletes in how they can develop their own stories better, for school, work and play. If you have a story to share that came from being a better storyteller as a coach, we would love to hear it, share in the comments and let’s all learn from one another.

## Decide Slowly

November 30, 2013

I have written several times about the Long Term Athlete Development movement, something which over 15 years ago USA Volleyball's Coaching Accreditation Program began including in the IMPACT and CAP clinics we put on. Earlier in November some 15 National Governing Bodies (NGBs for short) joined with the US Olympic Committee staff and Nike to share the latest research and ideas in this area.

Before I go any further, I want to share a statement that impacted everyone in the room greatly – ***that for the first time ever, the young kids of this newest generation in the U.S. will have a FIVE years less life expectancy....*** Whoa nelly, did I hear that right? Yes, primarily due to the increasingly inactive lifestyle kids are now having, which follows into their adult life. The research also shows that the age to change and get more lifelong active adults, is in a child's first 10 years. This we knew and is why we have been pushing more youth volleyball programming, including free USAV membership for 8 and unders.

Nike brought a lot of research to the group, which I urge all of you reading my blog to download and share – [www.designedtomove.org](http://www.designedtomove.org) While discussing this meeting with Dr. Peter Vint, Director of Innovation, he shared a discussion he had with John Murtough...now with Manchester United in the English Premier Football League. While discussing LTAD and pipeline decisions on athletes seeking to play for England at the highest level, Mr. Murtough brilliantly summarized it by saying "Decide Slowly."

The work of Dr. Carl McGown and two time US Olympic team head men's coach Fred Sturm in this area of LTAD, had been summarized well by our International Volleyball Federation (FIVB) – and is also a valuable download/read - being recently posted to the FIVB website [here](#).

Dr. McGown shared a [recent HBR study](#), lasting over 75 years showing once again that **Initial ability is not highly correlated with final ability.**

*The opening information on this study reads as this: At a time when many people around the world are living into their tenth decade, the longest longitudinal study of human development ever undertaken offers some welcome news for the new old age: our lives continue to evolve in our later years, and often become more fulfilling than before. Begun in 1938, the Grant Study of Adult Development charted the physical and emotional health of over 200 men, starting with their undergraduate days. The now-classic 'Adaptation to Life' reported on the men's lives up to age 55 and helped us understand adult maturation.*

*Now George Vaillant follows the men into their nineties, documenting for the first time what it is like to flourish far beyond conventional retirement. Reporting on all aspects of male life, including relationships, politics and religion, coping strategies, and alcohol use (its abuse being by far the greatest disruptor of health and happiness for the study's subjects), 'Triumphs of Experience' shares a number of surprising findings. **For example, the people who do well in old age did not necessarily do so well in midlife, and vice versa.** While the study confirms that recovery from a lousy childhood is possible, memories of a happy childhood are a lifelong source of strength. Marriages bring much more contentment after age 70, and physical aging after 80 is determined less by heredity than by habits formed prior to age 50. The credit for growing old with grace and vitality, it seems, goes more to ourselves than to our stellar genetic makeup.*

Volleyball on an LTAD timeline chart is a LATE specializing sport. While Olympic gymnasts must specialize very young to have success at the Olympic level, especially girls, our sport really takes the combination of skills, strength and experience in the ability to read and deceive the opponent. My Canadian coaching friend Mark Tennant recently shared this chart from some FIVB work he has done.

Mark shared a chart about the late specialization sport aspect of volleyball, a summary of age characteristics of the 2012 London Olympic Games women's and men's teams. Consider these facts. The final rank of the five oldest teams of the 12 teams of each gender was no lower than 5<sup>th</sup>....and then there are these facts:

Average age of all 12 teams	Average age of the three teams medalling
Women: 26.75	29.94
Men: 27.49	27.94

Oldest Team	Oldest Player
Women: 30.58	39.2
Men: 30.92	41.0
Youngest Team	Youngest Player
Women: 22.0	17.5
Men: 23.6	18.75

### **So to summarize for all of us in this sport for a lifetime?**

*The sooner and the more we are active as kids, the more we will be active through our lives....*

*Keep as many athletes as long as possible playing.- Minimize or eliminate cutting kids in all programming.....*

*Initial ability has little correlation to final ability, so....*

*Decide slowly*

Let's work together with all regions, clubs and affiliated organizations in USAV like the YMCAs and Parks and Rec, to give more children a chance to be their sport, and teach all of them what having a 75 and over national championships means to their lifelong involvement in volleyball.

By the way, if you can follow me on Twitter now, not just Facebook and LinkedIn - [@JohnKesselUSAV](#) , if you want to get some of the reads and ideas in advance of their being shared in my Growing the Game Together Newsletter or this GTGT blog.

## Winners Stay On

November 19, 2013

I have been doing grassroots players and coaches clinics for the Gulf Coast USAV Region and a USAV Beach CAP course this weekend. We are on the beautiful powdered sugar, squeaky sand of Ft. Walton Beach, Florida with Jon Aharoni and Ali Lamberson. Phil Bryant, the commissioner, has been doing great things here for over 20 years, and this long weekend is no different, as there also is a CAP Level 1 AND a CAP Level 2 with Bill Neville, Cecile Reynaud, Diana Cole and Don Burroughs teaching. Plans are to do it next year as well, so mark your calendar to come to the beach and learn!

Several things came out for me that I am going to share in this blog, the most important being the reminder of the value of the concept of WINNERS STAY ON training. It was how I learned to play on the beach – putting my name on the list...waiting and watching the older/better players...finally getting on the court and then – losing 11-2, 11-3...then putting my name back on the bottom of the list and repeating my wait/watch/learn cycle. I was never punished by being told to run laps, do push ups or something that made me dislike/seeing physical conditioning as a punishment. I learned over and over and over again, that if I won, I got to keep playing.

Isn't that what this year's NCAA Volleyball Championships are all about at all division levels? Winners stay on? Every high school playoff round that you are preparing for is simply...Winners stay on. It's not done enough in this current era of training - in beach, indoor, paravolley levels. Why do athletes of any age scream NOOOoooo when you stop playing monarch of the court or speed ball? They not only love to compete in gamelike ways – they love to stay on and keep playing, not find themselves watching as other teams are playing.

So imagine what happened this same weekend when we built a double sized court to video and promote an awareness for all adults, what it is like to be a kid playing on an adult sized court.

Challenge your players in a way that if they err – they have to sit out and watch.



## Heaven or HELL

August 10, 2013

Working in principles before methods has found me sharing ideas with a very diverse group of other leaders in sport and business. The one idea that has helped my volleyball teams that also works in other disciplines is that of first teaching from the positive side a skill option, as you work towards perfection. A recent talk at this year's USOC Olympic Assembly, hosted this year in USA Volleyball's home city of Colorado Springs, with the head coach Mike from NAIA Northwest Christian College, and then with the USOC Leadership sessions with Ebay, General Mills and State Farm executive staff allowed me to share this same concept in a business way. This concept specific to volleyball is covered in much more detail in my article "From Positive to Perfection Training" – available by clicking [HERE](#).

When an intern joins the USA Volleyball Sport Development staff, they get two things to read first. One is the article "No More Mistakes and You're Through" from the iconic business magazine *Forbes*. In he shares the importance of challenging yourself and doing new things never done before – which will of course have errors along the way. We want to go swifter, higher, stronger as players and teams, so mistakes are simply part of the process – for Pobody's Nerfect. An intern will also get a copy of this short poem by Kipling:

I have six friends

Who serve me true

Their names are What, When, Why

How, Where and Who

The current traditions in many sports teach what would be the worst kind of an error for long term development – in no small part as this error is the easiest way to do something. In soccer, good teams pass the ball teammate to teammate, but beginners simply kick the ball to the other end, in order to win. Similarly in volleyball, at the beginning level, the worst teams win – as they simply hit the ball back over on one hit, anywhere into the other side, any height over the net, any way they can. Good teams use all three hits, which when just starting means three chances to err, and thus these teams lose at the start. The solution to beating these one hit teams is to learn to read this kind of "attack" by warming up with the game of "Tennis" something I covered previously in my blog titled "Tennis Anyone."

It goes deeper than just one hit, into the motor program being developed by pair passing and wall spiking. For the "easier" reasons noted above, most teams run onto the court for both practice and game warm ups and pair up. This tradition of partner passing is powerful, but is teaching the worst error first to any player. In digging and serve reception, the worst error is to send the ball directly back to where it came from. Mind you, we know that this scores points and wins many matches in beginner volleyball, but it is negative error that is being developed and taught. Any good team wants this first contact not to go back over the net (to hell), but to ideally go to the setter ... and if not perfect, to go UP to heaven on their side where 5 other teammates are with you. To err in such a way so that THREE hits are possible, not relying on the other side to err.

Our sport is pretty much one filled with errors, the another related important risk management tool – valuable again in all sports – is to put your 'targets' in a place that allows the Bell curve off of perfect, to still let you play the ball. Note that a bell curve in this target way is really a circle, for errors go not just in line off, towards or over the net, but also left to right along the net from where the actual setter target is that you want. So stop keeping your setters standing on the net, and move them off 1-2 meters, so you keep more errors on your side of the net, even if they are negative and go past the target.

Similarly, most coaches teach "wall spiking" in no small part to develop a myth in our sport – that of the power and top spin that comes from snapping your wrist over the "top" of the ball. I have covered this myth before, in that with a contact time of only .01 seconds, the wrist snap only develops 2.3 percent of the power, and more importantly no topspin. What is happening is more like a golf club hitting the ball – and no clubhead snaps on contact, they are quite rigid. It is actually WHERE the sphere of the ball is struck and the angle of the hand at that .01second moment, that makes the ball spin. Thus learning to hit the ball down, as we do in wall spiking and traditional 2 person pepper, is actually making players worse at learning how to effectively hit the ball OVER the net or block. Hitting down for all but the tallest and highest leaping players means you are getting great at hitting into the net, or under it. –

what we call again is hell. Nobody learns anything when you spike or serve into the net. Hitting over the net, into heaven, may still see the error of going out, but in practice your teammates are learning what out looks like, a VERY important reading skill. Besides, the hell of hitting into the net is well under 2.5 meters, while the space for heaven is at least three times more space, depending on the ceiling height – and if you play outdoors, it truly is the space of heaven.

So take a look at this video of two 11 and unders doing this better kind of wall warm up. They are learning to hit over the 2cm wide tape put up on the wall at the height of the net. The other thing that you should notice is that they are not just hitting where they are facing, something they already are pretty good at. They are working on NOT hitting where they are looking/facing, a skill far too few players have in our sport. When the ball comes first to them, simulating contact #1, they do not receive it back against the wall, but pass it up to themselves, the good error habit over bad (back over the net/immediately against the wall). Perfect would go to the net (the wall) but not too near it, but in pairs it is best to teach to “err up” not over. Thus, if you pair pepper, start digging the ball up first to yourself, then set it and hit it over a net/leaping blocker/into heaven with your armswing, not into the hell of the net – even if the net is not there. The importance of playing over the net is not just gamelike, it is reality, and not doing such when you have a net is simply illogical and teaches bad habits.

So to help change the traditions of pair pepper, to the better habits formed by doing dig-to-yourself pepper, you simply warm up taking it to the level of 3 person pepper and the person in the middle is the net! They cannot jump, but they can block balls which are set “too close.” Some programs do this, but few take it to the even higher level of playing 1v1, 2v2, 3v3 and even 4v4 where the team of 1-4 players who loses immediately becomes the net. In showing this to school kids who want to play volleyball at recess, but have no net, they often call it by another sports game name of “monkey in the middle.” Whatever you call it, DO IT! as we need to start teaching a new tradition to play OVER the net, and of hitting into heaven, and not hell.

To see this game in action all over the nation, check out the [USAV website Grassroots](#) section and click on the USAV Drill Video section to find the footage I have shot to make “Losers Become the Net.” – Thanks for your help in growing the game together and as always we welcome your comments. If you are into Twitter, follow me at [@JohnKesselUSAV](#) and get advance notice on some of the new ideas I find to make you a better teacher of this wonderful sport for a lifetime.

## Relentlessly Positive

June 15, 2013

This is another slide in my coaching presentation, that was inspired in no small part by Nelson Mandela. When a man can be imprisoned for 27 years, then when released, seek only collaboration, reconciliation, and the desire for peace, not vengeance, you can only be inspired, as billions of the people of the world, not just the millions of the people of his now grieving nation. This is a time to go buy the ESPN 30 for 30 documentary titled the “The 16<sup>th</sup> Man” which tells the story of Mandela and the South African Springboks rugby team. You can watch it [HERE](#) on YouTube.

I was similarly inspired by coach John Wooden, as have other millions of people, and share a paraphrase of one of his poems that impacted me as well.

The Coach in the Mirror

No written word

Nor spoken plea

Can make your players

What they should be

Nor all the books

On all the shelves

It's what the coaches

Are themselves

So are you relentlessly positive? After all, it's what you DO, not what you say, that my parents taught me matters most. My dad had me reading Norman Vincent Peale's The Power of Positive Thinking when I was young, and worked his entire life healing those who were hurting. My mom was an amazingly successful first grade teacher for decades. She still lives and breathes eternal optimism as she nears her 90<sup>th</sup> year. Every day in her classroom she completely believed in her young students, every single one of them, in all her actions. Does your body's actions do the same in the gym?

It's called summary feedback in motor learning, when you catch your players doing things right, not only come up to work with them when they err. I don't know how many camp coaches I have worked with who give correction and criticism – such that players say to me as head camp coach after the other coach is gone, “Sheesh, do 10 right and where is my coach? Nowhere...Do ONE thing wrong and there they are in my face...blah, blah, blah.” We need teachers who coach to improve a player's average not those who constantly give attention to the errors. Teacher who understand the randomness of sport and the mathematics of regression to the mean.

But it is more than just getting better at feedforward. It is about HOW your body is when you coach. Are you one of those clipboard slamming coaches or a high fiver? Do you slump in frustration on the bench, or sit straight and supportive no matter what the odds? Eric Hodgson told the story of our national team head coach John Speraw being taught of the importance of body actions even to the point of not looking down to think and ponder, but to keep looking up.

So do you call timeout to catch players doing things right, and for other teachable moments, while trusting your players' skill levels and averages to let them get through their streaks of mistakes?

What about your substituting? As a TEACHER, not just a coach, are you teaching your players you believe in them, by leaving them in to learn in the heat of competition what you say you are teaching them to do in practice? Do you understand the impact of the randomness of sport – and work with your players to raise their average in a competitive cauldron in the non-public area of practice– but not when it comes to the actual game played in public? Are you developing amazing leaders on the court by letting the players chose their serving zone, or do you take that chance to develop away from them and put up a clip board and tell them where to serve?



## Pattern Interruption for Improving Coaching

May 09, 2013

If you have attended any of my clinics live, you know at some point in time I teach the value of using the method of pattern interruption to make important points stand out and be remembered, not just for a while, but often permanently. One of the finest teachers in the nation, Jamie Escalante, even had a movie done about his teaching, *Stand and Deliver*, where he brought dozens of inner city high school students to achieve Advanced Placement Test success at a level that the testing company assumed the group had cheated. Retested a month later, even more of the students passed the test under the company's staff watchful eyes. If you have not seen the real Jamie in action, and since everyone reading this has had to take math classes, take a look at how he uses pattern interruption compared to what your and my math teachers did to teach us, in this 4 minute clip titled "[Math, Who Needs It?](#)"

What does a great music instrument/band teacher, great dance teacher, great vocalist teacher, great playwright teacher have in common? They guide their students' discoveries, let them err and learn, in both private lessons and in group teaching periods. Then, when the performances with body, voice and instruments happen, in front of parents and strangers, what do they do? Yep, they sit there and listen and take notes on what to work on in the next practice. There is a lesson in that for coaches in all sports...

We have watched "how to sing" for decades, knowing how to hold the mic, move your hands, emote, but you don't really know how to sing until you sing...and know that I sadly cannot sing, not even in the shower....So this season I have again enjoyed watching *The Voice*. Not just for the renditions of songs they sing, but for all the teaching/coaching you get to watch going on. Unlike the almost abusive shows fueling a "teaching" method - led by "Dance Moms" and including *Toddlers & Tiaras*, and *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* - *The Voice* has real talent mentoring real talent.

The most impressive part of this season for me is seeing the teaching skills of Usher. I would love to have my kids play for him if he coached any sport... In the last few weeks he has danced a waltz with one of his singers, stood way back in the studio and said capture me from here...put his face right in front of another of his singers to ask her to sing to him intimately, made the quirky Michelle Chameul sing *True Colors* (great song choice by Usher) to herself by holding up a full length mirror.... All great examples of pattern interruption. I have yet to see any of the performers being punished, but rather they are constantly encouraged, guided and supported.

*The Voice*, *American Idol*, *America/Britain/Australia/InsertCountry Got Talent*, and other shows are fascinating examples of the competitive cauldron on a very public stage. That talent comes in so many varieties on the Nation's Got Talent version is a joy to see from just the specificity in training point of view. For me over the years, I love to see how music helps bond your team, from shared focus in lyrics to shared memories and so much of the important things that happen off the court.

So I will share two songs that are part of my team's memories... First, Olivia Archbold a 14 year old sings this version of one of my favorite songs - "[In the Arms of The Angel](#)" - she starts singing about 90 seconds in if you just want to skip the lead in story... Meanwhile, I will close this blog with the passion of a Bulgarian singer... She sings "[Ken Lee](#)" and if you have seen it you know what I am thinking about (my singing skills...) and if you have not, take a couple of minutes to laugh along with everyone on the show...

Here's to using music to broaden the experiences and value of our sport for a lifetime....

## 2 More Myths- Learning Styles and Fundamental Motor Skills

May 01, 2013

I just completed three days of the 6th annual Paralympic Leadership Conference. It is always so inspiring to be around hundreds of athletes and leaders who have either a disability or a passion for working with the disabled. As the keynote speaker said on Friday night "It is a great time to be disabled..." at least in this nation. The two highlights for me were speeches. The first was by David Liniger, chairman and co-founder of RE/MAX, addressing how he and his wife have both dealt with personal disabilities along with his unique form of philanthropy using the Sanctuary golf course to raise millions for non-profits. His very personal account is in his new book called *My Next Step* ([www.mynextstepbook.com](http://www.mynextstepbook.com)) and he is donating all profits to US Paralympics Wounded Warrior Program and two other charities. The second was the Gimp Monkeys, three guys who became the first disabled guys to climb El Capitan in Yosemite. You can get the gist of their speech by watching this eight minute highlight video [here](#)

I had two sessions, one with Elliot Blake entitled "Creating Sitting Volleyball in ANY Place," where we showed how to use ribbon or flip over a regular net to create what is now known as "ParaVolley." The second was called "Leadership Development and Myths in Learning." This is about the 5th time I have spoken to the group about these latter two topics, but with 40% of the attendees being first timers, I had a nice crowd attend. The first part of this blog, and a part of my presentation this weekend is summed up best in this article: [thinkneuroscience.wordpress.com/2013/04/11/the-myth-of-learning-styles](http://thinkneuroscience.wordpress.com/2013/04/11/the-myth-of-learning-styles)

The second part of this blog is about what I am going to simply call "the myth of fundamental motor skills." I base my calling this a myth on the science of motor learning which has clearly defined principles of specificity, whole, and random training. There are many who will have their own opinion on this, and likely who will disagree, but after nearly 40 years of teaching kids of all ages, the science speaks clearly to this "myth."

Lately, as clubs and sports move down into the younger age groups, we see an ever increasing set of methods, most often found in lesson plans and drills, where these so called "fundamental motor skills" are being taught to kids. More recently, several international coaches have asked me about the training they are seeing in their nation – in New Zealand and Canada it is catch and throw variations, while in Finland it was no volleyball at all – just "fundamental motor skills," and of course here in the USA, there is "Newcomb" where the ball is allowed to bounce once before playing or no volleyball but "movement training."

If you read my blog at all, or are up to date on the science of motor learning, you know how important I think it is NOT to specialize, yet how important it IS to be specific. I love that my son played a dozen different sports in school and park & rec, before settling on volleyball. The thing is, he learned/experienced those many sports, but due to the principles of specificity, transfer and random training – they did not make him a better volleyball player – he got to be good at volleyball by...playing volleyball. It is as simple as that. No catch, throw, bounce, dribble or whatever volleyball, just playing volleyball, mostly with older teammates, as my blog "For the Kids' Development, not the Parents" covers. In physical education circles, this is sometimes called "TGfU" – Teaching Games For Understanding." It allows for what Marv Dunphy wisely says "Train in Reality." The game is what teaches the game, the reading, the understanding of ball flight in advance and covering your court space and so much more...

The importance of training and learning in random ways I have covered often and won't go into here other than share a recent article about the idea of "interleaving" in learning. Random training, called interleaving in this article, shows how learning is best when the events are presented in random sequences and formats, rather than blocked learning, or learning in cycles (like blocked and circuit training). [wired.com/geekdad/2012/01/everything-about-learning](http://wired.com/geekdad/2012/01/everything-about-learning)

I responded to these coaching leaders first with this section taken from Drs. McGown and Bain's article, with the underline being mine:

The neuronal explanation for these effects are perhaps best exemplified by observations of inexperienced coaches training novice players where the instructor(s) become frustrated by the performance variability and lack of successful repetitions of new learners. As a consequence, these inexperienced coaches limit or abandon whole teaching methods for part, and random practice for blocked. Unfortunately, this course of action deprives the learner of the environmental variability and sensory inputs that are essential for the formation of motor maps and implicit behaviors, which are ultimately reflected in the acquisition of functional skills and expert performance [13, 18, 19, 29, 65]. In total, the evidence on this topic is clear; drawing distinctions between training methods based on age or ability is a coaching practice that has no foundation in either motor learning science or in the application of motor learning principles.

I also replied with this... Yeah there is a lot of slowing down for “success” by playing a catch and throw game – known as Newcomb where it actually is allowed to bounce first. In general this remains the way PE teachers teach the game of 6 vs. 6 to elementary school kids, rather than teaching 1 vs. 1, 2 vs. 2, 3 vs. 3 on smaller courts and all. Rather than learn to play by playing over a net and getting lots of chances to read/track the ball and play, they get one ball and 12-24 kids to play, so no kid is ever learning to play volleyball, since there are so few contact options.

Circulation volleyball as a concept is good, especially in 3 vs. 3 or even 4 vs. 4 – in where the team rotates after each ball crossing of the net, and thus there is no specialization. I like that, along with the chaos and randomness it adds. But specificity applies to any age from all I see in the research. Certainly an Olympic gymnast would not be successful at such a young age if age was what mattered in learning a new sport skill. The four nets on a rope system to also promote badminton, pickleball, youth tennis and sitting volleyball. In all the course work, we train live balls, over the net – just smaller team size, smaller courts, and lighter balls. It works, just like it is seen in developing Misty May and Karch Kiraly’s skills – learning to play any game is about opportunity to respond.

Canada interestingly (I just did two large province clinics there in January) has what I call “maxi-scoring” in my Minivolley book, but they call triple ball, as a national rule for 6v6 13 and under play. This is where the serve is only 1/3 of a point and two other balls, one of each thrown easily to each side, are the other 2/3rds of a point. It gets them learning the 3 hit game much faster.

I played hockey and am a skier. If you ever watch a new skier or skater, there are no “fundamental motor skills” you can learn in advance that are fundamental for those sliding sports, unless there is one called “nooooo, I don’t wanna fall.” Yet USA Hockey has over 50,000 members who are 6 and under, who can skate, turn, shoot and play with no problem. You learn to skate by skating and ski by skiing, no other way.

Two of the most important quotes taken from Dr. Richard Schmidt’s important book *Motor Learning and Performance*, Principle to Practice, now in its FIFTH edition, and discussed intensely in every IMPACT and CAP course for 20 years, is **“Drills and lead-up activities take considerable practice time and do not produce much transfer, so use them sparingly in later practice stages.”** AND **“It is fruitless to try to train fundamental abilities, (e.g. quickness, balance) so concentrate on the fundamental skills instead.”**

So given the limited time we have to teach volleyball as a specific sport skill, the best way to learn and teach is to use the net and court, and play small sided games, and throw some fun in the way, tag games, silly races, fun cool downs, all found in the MiniVolley book I wrote. Still a tag game is making you better at tagging and not being tagged, and not volleyball, but if it keeps more little kids in our sport by having fun games to warm up with, then that is worth doing.

A high school and club coach in Minnesota (Heidi, what else would she be named up there?), put it this way..

I sometimes wish someone had said to me: “This is what I would like you to do (play doubles). This is what it is going to look like (they are going to have trouble reading the ball and it is going to drop). Instead of making them run because they need to be quicker at moving to the ball, play more doubles. Give them feedback on their technique while they are playing. Keep and track score. It is going to look squirrely, you are going to want to step in and make the drill look more “successful” by having them throw the ball in instead of serve or worse yet enter the ball yourself. But in the game they must serve and you must stand on the sideline. When you get to the game, notice how much better the players are at anticipating the play. Watch how they can set the ball up and that the rallies are longer. Watch how they get their serves over the net when the score is tight (because they have had to do that in every practice). Realize that your training works. If you lose to a team that practices more days a week, has more talent, has players who have been playing for more years, understand that it is not that you need to change the way you practice. They just need to play more.”

When I taught 6 vs. 6 volleyball to youth in the past (both in PE and youth vb), I thought I was helping them understand the 6 person game, so that they could play it at a family gathering or something of the sort. One of my 14’s commented the other day “None of my friends want to play volleyball because they think it is boring and all you do is stand around and watch the ball drop.” So instead of teaching them 2 vs 2, 3 v 3 and them learning that volleyball is fun (and someday teaching them the 6 person game), we teach 6 v 6 and they think it is boring and don’t play anymore. This year in PE class I finally put the ribbon up and the kids had so much more fun. And moved and got so many more touches. The 4 nets on a rope is a no brainer.

Our traditions show this belief in what I am calling a myth of fundamental motor skills. To be sure, running, jumping and throwing are core parts of many sports, volleyball included, and if you have thrown a baseball, I could use it as a reference for you as an individual when you are spiking. Then again if you have painfully watched this great VW commercial on learning to throw, you see the

specificity and cue words being misused ... [CLICK HERE](#). However, it is not necessary to know “how to throw” in order to be a good spiker.

I guess I believe that such fundamental skills are learned before sport is discovered, by first walking, then running to a parent, or chasing a sibling or preschool pal in any way. I was not “taught” to walk or run. I still trip, but don’t think I need a private coach to teach me when I do stumble. My parents certainly did not hire a coach, or give me any cue words when I learned to walk. I run but I am a better jumper than a runner. I am not a track star, but appreciate what technology and video can do to enhance my running if I were to be a track athlete, to find economies of motion. But if I were to run the 100 meter race, then decided to go to the 110 meter high hurdles, I know that I would need to run in a TOTALLY new way, even tho it’s the same distance, just some stuff is in the way. Or maybe it is not in the way, watch this guy at a university level of competition do his thing...[CLICK HERE](#)

Specificity is seen in jumping – from the fosbury flop to a jump shot or dunk in basketball, to volleyball. I have seen that really good jump shooters in basketball, might start to do a spike approach with an incorrect left-right finish, which is great footwork for a right hander doing a jump shot. But Blake Griffin shows that if you know how to back row attack, you can use that to do a mighty fine dunk shot with a car ([CLICK HERE](#) - go about a minute in). You see, Blake played boys volleyball when he was young, showing perfect back row spike approach, double arm lift and reach, only to dunk...

In closing, two more things... Dr Schmidt’s work is very important in motor learning, and I urge you to not only buy his newest book, but to go to his website (a target="\_blank" href="http://www.HP-research.com">www.HP-research.com), and click on the articles button there, for hours more of insights and learning about being better at teaching motor skills. Finally, just a heads up that this summer, our new USA Volleyball Resource DVD will be coming out, with new videos, lesson plans and so much more it is what those seeing the draft versions have called “a Volleypedia” and “all encompassing.” To get a copy, contact your USAV Regional Commissioner after July 1. If they are already out of stock, as they will be free in our Growing the Game Together efforts, send a stamped (\$1.09 or more), self addressed 9x13 envelope and we will send you one. As always, thanks for your help in growing the game together.



## 300 Coaches and 600 Players

March 14, 2013

I spent a week back east earlier this month working with some of the true grassroots leaders in our sport in the states of Pennsylvania, New Jersey and New York. It began with a clinic for 50 athletes and 10 coaches near York, PA, and ended with a clinic for the same number of volleyball club members in New Jersey. In between there were days of 100-250 kids and teachers, depending on the site.

Four of the days stand out in ways that all USAV leaders can take advantage of for their own RVA- First was a day at a Junior High in PA working with 250 eighth graders and their PE teachers. Each class was 47 minutes, and every boy and girl, learned to torque serve, overhead pass/set and spike, and had fun cooling down playing the balance war game. As this class next heads to high school, many kids were encouraged to try out their next year in high school. Second was an evening set up by Ed Schultz, Keystone RVA Grassroots Director. Nearly 100 coaches showed up at Immaculata University for a full evening of seeing what training gamelike really looks like, featuring a dozen 12 and under players.

A similar day was seen in Schenectady, NY at an IRVA clinic for 75 coaches and 24 players, using one net/court, that changed into multiple courts with the use of 100 feet of 2 inch wide white ribbon. The biggest day was seen at Mid Hudson Athletic Center in New York, where three regulation courts were turned into 12 five meter wide youth courts by putting up three sets of the 4-nets-on-a-rope system. Over 100 kids and 50 coaches were able to spread out into pairs/groups of three and play over the net with lots of learning opportunities took place. Check out this picture of the training.

So what did I talk about mostly in all of these clinics? Here is a slide I shared in most the clinics that sums it up.

- Use the Net 120 min
- Teaching Principles and SPECIFICITY
- Teach them WHY, Better the Ball, Motor Learning
- Change Pair and Wall to Positive Habits/Reactions
- You can Never Serve & Serve Receive Enough – Serving Drill Tradition change
- J Stroke Awareness inside the 3m line Warm up
- 8 Balls in Motion Serve/Serve Receive/Concentration/Flat Targets
- Butterfly to a Warm up with Setting
- Front Meter/Bic/Back Meter/A/Pipe/D – Passing not Throwing, Hit, THEN set, then chase
- Front Back WITH Blockers over Net
- Three Person Weave/Move Back Pepper
- Coach to Second Contact – Players Develop Mean 3rd Ball Delivery
- Use More Scoring Options in Grills – like MaxiScoring -and Less Drills
- Wash Scoring to get 30% more Contacts
- SpeedBall and Losers-are-the-Net-Monarch of the Court.

Most of these will soon be seen in our new Youth Volleyball Toolkit being finalized this spring. New videos on all the ideas above will be on this toolkit, so look for them on both the USAV website and contained in the toolkit update, available from your RVA commissioner this summer for use at the PE teacher level to club program level.

Part of the journey was scheduled to be able to see my son Cody play four matches at home for Princeton. Alas, the weekend before I arrived, he broke his wrist in the last play of an away match against Penn State, and we opted for surgery to pin the broken bone and speed up his recovery. So we watched the Princeton Tigers compete well, a 3-1 record actually, and saw how strong Cody could cheer from the bench. He took time to speak to high school teams who came to watch the matches, blocked one arm in drills and provided teammates' serve speeds feedback with the team radar gun in practice. He also did situps while his sideline teammates did pushups for every ace the team on the court scored in competition. I am looking forward to returning next spring again.

The plan is to do a similar visit over the next three years to the New England Region, as my daughter is playing at Bowdoin, and great things are being done in Maine by the volleyball leaders there. The biggest good news is that with the work by Vermont volleyball leaders like Peter Goff from the Vermont Commons School (and a supportive fiscal USAV grant), the final state that does not have varsity girls volleyball will be coming on board. This project will also have boys volleyball at the same time, and I am planning on a

clinic tour to Vermont and Maine this fall, just like this adventure story found in today's blog...as we all work to grow the game together.

## Where is Your White Board?

January 15, 2013

One thing that still amazes me when I travel to gyms around the world, is the absence of a whiteboard on or near every training court. I briefly covered this in my blog “Your Practice Objectives Should not be a Secret” which can be read here if you missed it. <http://www.teamusa.org/USA-Volleyball/Features/2010/February/02/Your-Practice-Objectives-Should-not-be-a-Secret.aspx> If you understand that you as a coach you are a teacher first, then you know that every classroom you go into has one or more white/chalk boards – and that this needs to be happening in your “classroom” that is called a gym. So I wanted to share some options to getting a whiteboard or even two up in your gym. This is not about getting a flat screen TV or smart board up in your gym, or using an iPad or other electronic tablet to both write and show the ideas – we are talking white/chalkboards specifically due to their lower costs.

First option...you simply raid a classroom for a rolling whiteboard, or purchase one for your gym. These are not cheap however, but usually have a place to store the markers, and can be flipped over or turned around as all have the chalk/whiteboard on both sides. Recently I was at Arizona State with a long-time friend and ASU head coach Jason Watson, and found it interesting that he always had two whiteboards on his one training court – one with things that stayed up as things were written down over time – like quotes and sayings and team season records/tallies in games/drills they might do often. The second one was redone every practice. Since we need to keep a record of our practice plans, you just take and save a camera phone picture of that day’s practice after it is completed, and you cover this need.

Second option...head to your local home material store and get a 4x8’ whiteboard material. Today a 32 square foot sheet of Thrifty White MDF Panel Board costs \$13.45 at the Home Depot here in Colorado Springs. Simply lean it against the gym wall, or permanently install it. Optionally you can put wood molding around the edges to have a more finished product, so you would need about 25’ of molding in whatever style you want to edge your board with. For safety reasons, I prefer to leave the board without a ledge for dry erase markers and just carrying a marker in my pocket.

Third option...If the walls of your gym are smooth, or if you smooth an area by filling it in with putty or other material, you can then simply paint that area. The product description for a 27 oz can of Rust-Oleum Specialty Gloss White Dry Erase Paint says that it provides a smooth, hard finish that creates a writeable and erasable surface for dry-erase markers. This paint is ideal for use on interior surfaces such as drywall, Masonite, wood, cement and metal. It covers up to a 12 sq. ft. In this paint’s case you need to allow up to 3 days before applying dry-erase markings. Rust-Oleum also makes a black chalkboard paint if that is more fitting for your facility. Some classrooms I have been in have two or more walls with whiteboards up, and so can your gym if there are smooth walls that can be painted all the way around the gym. Dang, I would love to teach in a gym like that...

Fourth option...when I do clinics, I often carry a small roll of whiteboard material. It comes in 24 inch wide rolls, which are 20 feet long! So I just cut it into thirds and take one of the smaller rolls along, which I can put up for my session, and even leave behind as a gift from USAV in growing the game together. A product at Staples called “Magic Whiteboard” also comes in foot sections which are static cling and thus can be put up and taken down repeatedly. [http://www.amazon.com/Gowrite-Erase-Rolls-White-AR2420/dp/B00377TWSE/ref=sr\\_1\\_2?ie=UTF8&qid=1352924299&sr=8-2&keywords=dry+erase+sheets](http://www.amazon.com/Gowrite-Erase-Rolls-White-AR2420/dp/B00377TWSE/ref=sr_1_2?ie=UTF8&qid=1352924299&sr=8-2&keywords=dry+erase+sheets)

In all cases, please remember to locate your board so that the athletes will focus on what is up on the board, or that you are writing down. This goes the same for when you speak with your players – put yourself against a wall or some other place in your specific gym and court, so that they focus on you. So often I see coaches speak to their players in a multi court gym, and behind them is much more interesting stuff than your lips moving – most often another court which is filled with active and interesting other players who are not getting talked to.

There are other solutions found at these two websites that might help you customize what you need for your court - <http://www.usmarkerboard.com/> and <http://www.whiteyboard.com/> The former sells a sidewalk menu “A frame” whiteboard for just \$115, that can be moved around courtside easily – just a bit low to the ground for tall athletes and coaches to write on.

One last closing “Grow the Game Together” thought. When you do call them in to speak about something – Make sure to put your player’s name last. You see, most of use call the whole team or a small group in for some sort of instruction, and say “Player Name, brilliant words shared in a guided discovery way.” That tradition or habit we are asking you to change to become a better teacher of the whole group, by simply saying “brilliant words for teaching guided discovery, Player name...” In the first one the rest of the

players, hearing the player name you are focusing on, all tune out/stop thinking/stop discovering. In the latter, all must be processing what you are sharing, solving the question, until they hear the name of the player. You would even do better to have a bit of a pause, before singling in on either the player you wanted to focus on for this pause in the action of learning by doing or by letting them chose to answer your question.

If you have other ideas on how to be a more effective teacher in your gym with please do share it with us below, and thanks for your help in growing the game together.



## For the Kids' Development, Not the Parents...

April 20, 2013

In the past generation, I have seen how sport has gone from parents playing, with their children learning by watching to kids playing and the parents all are watching. This shift has meant that kids are now much more limited in their chances just to play, without it being observed and critiqued by parents, and these athletes do not get to be mentored by older players. The importance of free play, without being coached but by learning as the game teaches the game, is seen in many studies.

Equally important is to not specialize in the sports until they are in their teens, combined with the chance to experience multiple sports. Wisely, Brazil requires all teams competing in their National Championships at the 14 and under levels, must play a 6-6, where everyone sets and hits and no one is really specialized. Western Europe nations like Holland and Denmark have their kids compete using "circulation" volleyball, where the team which sends the ball over the net then rotates, after every net crossing of the ball in the rally. More about this is seen in my blog "Specialization is for Insects, available [HERE](#).

A recent study done about English soccer academies athletes found that there was really no difference in the training their students received over their years, other than one thing. It was not their nutrition, sports psychology, conditioning or weight training, skill or competition training as provided by the academy. What they found that was significant was that those who went on at the age of 16 to sign pro contracts, versus those academy members who did not, averaged several hours a week of "street soccer." This is where there is no coach, not a perfect playing surface or environment, but simply the chance to play small sided games competitively. Those not signing contracts averaged less than an hour a week of this time to just PLAY.

Play aside, for thousands of years and in thousands of species, the younger generation has learned from their elders. They "competed" against and acquired life lessons from those years and even decades older than themselves. Learning and respecting their elders who taught them their culture, language, and ways to live. Outside the USA, where sport development is not done through the school system but in clubs, this same mentoring continues to happen. The club has a top team, and a range of feeder teams, which compete in skill level, not age level competition. If a player is good, he/she is moved up to this higher, and older team.

Olympic examples come to mind in volleyball. Keba Phipps was a member of our 1988 Women's Olympic team at 19, as was Logan Tom in the Sydney 2000 team, with both training with our national senior team at younger ages. The best examples are Mercedes Gonzales from Peru who was on the 1968 Olympic Women's team at the age of 14 and Regla Torres Herrera, who won gold medal starting for Cuba in the 1992 Barcelona Olympics at the age of 17. Volleyball aside, look at other Olympic individual sports where the athletes are all in their teens. A much more recent example is Samantha Bricio, who joined the Mexican Women's National team at 15. In 2012, starting at the NCAA Division I level she was also selected as Volleyball Magazine's 2012 Freshman of the Year. Playing up may not mean you start or win as much, but you gain a level of mastery that is far more important than the outcome.

Meanwhile in the last 25 years, age group competition has become an ever increasing option to learning sports. In the beginning, USA Volleyball offered age groups of 19, 17 and 15 and under. Then as the sport grew, single age group competition expanded so we now have 18,17,16,15,14,13,12, and 11 and under Nationals. By USAV board mandate, no nationals are allowed at the 10 and under level, so those younger than 11 play up if they desire to attend the USAV National Championships.

Yet some parents actually think age group competition that sometimes means their child must play up a year is putting kids at risk. They somehow do not understand the safety of the sport of volleyball, starting with the non-contact aspect of the game. They do not know the history of age group competition which when it was 17, 15 and 13s, would see a team do well at the 13 or 15 age level, then vanish from nationals the next year as they could not beat the 14 or 16 year old team in their age division.

This also was a time when USAV combined age AND grade, resulting in players a year older than most their teammates, playing in that age group. In volleyball areas with larger populations, clubs would form entire teams of players a year older than the age group but permitted by the grade exemption to play down. After several years of study of both the volleyball database, but also over 30 other sports National Governing Bodies, USAV moved to a September 1 cut off date with no grade exception at the National Championship level. Regions can make exceptions in their RVA to have older players play down to stay with their grade group (it has always been fine to play up a grade level or more) but that team cannot take that player to Nationals or a National Qualifier.

This date, matching many other NGBs who the most common date for starting school, allows for the vast majority of athletes to compete with their classmates. This however is a North American phenomenon, and with 220 nations in the FIVB (Federation

International de VolleyBall), all other nations use the January 1 date so that athletes are group by calendar year, not by school year. The USA does the same for all our High Performance programs, as the athletes selected there must comply with the international federation age definition. It is clear by the numbers that the age cut off that least impacts America is September 1 for keeping kids together by grade group, with only about half a dozen states not using the common September 1 cut off date.

So with any cutoff/deadline, there are athletes who just miss this cut off, and USAV often hears from parents wanting their son or daughter to be allowed to be older than nearly every other teammate who is in the same grade. As noted before, waivers exist for all but the National Championship events. Still some parents want an exception that still allows their child to play at Nationals. Including the reasoning that USAV needs to honor the “expected birthdate” not their child’s actual birthdate as the child was born “premature” for various reasons. It is very important to understand that this is a 365 day window as things currently stand (except for 12th graders and 8th grade boys). No matter where the date is set, the intent is to have kids who are together in that 365 day window.

So how did we survive before age group competition? I know, as I had to play with men, for there was no age group competition available. My favorite memory was playing for a Men’s AA team when I was 17, against a great Men’s AA team from Ft Dodge, Iowa.

A sidebar here is that my Region then, Eight, was Colorado, Wyoming, Nebraska, Kansas, Missouri and Iowa – so travel to a regional event was a 12 hour overnight drive arriving in time to take a nap sleeping diagonally in the back of my 1970 VW Squareback (which I still own, 535,000 miles later), before jumping on the court to play all day...and sometimes we would start at 8am and play until 1 am the next day due to sideout scoring....a qualifier type trip for a one day event.

Ft Dodge had a back row player named Rod Wilde, 10 year old son of Bruce and Jackie Wilde. Rod’s parents served in many Iowa volleyball leadership roles over the years. No libero back then of course, but Rod played and learned from his far older teammates – and went on to be the back up setter for the 1984 Olympic team until a Russian player three months before the Games, came under the net in a USA USSR match in Russia and broke Rod’s leg. Rod is still playing and winning MVP titles in the 50 and over USAV Masters National Championships.

So with so much age group competition, the chances to learn from those far better than you – developing mastery and superior reading skills and a higher volleyball IQ, has several paths. Playing up one or more age groups is one. Playing coed adult league volleyball with friends and family is another, especially 4 vs 4 rather than sixes.. The fastest way is to play doubles against adults. This is the path that both Karch Kiraly and Misty May took in their development. Karch played only doubles when he was young, with his father mostly in the Santa Barbara area. Misty did the same with her father Butch May also in southern California. The experience of an older partner both speeds the learning and reduces the point gap and losses that usually takes place when two young players play against adults. If they start young playing with and against adults in doubles, they get better much faster than in the six person game, even against adults. Olympians Mike Dodd and Karch are known for getting their AAA beach rating, the highest adult level, by age 16, and recently a young gal reached her AAA rating at age 13 in the South Bay area of California.



adults. 3. Play up, and stop worrying if your child is playing a single age level above their peers. Help your child take advantage of it, and learn from those older than they are – for once they go to high school and college, freshman want to make the varsity team usually comprised of juniors and seniors. Then, once they get into the real world, the leadership, social skills and confidence lets them “compete” against adults decades older than they are...and that, like it has been for thousands of years, is a good thing...

So to all parents, please take these methods, based on the principles of motor learning, into mind as your amazing child masters the sport of volleyball. 1. Let them play all positions, not specialize. Set the offense, hit back and front row, pass, and dig. Let them block if they are tall enough otherwise let them learn to read and dig. 2. Play more small sided games, 2 v 2 and 3 vs 3. There is a club in Hawaii I have mentioned before. Take a look at this picture from Outrigger Canoe Club, where a single club with about 200 volleyballers has sent NINE Olympians to play for the USA. Their “secret” is seen in the far court, a 6x6 meter “baby doubles court” where the kids play next to the adults. The kids watch, learn, imitate and sometimes, when an adult needs a partner, they even get “called up” to play with the

Postscript – For those wondering, all these USA National Governing Bodies (NGBs) have Dec 31 or Jan 1 cutoff dates, these are the facts from a recent survey.

USA Badminton  
USA Cycling  
USA Hockey  
US Lacrosse  
USA Rollersports  
USA Shooting  
US Soccer  
USA Track & Field  
USA Triathlon  
USA Weightlifting  
USA Wrestling  
USA Curling  
USA Fencing  
USA Field Hockey  
USA Taekwondo  
USA Rowing  
USA Ski and Snowboard  
USA Softball

Those with Sept 1?  
USA Basketball  
US Figure Skating  
USA Team Handball  
USA Volleyball

And....for all those August babies... USA Bowling is...August 1, the only sport, not an Olympic sport, with that cut off date. Several other individual sports do "date of competition" .... USA Boxing, USA Diving, USA Swimming and USA Judo.

## From Doha to Dubai- Things Learned & Shared

April 09, 2014

So the past two weeks I have been in the Middle East, which is not anything like Middle Earth to say the least. The flight back is over 15 hours – departing at midnight and arriving in Washington DC at about 7 am – a flight that chases the darkness to provide a very long night to write this blog. My hope is that even though you could not be there for these clinics, you will be able to share in the secrets I did. After all – as Thomas Jefferson so wisely said: *“He who receives an idea from me, receives instruction himself without lessening mine, as he who lights his taper at mine, receives light without darkening mine.”*

My grandfather spent his life working for Standard Oil, and for several decades spent months each year based out of Saudi Arabia, even host Saudi leaders at the just opened Disneyland. He would not recognize this part of the world, from then, as nations like UAE and Qatar where I have been teaching were Bedouin nations with no oil money at that time. What a difference a few decades makes.

Doha, Qatar was stop one, a new capital with a downtown of buildings that each vie for being more unique than the last one. In general nothing is older than 20 years in general, such that an historical building might only be 30 years old. During this stop, as Development Director of World ParaVolley (WPV), I met for 3 days with the WPV board, preparing for June’s World ParaVolley Championships in Poland where the first two slots for Rio 2016 Paralympics will be decided. Note that with USAV help, we will have a new WPV DVD coming out next month, and have partnered with VolleySLIDE [www.volleyslide.net](http://www.volleyslide.net) – to grow the game at the grassroots level. Make sure to follow Team USA this June to see if one or both of our USA Sitting VB teams qualify for Rio!

Brook Billings, former USA National Men’s team player is in Doha, so one evening after meetings I went and watched him play – you can see some pictures I took of his key match, that he won 3-1, [here](#) – I think the most amazing thing I learned watching that match was that seven nations were represented on the court -Cuba, Brazil, USA, Canada, Qatar, Kenya and Sudan. This truly is a global sport for all nations.



John Kessel

punkt som passer mig! "Hvis du har tre ønsker for nettet i fremtiden - hvad ville du så ønske?"

"Tre ønsker, what are you some kind of a ecologist? Men lad mig prøve alligevel:

- 1) at alle trænere fra nationale hold til nybegyndere får nem og personlig adgang til nettet.
- 2) at spillere får samme adgang som trænere!
- 3) at teknologien til at teletransmittere kampe udvikles hurtigt til at blive brugbar på telefonlinjen, så det bliver muligt at se kampe, instruktionsvideoer og meget andet over nettet!"

Adressen på John Kessels web side: <http://www.volleyball.org/usav/jkessel.html>.

### Udvalgt CV for John Kessel

Fra 1990 har John Kessel arbejdet som Director of Program Development and services i National Governing Body of the sport, USA Volleyball. Primære opgaver har været udendørs volleyball projekter, USA ungdoms olympisk volleyball og andre græsrods organisations assistance.

I 1995 udnævnte det amerikanske volleyball magasin ham som en ud af 50 vigtigste personer i volleyball sportens første 100 år.

Siden 1971 har han været coach fra college niveau og op efter, Including National Women's Open titles in 1986 og 1987. Fra 1982 til 1990 var han Director and Coaches' Coach of the Albuquerque Junior Olympic Volleyball Program.

I de sidste 5 år har han coachet i Australien, Kina, England, Italien, Japan, Canada, Guatemala, Grækenland, Jamaica, New Zealand, Holland, Portugal, Irland, Tonga, Belgien og El Salvador samt samtlige stater i USA. I sommeren 1991 var han en af fire attraktive talere i en måned på en første internationale ungdoms volleyball coaches symposium i Olympia, Grækenland med deltagelse af over 50 nationer, og han var hovedtaler ved FIVB's "Volleyball in the Schools Symposium" i Quebec City, Canada i 1995.

Han er for øjeblikket en af otte medlemmer af IVBF's Technical Commission. Han er leder af the commission og Level IV instruktør.

Fra 1987 til 1991 var han tournament director of the US Junior Olympic Volleyball Championships. Som spiller har han deltaget i 15 USVBA åbne nationale mesterskaber - senest i 1993 i Memphis. Han er 7 gange blevet regional mester. Han har også spillet som professionel på holdet Denver Comets, og et år i Italien for Alessandria Volleyball Club. Han var staff for both the 1984 and 1988 samt senest the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta, USA. I 1993 startede han et hold i Colorado der vandt bronze medaljer i Masters National Championships.

Forbunds (FIVB, red.) web side læses over en million gange - hver måned! Og det er utrolig vigtigt, at via e-mail har brugere mulighed for at få samme information direkte fra afsenderen - eksempelvis FIVB. Informationen skal således ikke først oversættes, fortolkes eller på anden måde redigeres, før den kommer frem til modtagerne. Herved undgås mange dumme misforståelser!"

"Desuden giver anvendelsen af e-mail mig mulighed for at give interviews som dette på et tids-

Det er med stolthed at Dansk Volleyball Forbund indbyder til

## TRÆNERSEMINAR

med deltagelse af den internationalt anerkendte træner

**John Kessel**

17.-18. januar 1997 i Brøndby med temaet

# UNGDOMSVOLLEYBALL!

Sadly, the day before the clinic began, Adrie emailed me and the association that he was too sick to travel and would not be able to attend. So a long meeting at the UAE national office transpired to make the adjustments for me to teach the entire course. I had noted



that next door to our Leadership Center was the Dubai Disabled Sports headquarters. They would be hosting the International Paralympic Committee World Powerlifting Championships later that week, just 20 yards away. That led me to find out they did not know our three time Paralympic Sitting women's volleyball medalist Kendra Lancaster was living in UAE. She graciously agreed to come down after work to speak about ParaVolley to the coaches on the first evening, then I took her to dinner and shared a decades' worth of reminiscing on the USA program since she joined it, and of the man who discovered her – the late John Armuth.



It was a great group of coaches, from 5 other nations beyond UAE, and my translation was done superbly by Youssef Hilbawi. For five straight days, 9 am to 8 pm, with only meal and prayer breaks, we shared how to make volleyball stronger for kids at all levels. Most kids want to play football there (Emirates owns the great Barcelona Spain Football Club) – So footvolley films ([see this one as an example](#)) help them realize they can hook them with games that feature this option. Daily we used either the 4 Nets on a Rope (left behind as a thank you to our host the Al Ahid Club), a Proctor & Gamble USAV net band, or my 46 meter long Kirkland Costco wire-edged white ribbon. They could see how they could fit 30 coaches or kids on a space that one adult court is currently set up to

play/train, and even learned how to take that same large Team Handball/Basketball sized space to create 18 kids courts. Talk about getting more touches on the ball in the same amount of space and time.

## WARM UPS AND CONDITIONING

While my example of how a kid learns to ride a bike (no coach, no camps, no drills, no progressions, --just lots of riding) is no different in this nation – the question of how long it would take to learn with 12 kids and just one bike hit home. Still, when they went to share their favorite drills and warm ups, they grouped the kids into either one group of 12 (11 thus waiting/watching) or two groups of six. The coaches watching could see how the kids at the back of any such line/group, were just being kids, and far away mentally from learning volleyball. So up on the whiteboard (there were two brand new ones that might have been bought just for this clinic), went the following reminder chart:

12 of 1

6 of 2

4 of 3

3 of 4

2 of 6

1 of 12

The question of conditioning in practice and overall was another interestingly received topic. I shared my story of playing some 400 games 1 vs. 6 (and giving a 10 pt lead, letting my young opponents hit any shot including tips anywhere they wanted – just as long as I get 3 hits and start the match serving) to illustrate how volleyball skill at all but the higher levels is far more important to acquire during practice. I also shared two of my favorite quotes from the great UNC soccer coach, Anson Dorrance - “Conditioning is Homework,” and “In the Entire Off-Season, all we do is Play.” The myth of “learning to play tired,” also gave me time to share about the new \$27 million dollar Ted Stevens Center at our Olympic Training Center, and its important recovery focus. Still, it seems fitting to share these “conditioning” ideas we did come up with that actually are also often part of getting more contacts per hour.

**Countdown** – While they said they would count up in their culture – I am not aware of any middle east space ships being sent aloft - they loved the idea of giving kids a very limited number of seconds to get every loose ball on the floor and into the basket before the count ended. They also could see the sprinting, aka conditioning going on, let alone the important getting back on task/increasing the contacts per hour principle from their motor learning training to start the course.

**Whistle & Sprint** – Both the coaches and players walked in on the first whistle to group up. Once discussed, they always sprinted in to any group whistle. As a side note, they also learned the importance of talking to their players with a wall to their back. Having 30 other coaches watching them, and the kids looking at the coaches, not the training coach, helped with this coach positioning concept.

**Last Player Does More** - Even in groups of three or four, having the athlete at the end of the line stop just watching/waiting and do something - a skill rehearsal or single movement exercise - gets the end-of-the-line player(s) focused, not goofing off as young players often to.

**Serve & Sprint** – Every clinic this still cracks me up. Ask the coaches/players to go do some serving, and watch them serve and watch, never running onto the court. Ask them how often you get to do that in a match, serve and observe, and they smile sheepishly. If you serve 100 times in practice, and sprint to base every time – (you end up with...) gosh, 100 short wind-sprints of a totally game specific variety.



**Second to Third Contact Move** – This one is always an “a-hah!” moment for coaches. You see, in traditional pepper, you not only get better at digging a spike back to the opponent, you get worse at moving in a defensive posture. The better you get at pepper, the less you move as you show your “ball control” but in game reality, the better the defender, the more he or she moves. So in over the net, or same side of the net triple pepper, you get the defender to “wait in base reading” for contact one and two, then have them move in their defensive posture backwards any distance you want prior to third contact. This move should be done every rally of every point in the game, and thus is also practiced in this far more gamelike way of “pepper.” This is covered in the [“Evolution of Pepper”](#) blog from a couple of years ago.

**Warm up with more Two on None** – It was a delight to see how the USAV net band allowed 6 groups of 2 to play this great warm up. It also agreed with the line at the bottom of my Kesselville sign that says, “Use of the court without use of the net is prohibited”. Use the net 100% of the time please. Our time is too short in every practice to ignore the net as much as most coaches do. For lower skill level teams, to give them a bit more time to hustle to the other side of the court and be the “other team,” change the game to “Three on None.” For those not familiar with this warm up game, you simply start with 2 or 3 players on one side of the ribbon or net, and once you touch the ball, you sprint to the other side of the net to receive the ball and keep the rally going. Cooperatively scored, this is one of my favorite game-teaching grills, especially as a warm up. This grill will be added to the USAV Skill/Drill Video section by mid-April, if you want to see a bunch of very young UAE kids playing (along with a couple of coaches pitching in to get the kids more contacts per hour) – [CLICK HERE](#)

**Start Practice Running in the Butterfly Grill** – For those coaches who demand players to run, or even do footwork, the compromise is to have the players run through a multi-ball, over the net, butterfly grill. This final level, where lots of running happens, just in more game like ways, is best seen in the blog [“Evolution of the Butterfly Drill”](#)

**Homework** – For youth, not only do we agree with Anson Dorrance that “conditioning is homework” – we gave them exercises to do using either their bodyweight or surgical tubing for resistance. If you have a large group and few volleyballs, these bands and bodyweight exercises can be done as a station in the gym as well.

## THE “SAVE” SECTION OF THE UAE WHITEBOARD

*Remember that part of every classroom board back in school? These are the lessons that stayed up all-clinic long, and why....*

**SPECIFICITY** – Game-Like – This was put up first in the “Save” area of the class whiteboard and referenced countless times. They got it.

**WHY?** – Probably the running class “joke” as they started to ask themselves why in so many discussions it was great to see how they pondered and answered. After all, the coach who knows why does beat the coach who knows how. I did not want them to change just because I said so – like when they coach their players – we always took the time to understand the WHY of each new idea. After all, this course was titled “Modern Trends in Training Youngsters.”

**Change** – They brought me in to do with the coaches, that which the coaches do with their players – teach their players to change. So my role was to change the participants coaching skills for the better. This meant there were a lot of “why change” discussions also going on.



**Share Secrets** – An FIVB course was held in UAE in 2013, and three attendees of the group in this course also attended that eight day training. So one of the sessions had those three attendees teaching the other 30 what the most important new ideas they had learned. Every practical session featured these top club coaches sharing their favorite drill – and then getting my feedback on how to improve it – and a new grill or game that I shared. My translator, Youssef Hilbawi, a fellow FIVB instructor, led a spirited 90 minute session on lessons learned where dozens of new ideas to grow the game in UAE were generated. When I asked the last time they had gathered to share ideas like this, the answer was never. So not only did I make them promise to share what they learned from this course in the next 10 days with fellow coaches from their area who could not attend, they also are supposed to gather again in six months for a day of discussion. Finally, I invited them all to join the AVCA, attend the Convention, and to send their best HP representative to our 2015 High Performance Clinic at the OTC next winter.

**FUN/Play** – Each participant got a USAV SportKit DVD, and each practical session opened and closed with a few new and fun warm ups and cool downs that are found in the some 30 pages of that part of the USAV MiniVolley book. Remember you can get this resource at no cost from either your USAV Region OR if they are out of stock, send a stamped (\$1.49 or more) self addressed 9x12 envelope or larger, and we will send you one free of charge.

**Retention** – I find this topic too often ignored by those who demand blocked, part, coach directed teaching. It is simple, retention is superior when skills are acquired in random, or whole, or either intrinsically or through the guided discovery by a skilled teacher/coach. Because I see high level play acquired at even a very young age by kids who get the benefit of such game training – you would think that I am telling coaches to stop coaching, or drilling or focusing on a part that needs fixing in a technique or skill. Not even close, I just think most coaches spend too much time in these less effective for retention and learning areas is all. When I asked Dr. Richard Schmidt how many blocked trials of a new skill he would recommend before going on to random, he said “between 6-10, then we get to whole and random training.” I agree with his science, as he is a far better motor skill learning scientist and expert than I am.

**Increase the Contacts per Hour** – I need to replace my “Increase Contacts per Hour” motor learning principle sign which was recently stolen, as I appreciate and miss those words being seen in the gym for each session. Increasing the opportunities to respond is identical to the importance of increasing learning opportunities, noted recently in my blog [STOP Doing Drills](#). There I asked for coaches to better create reality-based learning opportunities during their precious 1-2 hours of practice. You would have thought I was asking for coaches to entirely stop practicing. Wait, I do want coaches to stop practicing....and I want them to instead let the players practice, just another way to get more opportunities to respond for the players! Remember all – **how we move is determined by what we see**. Think about that for awhile....

**Set High Expectations and Technique Understanding** – I will blog more about this in my upcoming blog “STOP Teaching Techniques,” as that title should confuse even more coaches who don’t read beyond the title or understand the real difference between technique and skill. In the end, this group of professional full-time coaches saw both the fundamental techniques and how simple they are for kids, and how those key techniques are acquired through grills and games as part of developing volleyball skill/IQ.

**Be a Better Storyteller** – After all, your parents did put you to bed by reading you bedtime facts or bedtime moral techniques. The coaches probably heard 100 short or even longer stories in our time together, and I know they will remember those stories better than the facts I shared otherwise. It is just how we are hard wired as human beings.

**Buy & Use Whiteboards** – Not one, but two, or even three. While they all acknowledged that their classrooms all have boards, pretty much none of the programs had whiteboards in their gym. Every day of the clinic they saw how the board improves learning in the gym.

**Ask more Questions** – Culturally there was a lot of explicit/from the coach training going on at the start. They began to be more Socratic and player empowering as the clinic went on.

**Scoring – How do I win?** – From day one to the end of the clinic, I probably had to ask that question 50 times – For even “ball control” drills done with cooperative scoring makes at least a highest “in a row” mark to strive to or beat. If you say you are training game-like, well how are the points going on the “scoreboard” in practice, as they ALWAYS score every rally in the game.

**Teach the Angles of the Game** – Do more THREES, or if you do pairs, keep doing game-like angles, as done in “Two/Three vs. Nobody” and alternating pepper. The reality of the game is that the ball changes angles pretty much every single time, so the sooner you start learning these varying angles of the game, the better the volleyball players you will have. Again, for kids, starting with the



smaller, but still game-like angles happens by playing small sided/smaller court games. It can also happen on a full sized court by starting with, for example, a setter working on front and back sets with the ball coming from court zone 4 near the three meter line, then to five, six, and one. The hardest angle for any setter, youth or Olympian, is a ball coming from zone 2 and that is the “final” hardest angle. This is all outlined in IMPACT manual in the section called BASE (Build All Skills Efficiently) drill building. You might perhaps want to re-visit your manual if you have one.

So hopefully if you have read this far, you also have now received some new ideas from our gathering in Dubai. If you have more to share, please put them in the comments below, for all of us to use to grow the game together.

## Why my Mom would have been a GREAT Volleyball Coach

March 01, 2014

For more than 30 years, my mom taught first grade. I would visit her many times at school while she taught over the decades, starting from about the same height as the kids in her class, to being over six feet tall and towering over the kids, my mom, and their little chairs. What I remember from her teaching has colored my coaching, in the principles I learned from her, which would apply to coaching any sport well.

***She made sure every student knew how artistic and creative they were.***

There is something about the observation of asking a group of kindergarteners, “How many of you are artists?” and seeing every hand shoot up, and then asking the same question to a class in junior high, and seeing just a couple of students respond. I don’t know when this loss of belief occurs in elementary school, but I know it never happened in my mom’s class. She was so darn good at instilling a desire to learn, a curiosity about life and knowing more. Those same traits also impacted my sister, brother and me on a daily basis. On the court, she would have pushed players to develop not just their volleyball technique, but their volleyball skill and to do things they have never done. She also empowered each kid to take charge of their own learning, something all coaches can likely do better, starting with me.

***She taught to 25 individuals, not making them be the same, but discovered quickly how each student learned best.***

Mom taught at a school that had a lot of military kids, who even at this young age, were experienced at moving into new situations. It was she who first told me that “Kids don’t care how much you know, until they know how much you care...” She worked hard to teach herself how each of the kids learned best, and made sure she taught to that focus. She knew the military kids in her class were immersed in a culture with certain values and expectations at home, and the rest of the class was not likely getting the same sort of message. She just was so good at knowing the complexities of even a seven year old, from what might be going on at home, to these individual strengths and weakness to help improve – working her mastery to help 25 different kids, and not simply cram them into “her system...”

Too many coaches miss this – and teach them in drills. We have changed the IMPACT manual now for 27 editions to bring new coaches the newest research. In the manual we started to call them “Grills” – to get coaches to focus on the activity being more realistic and gamelike – using the regulatory stimuli of teammates to decide between, the net/court/antenna/ball to be as much like that game and more. However, from now on I think I am going return to motor learning science principles and increase the opportunities to respond... and give thanks to New Zealand’s Lynn Kidman for even better anchoring this principle by calling all drills “Learning Opportunities.” If you start looking at practice that way, you will be an even better teacher of any sport – so thanks Lynn.

***She kept EVERY kid active/hands on.***

Her classroom was a hub of activity and were all reality based. There were reading, writing, art, music, math and other experiences for the kids and the time on task for each young child was almost constant. Yet, she didn’t just teach what 1 + 1 was, she taught *why* we need to know how to do math. At the same time, a wonderful silence would fall over her class, when she read them a story – each one teaching a lesson in life beyond the classroom. Her story-telling skills were amazing, both in vocal and facial/body expression, and every time (even as an adult), I would be captivated by the lesson being delivered.

She knew that grades had to be issued twice a year, plus “progress reports” but she never looked at it from that outcome side, and focused strongly on the process side in her reports. Too often it seems that coaches look primarily at winning – making learning a race – rather than focusing on this all important process. This process includes learning in the reality of the game -not in drills, to develop the player’s game IQ. As a team sport, this complexity also includes the interpersonal dynamics of the team members in “Coopetition” - as the USA National teams have coined the phrase combining Cooperation & Competition.

In this week’s trip back east, I was lucky enough to be able to work with several clubs coaches and their players. If there was one thing that surprised me, it was how many of the teams are still having their teachers doing most of the training, throwing/setting/serving the balls to a line of waiting athletes. Every time an adult/coach throws or plays a ball a child/athlete could do, the coach is stealing opportunities to respond from the players – as well as creating a non-reality based level of reading. From IMPACT to many of my

blogs, the importance to empowering the players to run practice, and get more touches, has been covered. I again make the request in this blog...

### ***She had high expectations of her class and kids.***

It was so neat to see her relationship with the kids, and hear her various ways of setting high expectations, and her belief in the kids to achieve them. She would always first say the child's name, then things like... "You are doing so well"... "That is wonderful work"... "I love the effort you put into that..." If you have not seen another great teacher in action, check out this clip from "*Math, Who Needs It?*" It is from a documentary on Jamie Escalante (which became the movie "*Stand and Deliver*")- showing him in action teaching using pattern interruption, fun, and so much more. In the opening scene, he writes on his chalkboard (Where is yours in the gym remember?) "*Ganas=Desire*" then says to the class, "*Ganas, that's what I need, the desire to learn, the ability to sacrifice to improve, the wish to get ahead. And ganas also means hard work, and hard work means the future, you're the best, you know people are watching you, looking at you, learning from you. You're going to do it, you are the best hope of the future.*"

Dan Coyle noted late last year in his blog "[A Simple Phrase](#)" similar research in which this statement "*I'm giving you these comments because I have very high expectations and I know that you can reach them*" help reach 40% more effective learning.

### ***She focused on leadership skills, not just the "three Rs..."***

She wouldn't break up fights, but she would guide the discovery of the kids to how to resolve their differences. It was first with her that I learned the phrase "Well we will just have to agree to disagree on this, but we sure do agree on a lot." As I reflect on her teaching, I realize how often she said "WE..." and not "I" or "YOU." That subtle but important difference in talking with her kids helped form them as a "class team" as it were.

Recently one of her lessons on the importance of building rather than tearing down came into double focus – I was playing a game of "Chairs" at my old friend Doug Levin's home in NYC one evening with three kids seven and under. The youngest who could not build a very tall tower of chairs (these are little 3 inch high plastic "chairs," not full sized ones...lol), would just kick down other peoples towers. It took some time to get him on board with the fun of building – together even – rather than the individuality of tearing down other's work.

This was another life lesson that I learned from my mom, who would talk about what it takes to put up a school – with people who got to decide and draw what the school would look like, and engineers who also planned in advance, to those who got to bulldoze and trench the site. Then came the people who had years of learning skills who could build the walls and roofs, the others who would install all the pipes and plumbing fixtures as well as those putting in all the wiring and lighting. Next, the interior designers who along with others, put down the flooring, painted the place and picked or brought in the furniture. In total, building something takes years of hard work and hundreds, if not thousands of combined years of education and experience. Now, what would it take to tear a place down? You could do it in a few days with a single person, who had no formal education, but who had just a bulldozer. So work hard to be a builder of people and places even though the effort may be hard and very time consuming. Anyone can criticize or tear something down. You don't even need an "Easy button" to do that, it's too easy.

I also noted this leadership side when she would prepare for Parent Teacher conferences. She kept the focus on the kid, and their efforts and growth in social interactions, as much as in the three R's. She also worked hard to get the parents, even with these younger students, to allow the kid to solve things, teaching the parents the importance of helping guide their own kid's discovery, and not just give the answers away. It was not just the discovery she focused on, but on helping the parents better empower their child's decision making skills – by almost always giving the kids choices, and asking them to create games and the rules, or often decide the topic to be focused on.

### ***She ALWAYS had a smile on and made class fun.***

Before becoming a teacher, she was a Rose Bowl Parade princess, smiling and waving at millions. Even today, in her late 80s, her smile radiates where she lives. With that smile came fun, pervading the class as she encouraged and exhorted these little ones to become the best that they could be at whatever task, using that tried and true “slanty rope principle” to fit the challenge to the individuals she taught.

I was lucky to be born a Kessel, for both my mom and dad followed Confucious’s advice to allow me to choose work that I love, so I would never have to work a day in my life. My mom knew the importance of learning, and as I study the science of motor learning I see how my mom was also principle driven to teach skill learning even better and broader than I did at the start. She focused on her kids’ hearts, minds, bodies and souls, not just how well they could play kickball, jump rope, or dodge someone in tag. Thanks to her, I am better at teaching the whole athlete, and following my personal coaching philosophy of “Develop Amazing Leaders.” In the end, you will have a great amount of *Nachas*....a Yiddish word that we all should take to heart that means the pride and satisfaction that is derived from someone else’s accomplishment.



We would love to hear why your mom or dad would have been a great coach...and thanks for your help in growing the game together....someone else’s accomplishment. We would love to hear why your mom or dad would have been a great coach...and thanks for your help in growing the game together....

P.S. Highly recommend Lynn Kidman and Stephanie Hanrahan’s book The Coaching Process, now in its third edition and Lynn’s book Developing Decision Makers.

P.P.S. – My mom fed me right but chocolate is our shared weakness, thus her good lessons on nutrition go out the window for moments like this, chocolate donut, hersey bars and twix included, but hey, in small portions! This was taken just last year...Thanks mom!



## Hall of Fame Induction Speech

January 09, 2014

Greetings to all of you in our wonderful volleyball family, there is NO WAY to get all my thoughts down in four minutes, so I will just have to let you know, my full speech will be in my blog...

Terry Pettit at a session this week asked what would your obituary say without mentioning wins, losses and championships – noting that such an obit would be your purpose. You may have noticed that my record is not in my program bio – so I will let you know that mine is currently 10,522 and 31. You see, my record is based on the number of kids who I have coached who keep playing, and those who stop playing volleyball after I have coached them. My purpose is to develop amazing leaders, on and off the court, and give them a love of the game of volleyball at the same time



do much more important things than I do, and they inspire me.

My grandfather won the French Medal of honor for his work eradicating elephantiasis in the South Pacific. My dad served in World War II as a navy captain and lived his life helping others get rid of their pain, while my mom was a first grade teacher for almost 40 years. My oldest friend, since kindergarten is here, Scott Graves, who is a cancer researcher par excellence. My best friend from college is here, Ruthie Musgrave, who directs a program that saves wildlife everywhere. My dear Cuban friend Lily Richardson is here, who now helps empower Wounded Warrior families, while supporting an orphanage in Haiti. These family members

Thanks to them and many of you here, I have been lucky enough to help grow our lifetime sport in over 50 different countries and all 50 states of America. I also have flown over a million miles in a metal tube strapped to a seat at 39,000 feet...I can only give my thanks to all of you here, while I must give special thanks to my other heroes and mentors....and of those still alive, I hope you spend time talking with them whenever you can cross their paths....

Mike Hulett – 4 time Paralympic coach, old across the net opponent, and quad amputee who made sure his prosthetics made him taller than me. He loses his arms and legs to diabetes, and then has the power to work full time at Walgreens corporate, while coaching four Paralympic ParaVolley teams, including a bronze and silver with the women in 2004 and 2008. I am so glad my kids got to grow up in gyms watching him.

Kirk Kilgour – my role model as a lefty, his dad and my dad were frat bros after the war, and after Kirk's paralyzing injury in Italy, a hero who taught me that while he might not be able to do everything as a quadriplegic, he still could do a million things. I am so glad my kids got to meet him.

Carl McGown – Already inducted, he has mentored so many of us for so many decades. Our sport is so blessed to have him in it.

Lang Ping, my sister, who taught me how to consume a 25 pound bag of rice in a month, how to have grace and humility while being insanely famous, and who taught me how winning and losing is temporary but friendships last forever – so that she may have helped thump us in 1984, but she coached our USA women to a silver medal in her own nation in 2008, beating her home nation along the way. Now she is coaching the Chinese women's team again.

Matt McShane, Fred Sturm and Rich Feller and all those on my all world lefthander team.

Becky Howard, Lea Wagner, Margie Mara and Fran Zelinkoff – USAV regional leaders who saw something in me when I was a young coach that I did not see in myself.

Doug Beal – The best boss anyone could ask for. The best teachers are those who show you where to look but not what to see. That is the gift Doug has given to me.

Sally Kus – who only won nearly 300 HS matches in a row, but who showed me how to get kids started loving the game.

Jim Coleman, for showing us how to grow the game for your entire life.

Brian Swenty and every other service member or dependent who protect our nation both here and abroad, while working so hard to make the game possible for USA kids overseas.

Jon Stanley as my coach with the Denver Comets pro team for inspiring me by beating Russia in 1968 and now John Speraw for leading a new generation of men toward international success.

Karch and Hugh, for really bringing motor learning principles and reading to the women's game. Nice that we only have to say one name and we all know who they are...

Gary Moy, Marv Dunphy and all at Pepperdine over the years who give back to our sport in countless ways.

Ali Lamberson, Patchi, Jon Aharoni and Veronica and all who at USA Beach who helped grow an idea I pushed for 10 years too early, called college beach volleyball, while this year moving the sport forward despite the loss of the amazing Dave Williams.

Dale Hoffman for helping me start USA Junior Olympic Beach Volleyball back in 1991, and Randy Sapozniak and Lori Okimura for helping with kid's volleyball and so much more.

Gary Colberg, fighting hard right now in a hospital, for starting Junior Olympic Volleyball in the 1970s, and then doing the same for the men, and now women, playing club vball in the National Collegiate Volleyball Federation.

Byron Shewman, who singlehandedly keeps our disadvantage kids programming going with Starlings, while also keeping a school in Haiti funded.

Pete Wung, Eric Hodgson, Peter Vint, Michelle Goodall and all on my grassroots commission who collaborate on new ideas to help grow the game while Helgi at the FIVB office and Denis, Wayne and Phil do the same globally for our work together in World ParaVolley.

Laurel Brassey Iverson – the only woman to play NCAA DI men's volleyball and a pioneer in so many other ways beyond her two Olympics.

Terry Pettit, whose Nebraska team in the late 1970s slept on my apartment floor when I was coaching CU in Boulder in the old days. Now we just fly fish and discuss the spirits in our sport.

Debbie Hunter, Sue Gozansky, Cecile Reynaud, Diana Cole, Bill Neville and so many others who help make a difference in coaching by giving back to the game in the CAP program – and helped me coin the term Exhaustipated. Yes, sometimes I get too tired to give a poop....

Stew McDole – My first true mentor, who is not just a great professor, coach, father and preacher, he kind of guy who puts mortgages on his own home to keep our volleyball camps going for kids.

And last but not least, the rest of my family – Tammie my partner who helps keep me in line and my kids. Yeah they play volleyball. Yeah, Cody he is here, and can touch 11'11" but both he and his remarkable sister McKenzie played 10 other sports while young, and as a single dad raising them alone since the 1996 Olympics ended. Since then I have had a quote by Hodding Carter on my kitchen wall which reads "Your job with children is to give them roots, and wings." My kids helped me become a far better teacher, parent, and coach, by being the best they could be – in so many ways they still amaze me.

Thank you AVCA staff, board and every member here for this honor. I am only getting it because of all of you doing your jobs in the Olympic way of Citius, Altius, Fortius – May I challenge you, as I challenge myself each time I coach – to measure yourself by NEVER BEING AN ATHLETE’S LAST COACH, regardless of the age you are currently teaching. Happy holidays all.

## Lessons Learned from the Ski Slopes

November 17, 2013

I have skied all my life, as do my kids, as there is nothing like skiing fresh powder on a sunny day, or doing a sport with your kids as early as age 4, where they can cruise and bomb an intermediate run with you, side by side. I first was impacted by Jean Claude Killy's ski racing in the Grenoble Olympic Games and would stand at the top of a dirt or sand hill, play the Olympic theme song in my head, then count the beeps at my gate before skiing down the dirt, running "gates" as fast as I could. Fifteen years later while on a holiday break from playing pro volleyball in Italy, I got the joy to ski L's Alp de Huez with Daniel Cathard, one of Killy's teammates.

That same year, before the Olympics were moved to alternate two years apart, the Winter games came to Sarejevo the same year I worked them in Los Angeles. Bill Johnson set the standard then, like Babe Ruth calling his home run shot, Bill told the world he would win gold in the hardest event in skiing, the downhill. He was a skateboarder on skis - refusing to live on anyone else's terms. Bold, uncompromising, often reckless. A recent ESPN 60 show brought me back to the future, seeing Billy now in a wheelchair, in part from a severe crash after an attempted comeback in his forties. He can barely speak and has signed a Do Not Resuscitate order. It reminds me of how so many athletes would be willing to take a drug that would guarantee winning an Olympic gold medal, but kill them in five more years. What price glory?

So with that background in mind, I found myself for about the 5<sup>th</sup> time up in Vail, working with the top ski and snowboard club in the nation, year in and year out- Ski and Snowboard Club Vail (SSCV). Director Aldo Radmus has grown the club, home to none other than Lindsey Vonn, to be the leader in the sport. What inspires me the most about working with the club's coaches, is how motor learning and core teaching principles carry directly into another sport, and how dedicated their coaching staff is. Each coach teaches on average 8 athletes a season. For the 60 coaches in the program, all but a few are doing it as their second job, if that. Yet for TWO WEEKS, all day long, these amazing teachers attend training for themselves, to make them better. Safe Sport, Weight Training, Sports Psychology, Motor Learning, they do it all. It just is so impressive to see how much they take on a growth mindset and lifelong learning to heart.

I have a slide I use in my volleyball coaching clinics showing a ski racer flying down the mountain, titled "Why Johnny Chose Ski Racing" It is followed by a slide called "A Gym is a Place for the Performing Arts". The first slide came from SSCV clinic years before, where the coaches noted they get kids to come ski race from volleyball and basketball, based on what level of what I will call "parental and coach support," the athletes get bombarded with from the sideline. They come to skiing or snowboarding as all they now hear in "support" is a very brief "GOOoooo" as they fly by mom and dad, while the coach now stays at the end of the training or race run. They are taped as they fly down the hill, get given a tablet computer to watch and study that very run as they head up the lift, complete with coaches comments coming in wirelessly. The second slide notes how great music, theatre, orchestra and other performing arts "coaches" give a lot of feedback during practice, but what do they do during the performance? Yes, they let their athletes perform – not shout out feedback from audience or call time outs -- and simply take notes on what feedback to give at the next practice.

The "Randomness of life" hits often in ski racing, as also recently seen in Lindsey Vonn's recent ski crash and setback. She was racing after men, who are heavier and were carving deeper ruts into the run, and one of those ruts brought her down. YouTube search for "Le Chance" and watch some fascinating examples of how people escape certain death in everyday life or more extreme sports, just by fractions of seconds. I especially enjoyed a recent ESPN 60 story on a Santa Anita Legend – John Shear. He has worked at the Park over 50 years, and said there is no way he will retire and still can do 30 push ups at the age of 92. On March 12, 2011 a horse got loose, in the walking paddock, a 3 year old gelding named Sea and Sage. Johnny saved Roxie Keen, a 5 year old from this runaway horse and spent 7 weeks in the hospital for his efforts. Check it out [here](#), and stay calmer the next time our sport of volleyball's randomness happen, as it just changes the scores and outcomes of the game by large amount, but nothing life threatening...

Wishing our USA teams well in Sochi soon, maybe as I was, you will have kids inspired to play a higher form of volleyball because of the performances they will see.



## John Kessel's Top 25 Books to Learn From

September 15, 2013

I found it impossible to keep my list to ten, and I am focusing on sport and business areas of our dewy decimal system, to keep the list just to twenty-five....yeah I read a lot. In my clinics I am often asked which books have I learned the most from, so in response here is my list and observations on what I learned, in no particular order.

1. The Man Watching (2009) by Tim Cruthers - The biography of Anson Dorrance, University of North Carolina soccer coach and USA national team head coach. This book teaches the evolution of the competitive cauldron tool and other insights into the coaching tools used by the most winning coach in NCAA history.
  2. Training Soccer Champions (1990) by Anson Dorrance - It's out of print currently, but you can still find it online. Reading it over 20 years ago was when I first learned of the value of the "Competitive Cauldron" which makes up much of the book. I also love the title of two other chapters - "In the off season, all we do it play" and "Conditioning is Homework" which helps a traditional coach see the value in getting in shape by playing, and not by running lines or doing things which take up valuable practice time.
  3. Motor Learning and Performance (2010) by Richard Schmidt - Any edition, it is now in its 5th edition, as its subtitle "Principles and Practice" gives any coach without a motor learning science degree the most important information about how we learn any skill, not just volleyball. Here are two of the more important sentences from the book. "It is fruitless - and "Drills and lead up activities "My bet is you missed those two when you took your USAV IMPACT clinic, so I am making sure you see them now!
  4. Mindsets (2009) by Carol Dweck - The idea of a growth over a fixed mindset gave me some science and research facts that matched up to how I play
  5. The Talent Code (2009) by Daniel Coyle - I am proud to call Dan a friend, and I know he is a great father too. If you don't have this book, get it. If you don't follow his blog, [follow it](#). Coyle breaks down many of the ineffective traditions and beliefs in our sport in the way only an award winning *Sports Illustrated* writer can.
  6. The Art of Learning (2005) by Josh Waitzkin - One of the best parenting and teaching films of all time is the movie "Searching for Bobby Fisher." This book is by the chess champion who was the focus of the film, as an older adult, Josh shares his insights into the art of learning - including how to do less to accomplish more.
  7. The Manager (2013) by Mike Carson - This book asks key questions in detailed conversations with some of the most successful football (soccer) managers in recent history, examining the critical issues they encountered in their career. They explain their methods and give examples of lessons learned along the way.
  8. The Little Book of Talent (2010) by Daniel Coyle - After the success of the Talent Code, Daniel Coyle heard from thousands of readers about the need to make things simple for parents to help guide their children in good ways to personal success, and thus this book. Look for a Volleyball specific version in 2014, with the help of Brian Swetney.
  9. A Man's Search for Meaning (1952) by Victor Frankel - A memoir about his experiences in the holocaust. This quote is a sample of what can be learned from an experience that puts just playing games in their place - "*We who live in concentration camps can remember the men who walked throughout the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man but one thing; the last of the human freedoms - to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way.*"
  10. Vision of a Champion (2002) by Anson Dorrance - Leaving the office one evening, Anson saw someone training alone and from a distance, saw Mia Hamm training. He wrote her a handwritten note that night which said "*The vision of a champion is someone who is bent over, drenched in sweat, at the point of exhaustion when no one else is watching. This book is primarily for a team player in any sport, on how to be the best you can be.*"
- 
1. Developing Sport Expertise -2nd Edition (2013) - Edited by Damian Farrow, Baker and MacMahon - The latest book on the science of motor learning, from down under, with excellent new research since the first edition.
  2. Freakonomics (2006) by Steven Levitt and Stephen Dubner - The revised and expanded edition. Like Moneyball, this was the first book to get employ statistical tools into new areas human thinking, skills and the riddles of everyday life.
  3. They Call Me Coach (1972) by John Wooden - The first book on coaching I read when I first started coaching in 1972 and still timeless, including Wooden's famous "Pyramid of Success" You won't go wrong reading ANY book written by Wooden, especially his You Haven't Taught them if They Haven't Learned.
  4. The John Wooden Pyramid of Success (2003) by Neville Johnson - The authorized biography, oral history, philosophy and ultimate guide to life, leadership, friendship and love of the greatest coach in the history of sports. Revised second edition.
  5. Thinking Fast and Slow (2011) by Daniel Kahnemann - Those who have taken a clinic from me likely have heard about how I discovered the research of Kahnemann in 1985 in a life changing way in the article on regression to the mean "Decisions, Decisions." This book is the latest in this Nobel Prize winning mathematician/psychologist's insights into how humans think.

6. The Drunkards Walk (2010) by Leonard Mlodinow - While Taleb's Fooled by Randomness gets Forbes magazine's nod as "one of the smartest books of all time" – Mlodinow's thoughts on the randomness in life I found to be the better read. If you are into Econ, get Taleb's book but if into sport/teaching get Mlodinow's book.
7. A Nation of Wimps (2004) – by Hara Estroff Marano – An article in *Psychology Today* by the same name started this website and book – with great insights into how parents are doing far too much for their kids, and how to avoid the pitfalls therein.
8. David and Goliath (2013) – by Malcom Gladwell – or Blink, or Outliers. Gladwell's work in any of these books is worth reading and understanding. D&G is about how to overcome against a superior foe and the research around being an underdog.
9. Drive (2008) by Daniel Pink, or To Sell is Human – Perhaps the best book out there on the research being done in the science of motivation, something all coaches need to get better at. Check out this great RSA animation summarizing the book [HERE](#):
10. Sometimes you Win, Sometimes you Lose Learn (2013) – by John C Maxwell – most everything by Maxwell is good, and given the realities of volleyball, this one is a great one, along with his book Talent is not Enough.
11. The Power of Story (2007) – by James Loehner - More than actual events, it is people's perceptions which determine so much in life. Like the classic Jewish proverb – "What is truer than truth?" – the answer is, like this book teaches so well, "the story."
12. Fun is Good (2005) – by Mike Veeck - A great look at both the broader lessons of creating joy and passion in the gym and work, while also including dozens of promotional examples from a sports pioneer.
13. Thinking (2013) - Edited by John Brockman – One of my top favorite web/blog sites on the internet is [www.edge.org](http://www.edge.org) which is hosted by Brockman – this book has 16 of the top thinkers sharing unedited conversations on understanding human thought.
14. Over Time (2012) – Frank Deford – I don't think there is a better sportswriter in the last 50 years, and this memoir shares his remarkable insights, whimsy, elegance and skill in sharing his best stories.
15. Anything by Dave Barry – I will close out my list with humor, and I know, it's a cop out to not pick one, but so much of what he has written will make you laugh until tears are coming down your face. Just google for his name and the word colonoscopy to start.

And since they are free – remember you can download four years of this blog as a book - the Coach/Club Director version is [here](#) and the Player/Parent Edition is [here](#).

So there you have about 40 books in all to consider learning from – feel free to comment and add to this list of books that are MUST reads for a growth mindset coach of any age or experience. To be the best we can be, we must be lifelong learners, and willing to change. What book did that the best for you and why? Thanks for your help in growing the game together.

## Space Dive

September 12, 2013

Citius, Altius, Fortius – what a great movie about testing your own limits.

As Felix Baumgartner broke the world record for a free fall jump from higher than 120,000 feet in space—becoming the first person to free fall while breaking the sound barrier—the National Geographic Channel and BBC used more than 20 cameras to capture the four year process. He went from elite BASE jumper to a pressure suited test pilot who really was an astronaut. I caught this movie in flight on the way back from our clinics in Italy and was mesmerized. Seeing his confidence ebb and flow - (sidebar having just done summer camps and taught the Italians minute mysteries, here is one... Ebb and Flo are lying dead in a puddle of water, how did they die?) – and his struggles with his lack of pressure suit experience and how to use it - in flight (think specificity...).

To jump from over 24 miles up, over Roswell, NM no less as the “aliens” appreciated it, and deal with the risks of breaking the sound barrier in just a pressure suit, risk of leaks which would make your blood boil, and the spins that come from just a small bit of being out of synch... amazing.

The team behind the team was huge, and the one year project ballooned to four years and many, many more millions of dollars than expected for Red Bull, who did not pull the plug. The aborted takeoff and loss of one of just two helium balloons for the flight, it was just a remarkable film worth sharing with your team at the start of their season around popcorn and discussion about the struggles.

I especially liked that the guy Joe Kittinger, who did it over 40 years prior (in 1960) from over 100,000 feet, but who did not break the sound barrier, was both mentor and leader in the project. That National Geographic was there also to film that event, and shares it also on the website link below, is why I would have loved to work for them – my dream job other than this one working with all of you through USA Volleyball.

<http://channel.nationalgeographic.com/channel/space-dive/>

Watch the whole ascent and dive itself, complete with constant views of the horizon becoming more of a curve as well as the temperature and altitude changes second by second at this link - except for the section where he uses the code “Rainforest” (I am taking a leak) and dealing with his worries of an unheated/improperly heated helmet visor which would have to abort the jump

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rNhmYaWiPEk>

Soon I will be updating my list of movies to share with a team in a season, the one I used with our 2004 USA Paralympic teams, including our bronze medal winning women’s sitting team that I was team leader for. Happy to email my hand out from 2004 if you need it before I post the updates from the last 10 years – just email me at [john.kessel@usav.org](mailto:john.kessel@usav.org)

## Due Settimana Nella Italia

August 15, 2013

Two weeks in Italy happened this summer, with my son and daughter as camp staff for the Anderlini Scuola di Pallavollo – my old friend, and coach of Lang Ping in Modena for several years. The best part other than being with my kids back in the country I once played professionally in, was the chance to teach alongside Carl McGown, my mentor (and so many others mentor too) and dine 2-3 times a day with him and his wife Susan.

The trip started with a big challenge, our outbound flight was going to misconnect in Chicago, so we were forced back home for 24 hours. We left our packed bags in the car, only to come out the next morning to head to the airport and find that someone had stolen all our gear. So we had about 30 min to repack before dashing to the airport, and all the gift shirts and gear I had collected over a year's time for my old coaching/playing friends, was gone. Mac had a special bag with all her FAVORITE comfort clothes taken and Cody lost all his Princeton volleyball gear and special shoes. We vowed not to let some dirtbag thieves deter us from having a great adventure, and we were glad they sold underwear in the Frankfurt airport.

Our first week was near the sea in Cechina. We trained both coaches and players day and night, indoors and on the beach. Antonio, who now coaches Egypt's national men's team, took us out for amazing seafood one nite, but most the time we had lunch and dinner with the players and coaches at the hotel near the gym. The training went great, Alessandro translated Carl well, and I got to improve my very rusty Italian. Giobbe said after the week's coaching clinic was done, that the coaches felt that the things we were teaching them were from the dark side of the moon. I found it interesting that they spoke often about "the American school of volleyball" which was defined as "motor learning science based." Despite the time taken to translate, the coaches and players got tons of contacts – or opportunities to respond in motor learning terms – and asked great questions.

Then it was a 4 hour autostrada drive into the mountains, past the trout streams and cherry capital area of Italy to the town of Sestola-home ski areas and the great Olympic ski racer Alberto Tomba "the Bomba" Some of the Sestola camp coaches were teammates or opponents of Karch and Steve Timmons, back during the fiscal heyday of Italian pro volleyball. This second training gave Cody and McKenzie a chance to train with the boys and Carl, while I trained the girls and the coaches. A great high ceiling 6 court gym gave us lots of room to teach, with 20 meters of 1.5 meter wide paper on the wall that meant the whole camp unfolded in writing for all the

attendees to see and learn from.



*Cody hitting and demonstrating blocking with Carl McGown*



One nite afte training I watched a replay of Iran beating Italy in this summer's World League match. The Iranians were coached by none other than Julio Velasco, Olympic silver medal winning coach of Italy back when I was producing the indoor venue for Atlanta. The Iranians tossed him into the air after the victory, the first ever by Asian Volleyball Confederation Iran over a strong



European Confederation team. They will be a force, as they are big and serious and well coached, the USA men need to watch out around them.

My favorite day was a half day “break” up to the verdant ski areas above town, after exploring the 900 year old castle in town. Every athlete got a pass to the mountain park, which gave them chances to do a top of the mountain to the bottom bobsled run – with brakes, ropes course work, trampoline training and inner tube sledding on fake snow. What the hit of the day was though, was Cody and Mac teaching first 6 kids, then ALL the kids in the camp, the 1 motion movement knockout game of “Ninja” It was so cool from a motor learning point of view to see how the kids learned by watching then doing – as both my kids speak Spanish, not Italian so the teaching was by demonstrating. Then after a fantastic dinner, the kids had a player party late into the nite, as the coaches asked questions galore. My old coach and the club president came up to meet Cody and Mac, and reminisce until we could not stay awake and longer. It was a great trip back to one of my favorite nations, because of all the people I reconnected with and the new leaders and players in the sport I got to work with.



My old team – a picture recently shared thanks to the power of Facebook....tell me what my number is...

My MiniVolley book was translated into Italian for all the coaches, and if having a pdf copy of the book in that language would be of help, email me [atjohn.kessel@usav.org](mailto:atjohn.kessel@usav.org) and I will send it to you free of charge. I also did a national ParaVolley (sitting volleyball) clinic one day with over 40 coaches, which has helped FIPAV, their national volleyball federation, ramp up the disabled game. Mac took dozens of pictures of the pasta we had for lunch and dinner, and not one bowl was the same – I forgot how many noodle and pasta variations there are in Italy. The coaching book we shared is also in Italian, and if you want that, I would be happy to share it too, to grow the game together.

I took some one liner notes which speak for themselves, things from Giobbe or Carl that made me ponder....the first is from my “sister” Lang Ping, as each evening we had talks with players about the mental game and sharing stories about volleyball around the world. Giobbe told the story about how Lang Ping stunned her club by being so consistent to her statement...

We do not enter the court to win, we enter to play at our best, our maximum, and that should result in a victory... - Lang Ping.

No matter how fast you are, the ball will be faster... Carl McGown

What you see determines how you move...Carl McGown

Mark Lebedew's blog <http://markleb1.wordpress.com/2013/07/01/eye-work-for-coaches/> is worth looking at.

We need Generalized Specialists. – Carl McGown

A rollercoaster in Russia is called an “American Mountain,” while in Italy it is called a “Russian Mountain,” while a Hamburger in Italy is called a Switzerland. Go figure.



The biggest bring back from the trip you will see in early 2014 – a 30 meter long net band to help PE teachers and clubs alike affordably divide the adult court into four minivolleyball courts. Proctor and Gamble is helping us make 3,000 nets to share with our USAV Regions. I think you will find it of value.

So as the scholastic season starts for most of you, hope you had a great summer too and thanks for your help in growing the game together.

## Pole Vaulting and Ebay

April 10, 2013

I had the honor in January to be the first non-polevaulting speaker to address the National Pole Vaulting Summit in Reno, Nevada an event that had been going on for over 25 years with over 2,000 attendees. The motto of the session was “Encourage, Engage, Educate and Inspire” - four great words that meet together to make any sport a better situation for the kids. It was here that I learned two new quotes that I speak of every training session since then – with thanks to this remarkable group of pole vaulting coaches. “Don’t ever allow the pressure of competition to be greater than the pleasure of competition,” and “your job is to show up at practice with a smile on your face and my job is to send you home with a smile on your face.”

The day before, I was in Phoenix, AZ speaking with the nearly 200 Sport Court dealers from around the world, to share with them the materials and programming USA Volleyball does for grassroots volleyball. Sport Court back in 1988 joined USAV to change the course of volleyball tournaments for kids and adults, when the USAV Equipment Committee worked with the SC staff to create a standard anchoring system. It was one that did not require drilling into the floor and that was able to be transported, set up and taken down in a short amount of time. They are still the leader in developing flooring systems for both indoor and outdoor spaces and have sold courts for use in over 100 nations around the world. Every convention center and college coach should send a thank you card to Sport Court and the USAV Equipment Committee for the way they have help us all grow the game together.

Bob Fraley, Fresno State University head coach, started the National Pole Vault Summit 22 years ago with 23 attendees. He started it as 16 kids had been killed in the pole vault, and he wanted to get people together to do something about it. They began first by looking at the safety aspect and he still gives a talk about the legal duties of coaching. This picture of the opening session shows a raft of Olympians who were on hand to interact with the athletes, coaches and parents, a chance to learn with the stars. The 1960 Olympic gold medalist was there, along with those from 2000, 2004, 2008 and 2012.



Twelve runways and pits all jammed into one facility in Reno, so new young and new vaulters could watch and be alongside the best in the world. One of the speakers described pole vaulting as the “beach volleyball of track and field...” another stated that on a scientific basis, pole vaulting is the most technically demanding discipline of track and field. I would agree only to say that it has to really be decathlon, since they not only polevault but do nine other disciplines. To that end, 2012 silver medalist from London Trey Hardee was also present, to share and learn.



The other interesting session I did recently was with Ebay's top worldwide leadership, including their CEO and over a dozen of their senior vice presidents. They came to share and interact with Olympians, Paralympians and other members of the US Olympic Committee last month at the Colorado Springs Olympic Training Center. For almost two hours I shared my thoughts on coaching and leadership development, the science I know and my experiences in Olympic and Paralympic Games since 1984. Our own Katy Holloway, who the stats/facts would show is the best woman's ParaVolley player in the world right now, also shared her thoughts over the past eight years about going from a Division I level basketball center, to world level sitting volleyball player.

I think perhaps the most interesting topic of discussion revolved around measuring/determining potential. They were frustrated to hear that we had not found a magic bullet or solution, as they too found nothing that was successfully determining the leadership and level of success in new hires. I know that for me, I focus on a player's work ethic and positive attitude first and foremost. Other topics, all found in this blog in most cases, included regression to the mean, leadership mentoring, training in reality, catching them doing things right, recovery vs. being tired, and too many others to list. Some great questions from the group kept things going until it was time to go compete in ParaVolley, and they did that with gusto as well. The global standard and work world the Ebay leadership works in is fascinating to me, and I was honored to share ideas that come from the coaches and players at the grassroots to Olympic and Paralympic levels with them.



## Growing the Game after an Earthquake

February 25, 2013

So while most Americans are enjoying their President's Day holiday weekend, and many USA volleyball families are found in a convention center or gym – or even the Arizona Cardinals football stadium (well done Eppersons!) with kids playing over the days off, I find myself spending my week in Haiti, growing the game on the last stage of our State Department Sports United Grant. I am so glad I came....

This is the Phase 3 stage where the 10 coaches from Haiti, who Bill Hamiter, Sue Gozansky and I first met and coached at the FIVB Development Center in 2011 during Phase 1 and then brought the same coaches to the USA to participate in the Volleyball Festival as Phase 2, are now following the principle of "That Which You Teach, You Learn." They are giving back to their nation by teaching their nation's coaches, and over 30 new teacher and coaches have turned out to learn from the ten who we taught.

My luggage did not make it to start, but in the end I was able to give away a four nets on a rope, and a 45 meter 7.5cm white ribbon, some Molten 240g kids balls, copies of the USAV coloring book (and crayons) and MiniVolley book to leave behind. I could kick myself though as I forgot my sidewalk chalk back at home, for marking courts on all the concrete surfaces they play on, but I'll send some down when I get back. From Child in Hand, I have brought along shoes, uniforms, socks and more, to give to the Haitian Volleyball Federation. The federation president, Margaret Graham, is a solid leader, passionate about growing the game better in her nation, especially as a solution to the problems which have come from the earthquake impact. This clearly includes adding the sitting game to their options, part of my role as World Volleyball for the Disabled Director of Development.

Nearly every court you see is not just outside, with the best having Sport Court installed, but they play with no roof. Thanks to former USA national team members Bob Stafford and Byron Shewman, assisted by PSA/Lily Fernandez and NORCECA/Cristobal Marte - a fabric tent version is going up near the city, to be the headquarters of the Haitian indoor and sitting teams program. It will be a good thing to anchor and restore the program in this nation still needing so much.



I am coming in on the heels of Carnival which they all celebrated with abandon and which is a week off of school for the kids. Still with these holidays, the traffic is amazing, and gridlocks happen often for no apparent reason, other than one time there was a palm tree downed in the street and we negotiated around it by driving on the sidewalk in a game of chicken with the constant flow of foot traffic moving along that same space. This city of some 3 million starts at the sea and quickly climbs into the hillsides, meaning most the time you are either strolling downhill or struggling up hill. When I played volleyball in Italy I lived near Cinque Terra, but this place is more like 555 Terraces, not five. All the while "TapTaps," or camionettes filled with 10-15 people meander the roads. These are colorfully painted small pickup trucks with a raised camper shell and bench seats extended past the truck bed added to turn them into high volume taxis. How do you know which one to

get on? I am told you just learn....but then again, there are limited street and stop signs, as people drive fast, but not too fast, and all seem to know the width of their car or truck down to the a single centimeter. Luckily I grew up riding Mr. Toads Wild Ride, a C ticket at Disneyland, and I am enjoying each intersection. What adds to the fun are the thousands of motorcyclists weaving thru every small gap to save time. Fredrick never wore his seatbelt, but after my daughter McKenzie's two serious car crashes as a passenger, now I do. Amidst the chaos of traffic, a swarm of horn beeping motorcycles, usually with a passenger, can always be seen weaving across, through, along and even sideways, like water rivulets up and downhill. The Tap Taps cost about 12-25 cents while a getting on the back of a motorcycle, since they can move thru gridlock faster, costs twice that. Why are they called Tap Taps? Before the drivers installed bells to signal stopping, you had to of course tap loudly when you wanted to hop out.

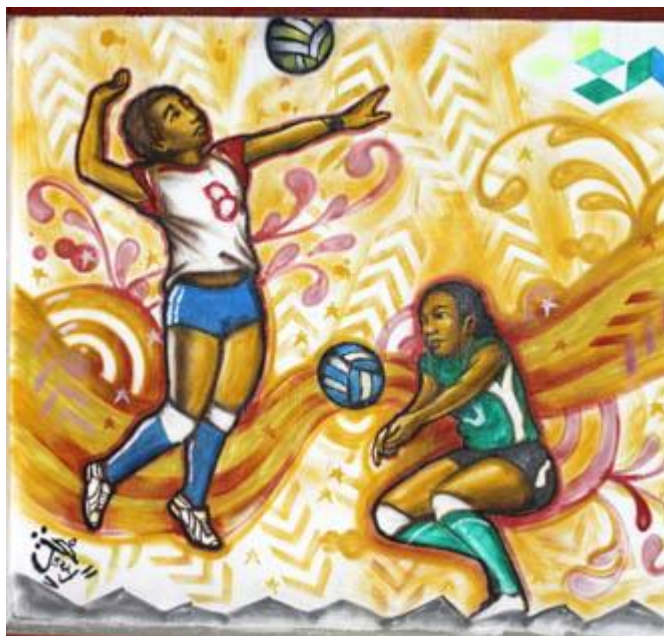
Port au Prince is a city of walls, narrow sidewalks made smaller by street vendors and mini-stores, and wary street wise dogs and children in instinct to avoid all traffic. Either things are shorn up or rebuilding every wall and building, where bougainvillea in white and magenta pours over the security top of broken glass or barbed wire of a hundred variations. I think my favorite street was "Tire

street” where no shops exist, just used tires piled 20 high narrow the street and deals are struck. There are also loads of white UN vehicles as there is no army here and only a slowly growing police force. One night we passed a tent city being dismantled after its inhabitants had lived there for over three years post-quake, refugees in their own nation carrying all they could/owned with them. For pics of life outside the gyms we visited, [click here](#).

If you got this far, it is time for a shared secret/new thing I have learned recently, in this case it is two quotes/concepts from my three days speaking at the National Pole Vaulting Summit in Reno last month. Principles are principles, and in this case, that was what the director of the event, who listened to me speak to the Aussies in Arizona last fall, asked me to cover. I came away with these:

**Your job as a player is to come to the gym with a smile on your face; my job as coach is to make sure you leave with one.**

**Never let the pressure of competition get in the way of the pleasure of competition.**



The course has gone well, though I have had to press them for less talking and more on the court time. They have had the most passionate discussions of cue words I have ever seen, and then when they play, even just 2 v 2, the arguments resound as if it is a full 12 on 12 brawl. Power remains limited, but the gym has opened louvered sidewalls and we have plenty of light. At the outside courts I have seen, each are powered by generators, not the city power system. The first practice I worked with the team, they ALL arrived, all 12, in the back of a single pickup.

Other observations shared with the coaches are how well the people

carry huge loads on their heads without even holding onto it. The women walk with wonderful posture, grace and dignity and I asked the coaches...did anyone send you to class to do that? Do drills to do it? Hire a coach to teach you how to do it? They laughed and got the point even better that the game teaches the game.

I think the biggest surprise is how hard it is for everyone to change from 1 court to many...it's as if they just don't think it is allowed even for younger kids. So inside the main gym, using the 1.5 inch wide white ribbon from Costco (also easy to buy online, 50 yards for about \$12), we strung up 4 courts in half their main gym, and a 4-nets-on-a-rope on the other side and had all 40 coaches playing doubles....and speedball....and fast queens....and wash games....and they started competing. My favorite had to be a variation of “steal the coconuts” scoring (see the minivolley book for that), using just 12 M&Ms, which did not melt on the hot outdoor court, no matter how many times they were swapped from side to side in the battle to win all the chocolate...

The last day was a full one, as always starting with food, then outside we went for several hours, working on the rules, strategies and techniques of both beach volleyball and mini volleyball. Once again, speedball wove its way into their being so active, with not just four, but 16 players playing doubles. It is nice that an international basketball court is 16 meters wide, as you can then put two regulation courts on one, while playing on concrete and not sand. While this is a land where no small part of life revolves around finding and keeping shade, the coaches forgot that it was hot and sunny and played and learned very intensely. Another media interview, lunch, and some time showing USAID workers the gym and training, and before you knew it, it was time for closing ceremonies. Click here to see the Sports United Clinic and training shots I took... ([click here](#)) So here is our list of action items from this clinic, has some parallels to many programs around the world and USA

1. Serve and Serve Receive more – over the net, not in front of it

2. Put up 2-4 nets on each full basketball court, and get 100 percent more training. International courts are 16 meters wide, so either a meter short or include the sideline space.
3. Remember the best serve reception drill is receive, set, spike...the best setting drill is receive, set, spike, the best hitting drill is receive, set spike...and the best digging drills are dig, set spike (with thanks as always to Marv Dunphy and Carl McGown)
4. Train positive to perfection, eliminating negative habits
5. More Balls – Can Molten make a more concrete/dirt durable ball, without it being rubber?
6. More leaders – not just coaches
7. More competition – consider going more to 2/3 matches, wave formats, pools of 3 evening completion, players refereeing

While one of my main reasons for being here is to set in motion a program to get a Haitian women's team to the Toronto Para Pan Ams in 2015. After the quake there were thousands of crushed limb injuries. So at my NORCECA Technical/Coaches Commission meetings later this month, we will push for more sitting volleyball in the region. My last morning in Haiti however, I visited an orphanage that a volleyball friend supports. As pictures speak a thousand words, I will let my photos speak to that experience, other than to add that two great friends of volleyball, Lily Richardson with Child in Hand and Bryron Shewman with Starlings USA, are both making a difference with their work in Haiti, both through orphanage and school support. They are making a difference there on the ground every day. Click here for pics of the kids in school ([click here](#)).

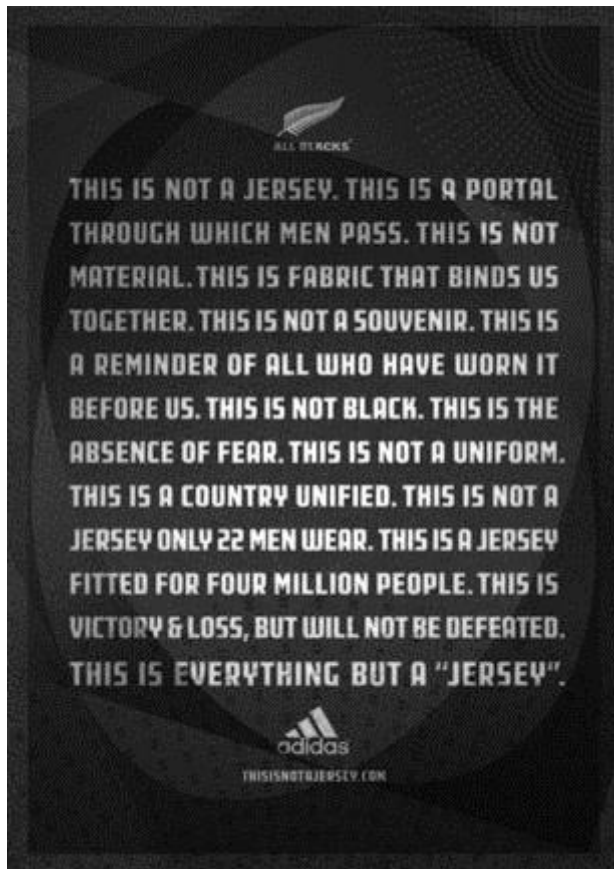
This also brings back a grassroots idea I created when I did a clinic in El Salvador for the State Department back during that nation's civil war in mid-1980s. The embassy asked me to bring a set of antennas, as the men's national team had a set of antennas but not the women's team, or any other team in the country. They gave me about \$75 and I found a donated set of real antennas, then went to Wal Mart and bought 40 bike safety flags. I removed the metal attachment and the orange flag on each. I also asked for bike inner tube discards from the city bike shops, cut them in half, removing the valve in the process, and used the big "bands" from the inner tubes to attach each six foot long antenna to any net. With red permanent markers on the white fiberglass shaft, marking each to alternate red and white on each shaft, I packed the 21 pairs of antennas in a fishing rod transporter tube and was able to give every court/program I worked with, their own antenna set. Now for fast kid friendly antenna solutions, I just spent \$2 and get a pair of foam swim noodles from the dollar store and weave them into the net mesh...they may not be perfectly straight but they sure show up that meter above the net to determine in or out as the ball flies! We just filed a state department Sports United grant to return to help 40 coaches from El Salvador and Belize in 2014. It will be interesting to see if any of my antenna creations have lasted the decades...If you are at Jr Nationals in 2014 in Minneapolis, stop any of these coaches and give them a tip or two...they will appreciate it just like these 40 coaches in Haiti...as we grow the game together...



January 05, 2013

Long before Spock split his fingers and said “live long and prosper” the people of the Cook Islands said in greeting and thanks “May you live long/well” It is on their license plates, and even means thank you. We drove one nite around the whole main island – there are others where the black pearl is found – taking 45 minutes if that. Our journey was slowed by the “Egg Lady” truck which moved gingerly along the rougher sections of the one lane highway. Gas is about \$8 a gallon, so lots of scooters, but surprisingly not many bicyclists. Ever present are the “Tsunami Route” signs and arrows, and the harbor has a large tsunami warning device hooked up to the main site in Hawaii. Hugh Graham, my host and President of the Cook Island Volleyball Federation, said there are about 11,000 people on this main island, and about 18,000 total people in his country. So the chance for impacting is great...

Only one direct flight a week goes to the Cook Islands from the USA, so I caught a flight first to Auckland, and got a chance to see the all black All Black Air New Zealand plane. Having shared many ideas of the last four years with the All Blacks, I was pleased to see their success in the World Cup, finally winning it...after decades of coming up short. The campaign by Adidas, called This is not a Jersey” I think is a brilliant one, and an adaptation of this would be appropriate for many other programs beyond the All Blacks. In their case, they wove the names of the fans, using fibre imprinting nanotechnology into the thread that made the jersey....so search and learn online for more video and posters on the program. This and another of my favorite signs from the main road are favorites of mine from this trip...



school teachers, as part of the “that which you teach you learn. That ending event was for over 100 kids from the primary schools in the capital city where 6-12 year olds spent the afternoon learning the skills from the CISA coaches and playing on various height nets.

The Oceania Games happened a month after my visit, and there is one strong doubles male player, who needs a partner. The plan was to have them train 2 vs 6 in November, to work on how to put the ball down no matter how big a block or defensive group might be.

Beginning with the end in mind, we seek to send a Cook Island beach team to the Olympics – male or female. There have been Olympians from here since 1988, and two of the athletes I am working with were in London, both in the 100m dash. [cookislands.org.uk/cookislands-london-olympics-2012](http://cookislands.org.uk/cookislands-london-olympics-2012) - That this volleyball success might be possible to happen, for the athletes are quite strong here, is seen in both the success of the Latvian men in London (bronze) and the number of Olympians and medalist coming from Hawaii and Outrigger Canoe Club courts, as covered in my blog “Ohana and the Value of Play”. So part of the trip is about building and enhancing both a men’s and women’s court, as well as a kids court – just like they have at Outrigger.

Another challenge is lighting the courts, for in this longitude, the sun comes up, complete with the chorus of crowing free ranging roosters that fill my bedroom’s back yard, at about 6 and sets about 12 hours later, leaving just a couple hours of sunlight training time after work ends.

The main groups we trained were the Cook Islands Sports Academy – about 20 coaches, and the High school teachers at all three high schools – six PE teachers in all with each class getting training – totaling about 250 players, who then taught what they learned to the primary





The Cook Islands Sports academy coaches were eager to learn, on the court then on the sand, and at the end on the grass courts. School volleyball is played, culminating in championships that are being restored, January thru March, but the PE teachers brought their classes to learn. Like my trip to Barbados, these Commonwealth connected nations focus on Rugby and Cricket for the guys, and Netball for the girls. It just so happens that a solid netball station is perfect for putting up the netband with white ribbon, and then sliding it up and down from the men's to the women's net heights, as well as lower for badminton and of course sitting volleyball. I left behind a set of four nets on a rope so that our hosting school could get lots more kids playing.

Twenty Cricket is a big program, with an on site full time staff member from the international cricket federation. I never did see a single person on crutches, in a wheelchair or with a prosthetic – most wear shorts so I would have seen it. I just think the population is too small. I did see a LOT of 3 legged dogs as they and the free range chickens are all over, and many have been hit by cars and are hopping around. I guess the people are just that much smarter – not faster...lol.



I finished the journey with two days of training coaches in Auckland, New Zealand - where the greeting gets shortened to Kia Ora, but with the same intent. - I coached 15 more coaches and 25 Maoris athletes – and worked with the NZ Paralympic Committee as my host, James, who runs some excellent leagues decided after hearing about sitting volleyball, to add the option to his adult program and support ParaVolley.



## Giving Back to Those Who Serve

November 11, 2012

Readers of my blog know the many different ways USA Volleyball doesn't just support juniors, but everyone involved in our sport. Those who know the history of our game, know that wars, especially World Wars I & II, were instrumental in bringing volleyball first to Europe, and then Asia. Our military members of USA Volleyball – US Navy, US Army, US Air Force and US Marines -- compete for the USA in the CISM World Games, and of course in the Wounded Warrior Games and some members even at the ParaPanAms and Paralympics, events I have blogged about in the past.

Well this past summer, thanks to the help of Brian Swenty, Christine Vega, Erin Markus and others, we were able to help many of the volleyball passionate kids of our military service members based in Europe. The idea is simple, these American kids who are living in Europe – deserve a great American style volleyball camp, without having to spend over a thousand dollars in airfare just to get to the USA for that experience, let alone the costs of many US camps that include room and board. Brian and Christine, the engines behind the idea, put forth this idea while we were working together in Ramstein, Germany, last November, on a Wounded Warrior Training project of training the athletes and the trainers. Maybe it was because I got the overall commander of Europe's forces, a three star general, to get on the floor and play sitting volleyball for almost an hour, even practicing over some olive green army issue 550 cord. I think it is more because Brian is a passionate, talented and creative coach who also loves to grow the game together with USA Volleyball.

Having done many hundreds of volleyball camps over the years, the chance to bring a great experience to the kids of those who serve was a no-brainer – and with Cody and McKenzie both being college players by then who have been also coaching kids for many years already, I had some staffers I knew would contribute well. Brian knew some of the talented coaches in both the Armed Forces side who played for the USA in CISM games, and others who coach high school or club ball in Europe. We opened the staff training coaching course in advance to others from Germany and beyond, and for the first two days before camp, gave the core ideas and principles to making the camp one that would teach the kids to teach themselves, since after six days of mostly 3-a-days, we would be leaving. We wanted to make sure that the camp was both solid technically, but one heck of a lot of fun, with tons of game-like contacts per hour. What a surprise eh, if you read my blog and science based writings...



Hosting it in Vilseck, where Brian has been steadily changing the culture of volleyball at the school level as a teacher there and the team head coach, was not only logical, it was simply the right place as each month there are still service members based there, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Cavalry Regiment and 172<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Brigade, who are losing their lives in the current war. During camp staff swung by the memorial of the fallen, while just a few feet away, units of troops would be marching by in unison, and full voice, returning from the live fire range back to chow. Indeed the coaching staff and many athletes ate in the troop dining halls together. Brian also made sure we learned even more important history, as we Kesslateers spent a day at Dachau and my kids also visited Nuremberg.





Perhaps the most important thing about working and helping the camp was the commitment by all to be paid by learning, not in dollars. This allowed 175 kids, from eight different nations where their parents were based and thus they went to school, to be able to drive or train in affordably. So, what was the cost of these six days with room and board, and 3-a-day training in not just volleyball, but in doubles on grass, minivolley on tennis courts, sitting volleyball and wallyball in two racquetball courts, and a full day of beach volleyball and swimming/diving pool training and competition? The kids camped out at nite in the Vilseck HS classrooms, we coaches stayed on base as well ...and the cost charged to each athlete attending was...\$175. That's it, as these kids and their families deserve such a low cost but quality training. We watched the USA teams live online every evening, and I even got some "Kessel Chips" to eat one day, as they are "NEU!" in Germany. Growing the game

together we went on the Armed Forces radio broadcast and had the The Stars and Stripes Europe newspaper report on the training, as did other papers there. [Read the article and learn more](#) about the camp.

Many camps have a staff match mid-camp one evening, and so did we. Ours just happened to be a USA vs. Germany match, as two coaches who attended the pre-camp coach IMPACT course, brought their high level men and women to play the USA coaches. Memories of my first camps back in the mid-1970s flooded me as I watched both my kids play with almost 200 campers cheering and laughing at the competition, starting of course with the warm up.

This upcoming summer marks my 40<sup>th</sup> year doing summer volleyball camps, after working my first one in 1973 at Cate school in Carpinteria, CA for the Southern California Volleyball Association. I must take time to also thank Stew McDole, still at Graceland College-now-University, and Chris McLaughlin from Punahou HS in Hawaii, for starting me down the path of doing each camp better than the last. This summer marks Stew's 41<sup>st</sup> year of doing the USA National Development camps, the precursor to the current High Performance program. Stew trusted me and my fellow camp coaches starting in 1976 to make camp fun yet gamelike and skill based in the four states we ran camps each summer, based out of Lamoni, Iowa.

I loved the intensity, and give this example of our "day off/24 hour break" McDole style. You do the camp tourney in the am, and camp awards luncheon (along with such "famous" skits and Ball Identification, the History of Volleyball and Stripes) and finish saying goodbye to the campers/meeting their parents about 2pm. You sleep, do laundry, dash to the big city and watch a movie in air conditioning (for our gyms and dorms were never air conditioned), do laundry that morning if not done before then...are back in the gym the next day at 2pm to do skill testing and group sorting then a talk and finally three hours of training with your new group, which ends at 10pm. See, you got 24 hours off. That most of it was spent brainstorming how to change the next camp to even be better still was time off...and I loved it. Camp in Germany in summer 2012 was no less a chance to help the kids and the coaches and I still love it.

Plans are to do another camp next summer in Italy for even more kids. If you want to know more about the camp programming and design, start by downloading the new edition of the Minivolley book, 2012 version, in either Spanish or English. That is where dozens of pages of my camp scoring, games, warm up and cool down fun ideas are shared. Then email me to get my master summer camp checklist and schedule, and drop a thank you note and request to Brian, at [brian.swenty@eu.dodea.edu](mailto:brian.swenty@eu.dodea.edu).

Don't forget to share your thoughts, comments or ideas in the comment box below. We love your feedback!

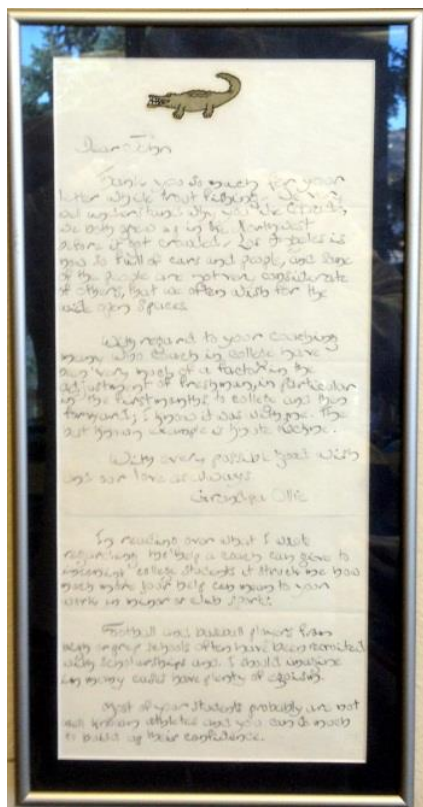
## Decades of Growing the Game

October 23, 2012

### Sport Development Workshop

Many people joined us recently for our USA Volleyball open house. Some of those who entered my office are still there I think, hiding or lost somewhere between the collection of world globes and my event credentials, reading some of my hundreds of books on the shelves.

Anyone who enters, thus leaves passing by one of my most treasured possessions, a handwritten letter from my Grandfather, Ollie Lamson. My mom was an only child, so I carry that Lamson name as my middle name. It was written to me in my first season of college coaching back in 1971 at my alma mater, The Colorado College. A sample of his writing in my letter, with a style that I still want to turn into a magical font, can be seen in the picture below the content of his whole letter. He said to me....



*Dear John,*

*Thank you so much for your letter while trout fishing. We very well understand why you like Colorado, we both grew up in the Northwest before it got crowded. Los Angeles is so full of cars and people, and some of the people are not very considerate of others, that we often wish for the wide open spaces.*

*With regard to your coaching many who coach in college have been very much of a factor in the adjustment of freshmen, in particular in the first months, to college and then forward; I know it was with me. The best known example is Knute Rockne.*

*With every possible good wish and our love as always - Grandpa Ollie*

*In reading over what I wrote regarding the help a coach can give to incoming college students it struck me how much more your help can mean to your work in minor or club sports. Football and baseball players from high or prep schools often have been recruited with scholarships and I should imagine in many cases have plenty of egoism. Most of your students are not well known athletes and you can do much to build up their confidence.*

*Build their confidence....Grandpa was a wise man, who set a record in World War I era for the highest number of consecutive rolls in a Jenny biplane, and worked his entire life for*

Standard Oil. He rowed in the 8 man scull for the University of Washington, thus you read how he was impacted by coaches. Thus you have a sense of why my coaching philosophy hinges around developing amazing leaders – [CLICK HERE](#) for that blog. It is also why I left the path of coaching at college, and focused on coaching the coaches, I did not want to impact just my team and some others in summer camps and a clinic or two, I want to build that confidence and knowledge and teamwork, not egoism, through every coach we reach.

You can't have confident players without their trusting you, and in no small part that comes from their knowing you are working to be the best coach you can be and improving, no different from what you ask of your athletes. One of my big questions is, so who is pushing you to be better...who is coaching you? What homework are you doing, books are you reading and perhaps most important, CHANGES are you making...including those which bond your team, build trust and confidence in your team and each player. As we have covered in Mindset, years ago, it is about doing things that reward effort, not outcome, that rewards things the players can do, not what their looks or "smartness" or things that are more genetic are about.



Remember, success builds confidence, and your feedback does too. What do you say when a player shanks, but did it using solid technical form? Does your feedforward, on the next point that is in their control, build confidence? Do you understand that coaching does not always mean correcting? Are you “catching them doing it right” or only paying attention to them when they err? Also remember, athletes don’t care how much you know, until they know and trust how much you care.

Some visitors no doubt shuddered when they saw my office. More than a few asked...do you do all the dusting? Yes I do. For me, my office is a place of over 40 years of volleyball memories and ideas, and since I spend more time there annually than I do in any other room on the planet earth, I want it to be something that impacts me as I work to grow the game together with others.



It is very important in growing our game to break down the silos of information, those found within our sport and those between our sports. We need to share more, and a hard working junior college coach puts it accurately in his blog - <http://jimdietz.blogspot.com/2012/09/the-free-and-open-movement-of.html> Too that end USAV has just released a new newsletter, appropriately named the “Growing the Game News.” Like this blog, we just want to help you stay current on educational material that will assist you as a teacher of the game. Each two-page issue, going out about twice a month, will include new videos, articles, webinars, book suggestions, and technology tips in a quick-read format as we know your time is limited during season. **CLICK HERE** and start reading about new things we have found in this inaugural issue, including dozens of highlight clips from the medal round of

the 2012 Olympic Games, and let us know how else we can help you in growing the game! If you did not get a copy of it yet, as it went to all USAV IMPACT and CAP certified coaches, email [patty.fadum@usav.org](mailto:patty.fadum@usav.org) and we will get you added.

Several of those who impacted me came through my office that Friday. Two of them were Tom Crawford, now CEO of USA Ultimate Frisbee, and Audrius Barzdukas, now the principal at the prestigious Harvard Westlake school in southern California. Back in 1995, Tom and Audrius spoke at a USOC coaching clinic as they were the director and assistant director of USOC Coaching at the time. They shared with those of us in attendance the poem “The Impact of Coaches.” As I had been updating the USAV IMPACT manual annually since my first edition in 1988, with new research and ideas gleaned from around the world, I walked right up and asked them for permission to share that poem with our new volleyball coaches. Fast forward to 2012 and you can now see these words come to life on your computer screen in the words of USAV coaches – thanks to the creative vision of Matt Podschweit. It will open all the IMPACT courses ahead, and you will soon be able to view it at the USAV Video and Education areas -- a three minute reminder with cool video on why we coach.

I got a long email shared below while traveling back to see my daughter McKenzie and her Bowdoin Polar Bear teammates play in a tournament this weekend. Those Polar Bears went 4-0, beating the regional #1 seed and are now ranked solidly in the NCAA top 25 for Division III. The team is a wonderful bunch of athletes and staff, and Mac came in off the bench often to do her part to win. The email came from coach who is working hard to be the best teacher of the game possible, and I will share it with you readers, as I know many of you can relate...and hopefully others might have comments to share with her.

Reading Mastery by George Leonard – good quick read...interesting thoughts about “loving the plateau” and along with Mindset, The Talent Code, Talent and Secret Life of Teams and some other off-season reading. It’s been some good mental stuff for me as the coach and helping me with this “process” stuff.

Early in my career I came across this USAV stuff that you teach and have since been intrigued. I’ve tried hard to implement as much of what I can (or what has made sense or I guess you could say what I’ve bought into) with whatever level I am working with over the years. It’s challenging when I’m the head coach or one of the founding members of our junior club to know that this stuff works and that I can’t convince other coaches that I am working with the same. So I keep trying and somehow along the way I got to thinking that I have to win to earn some credibility to convince them. And the same goes for when I teach coaching clinics to give back to the game – the coaches are interested, but I can tell they are not quite sure that they should buy in. And I, of course, take it personally as in if I had more wins to my name maybe they’d listen.

We struggle to find people to coach period, and I have found it especially difficult to get them in and then try to “tell them how to coach.” I’ve tried giving resources – books, videos, binders of stuff I’ve collected, send them to clinics, share your USAV Resource CDs, articles, blog, etc. I don’t think you can make someone do something and I’ve tried my best to show the coaches and the team that it works and why. But it seems they always go back to the record thing – Winning School X runs the mile, Winning School Y teaches setting from laying down on the floor, etc. We have had some success and I think the players I’ve worked with can see they are improving, but the parents and players have really been on my case the last few years about not being one of the elite teams.

We manage to finish a few games above .500, somewhere just under 20 wins a season and be competitive in playoffs. But we are stuck on this plateau . . . I am very involved in all levels of our program and just keep thinking if we can implement some of this stuff at the younger levels and get the kids playing more volleyball that is going to be the difference. And so I just keep thinking “work harder” and putting in more time and when the record comes out the same I feel like I am banging my head against the wall. It is a hard path when you sometimes feel like you are going at it alone and all anyone has is criticism about why you are not winning more. And when I read about you starting a team for Cody and the wins piling up I think “maybe there is supposed to be instant success.”

I feel like this year has been different. The JV and C-team coaches who got to see you speak in person are really trying hard to use some of the stuff. We are having a lot of good conversations about why something is done a certain way. They are asking me a lot of questions.

You said something a few months back about it being about the process. And I remember hating the word about as much as I hated the word fail. But I have a lot of respect for the work you do and I remind myself that much of your time and wisdom is spent trying to convince people to think and how patient you are and that there is some new lesson for me to learn. So I have a lot more reading

and thinking to do and have certainly not mastered anything (do we ever?) but have appreciated the time you've taken to help me and the questions you have allowed me to ask.

After watching so many people hear the science and ignore it anyway, I have decided that I have many levels of learning: ignorant (don't know the science), resistant (know the science but refuse to believe it), failure to act (know and understand, but still don't implement). More than anything it's been helpful to have someone outside of our program that I can talk to, question, etc . This level of action brings to mind a poem paraphrased for coaches – passion is not in your head; passion is not in your heart; passion is in your behind and legs....

Wow, that's a lot of thinking for a Friday – anyway just wanted to say that I know you're busy and thanks for sharing your time and talents.

So why not share some ideas and comments for this talented and passionate volleyball coach...as I would love to read them too...

## LTAD- A look at Stephen Curry's Longshot Journey by E:60

April 30, 2014

I recently watched an ESPN E:60 show, that included the following story on how Stephen Curry went from multisport athlete through high school and college unseen at the start – to NBA All Star – the transcript is typed below to show each part of his long term athletic development (LTAD). His journey spoke volumes to me about the importance of giving players a love of the game and of keeping as many players involved as long as possible – not cutting any player unless they chose to cut themselves or found a new sport to love. The link to the video itself is at the end of the transcript.

### E:60 Stephen Curry (Full Segment HD)

**The following takes place in an ESPN meeting room:**

ESPN Producer: (*holds up picture of Stephen Curry*) Jeff, best shooter in the NBA right now?

Jeffri Chadiha (ESPN Reporter): I think he is.

Lisa Salters (ESPN Reporter) : Best 3-point shooter in the NBA.

ESPN Reporter: Who is the best shooter overall? Labron?

Lisa: No! Kevin Durant is better.

Other ESPN Reporter: Really?!

Jeffri Chadiha: I'll take this guy because he is pretty special. And in a few years in the NBA he has become a superstar.

Chris Connelly (ESPN Reporter): He is the first twitter star of the NBA. When he goes off, everybody goes to twitter and says, "You've got to watch the Warriors, he's gone off".

Wayne Drehs (ESPN Reporter): And the next day, there are more Steph Curry clips going around, on the days that he goes off, than any player in the NBA. You gotta see what he did last night.

Jeffri Chadiha: But as easy as he makes the game look, his road to greatness has not been anything close to as smooth as you might imagine.

**The following is the story of Stephen Curry:**

Del Curry (Stephen's Father): Today is a big ticket today. Everybody's still offering me tickets. Steph needed 45-50 tickets, and I will probably still get a call before I get to the arena, maybe even before the game starts. Here comes another call for tickets...right on key.

JC ESPN Reporter: It is December in Charlotte, North Carolina. Del Curry, a TV analyst for the Bobcats, is on his way to work. It is a short trip that represents a long journey.

Del: It's a fathers dream to watch your son compete and do the things that you did. And he's better than you are. No doubt about it. I can still shoot a little bit, but he's way better than I ever was.

JC ESPN Reporter: He is the Golden State Warriors all-star guard, Del's oldest son, 26 year old, Stephen Curry.

Stephen Curry: (*talking about his dad*) Still surreal to me, for real. I mean, to come and play against him and see him on the sidelines. And I know he is commentating on me now; trying to stay as neutral as possible probably. But, it's still surreal to me, for sure.



JC ESPN Reporter: Surreal; because the NBA's best shooter was once a longshot.

Coach ? : *(talking about Stephen)* I don't think anyone could imagine what he has done on the basketball court. We knew he had the work ethic, drive, and dedication, and the want. But, you just don't know how things are going to work out.

JC ESPN Reporter: March 14, 1988, Wardell Stephen Curry II was born. That summer, his father, a 6' 4" shooting guard joined the Charlotte Hornets; who would make 12,000 "3's" in 16 seasons, earning a reputation as one of the best shooters in the game.

Del: *(flashback to 1995 interview)* It's good that my teammates, they know that when I am in the zone they are going to do everything they can to get me the ball.

Stephen: I remember on school nights wishing I could go to the games. My mom would say, "No, you can't go to the game on school nights because you will not get home until 11 or 12". So when they had Friday or Saturday night games --that was like the biggest deal for us because we knew we were going to the game that night.

JC ESPN Reporter: How much time did Del spend teaching him the game?

Sonya Curry (Stephen's Mother): Not very much at all, because we wanted it to just let it come naturally.

Stephen: I was a competitive guy. I loved all sports that I played. There was something about basketball and doing what your dad did that had a little more of a draw to it.

Del: He didn't have to follow in his Dad's footsteps. He could do anything he wanted to do. Try anything he wanted to do. As long as he gave it 100%.

Stephen: When I was in 8<sup>th</sup> grade I made the decision to spend all year round on it. And do what it took was necessary to play in college.

JC ESPN Reporter: But as a high-school sophomore, Stephen stood just 5'6", and weighed 125 pounds. Lacking strength, he still shot the ball from his waist.

Del: I told him that if he wanted to play in college you're going to have to bring it up, and get it up above your head, over your forehead. So, we worked at it all summer. That was a tough summer for him.

Seth Curry (Stephen's Brother): It was tough for me to watch them in the backyard, late nights, a lot of hours on the day, working on his shot, cause they broke it down to a point where he couldn't even shoot at all. There would be bad times crying and not wanting to work on his game. He had to do it rep after rep after rep until he was able to master it.

JC ESPN Reporter: With his re-mastered shot, Stephen average just under 20 points a game his junior season of high school.

Stephen: Growing up in Tar heel Country, you want to play for Duke, NC State, Carolina, and Wake Forest. I wanted to play at that level.

Roy Williams (North Carolina Head Coach): I don't ever remember even seeing him. I do know that when I did see him I thought, "Man, he is little."

JC ESPN Reporter: The only major program to recruit Stephen was his father's alma-mater, Virginia Tech. And even they said he would have to walk on.

Seth: I don't think he has ever said it before, but you could tell that it hurt him a little bit.

JC ESPN Reporter: *(talking to Stephen)* How did you handle the disappointment of those bigger schools not coming after you?

Stephen: I used it as motivation that summer before my senior year in school to just play my game and the right coach and right college will come and make their selves known that they wanted me.

JC ESPN Reporter: That college was Davidson. A small liberal arts school, 20 minutes north of home.

Bob McKillop (Davidson Head Coach): The big school didn't recruit him because of his appearance, I think. His size, his stature. People just saw him as a low-major, mid-major guard that they were a dime a dozen.

JC ESPN Reporter: What did you see in him?

Bob: I saw brilliance.

Stephen: Just the way he talked and the confidence he expressed and how I could impact the time right away. If I allowed him to let him coach me, that good things would happen.

Bob: His first game, as a college player, he started against Eastern Michigan up in Ann Arbor, and in the first half he had 9 turnovers. We are down 18 points at halftime. I am re-thinking whether he belongs to be in the starting line-up. Put him in the starting line-up in the second half, we won the game. Next night against Michigan he dropped 32.

Del: I was very surprised when we passed coach McKillop in the airport, and he grabbed me and wife and goes, "Your son is going to make a lot of money playing this game someday". I'm thinking, "Yeah, ok, maybe somewhere overseas". *(laughs)*

JC ESPN Reporter: But the best was yet to come for Stephen; who had grown to 6'3" by his sophomore season. March 21, 2008, the NCAA tournament. With his parents in the stands, Stephen scored 40 against Gonzaga. Two days later, he dropped 30 on Georgetown.

Sonya: I don't think I have the words to, kind of, describe that whole experience. I mean, we just sat there and scratched our heads from home and say, "Can you believe that?!" And we would ride home in silence because it was just like... "What is he going to show us next time?"

JC ESPN News Reporter: *(talking about Stephen in the NCAA Championships)*. The star of the tournament, his legend continues to grow, Stephen Currie.

JC ESPN Reporter: He averaged 32 points a game in Davidsons Cinderella run to the Elite Eight. In a span of 10 days, "Stephen Currie" had become a household name.

Seth: When you change from being Del's son to Del being his father.

Del: A couple days later, the Bobcats had a game and we got tickets. I told him, "Hey, we will bring Steph to the game". The security calls me and goes, "Do you need security?" I said, "Na, we don't need security, what do you mean? He comes to the games all the time". He said, "OK". So we get to the game and a mob formed quickly, he was like a rockstar. I am like, "We need some security here." *(Laughs)*. Things have changed.

JC ESPN Reporter: In his junior season, there was more of the same. He led the nation in scoring; averaging almost 29 points a game. Then declared for the 2009 NBA draft.

Stephen: I kind of heard the same stuff outside, going into the NBA, I'm too small, not athletic enough, can't play defense, not strong enough. I was nervous; obviously making that transition is a big deal.

NBA DRAFT SPEAKER: *(flashback)* With the 7<sup>th</sup> pick in the 2009 NBA Draft, the Golden State Warriors select, Stephen Curry from Davidson College.

JC ESPN Reporter: In 2010, Stephen finished 2<sup>nd</sup> in the Rookie-of-the-Year voting. But in the next two seasons, chronic right ankle problems would force him to miss 48 games and undergo 2 surgeries.

Stephen: Every question I got was, “How are you ankles? Are you going to be the suedo Grant Hill story—where you have an injury that kind of holds you back from reaching your full potential?”

Del: He’s always injured the rumors and everything, it’s really tough so it was good he was here around family, to keep that encouragement while he was rehabbing. But again, he is very competitive, determined that he wasn’t going to let it stop him.

JC ESPN Reporter: After six months of rehab, In November of 2012, Curry returned for his 4<sup>th</sup> season. He set a new single season NBA 3-point record. Signed a 4-year, 44 million dollar contract extension, and led the warriors to the playoffs in the first round upset of the Denver Nuggets.

Mark Jackson (Warriors Coach): Steph has more game than his pops. And that is with all-due respect to old school basketball and Del. To me, Steph Curry has blossomed into a superstar. He has simply become the face of this franchise.

JC ESPN Reporter: He has also become like his father; a family man. Stephen lives in Oakland with his wife, Ayesha, who he met in high school, and their 2 –year-old daughter, Riley.

Stephen: I just love coming home and seeing her (Riley), and seeing what she learned today and see her smiling and having fun and lighting up not only my eyes, my wife’s eyes, but my whole family. They don’t really worry about me or my wife anymore, they just say, “Where’s Riley at?” (Laughs)

Ayesha (Stephen’s wife): Typically, he’s at practice, comes home, and we are chilling, cooking dinner, watching Modern Family on the couch, playing with Riley. We are the most normal people on the face of the planet. It’s kind of sad. (Laughs)

JC ESPN Reporter: *(talking about Stephen’s new hobbies)* But on this September day, something far from normal...

Stephen: *(talking about the trapeze)* I’ve never really been afraid of heights, but looking at this, I kind of am starting to.

JC ESPN Reporter: Just a week before training camp, Stephen and Ayesha, are trying something new.

**\*\*Clip of Stephen and Ayesha doing the trapeze together\*\***

JC ESPN Reporter: Reaching new heights was a fitting to start to Stephen’s fifth NBA season. He was voted a starter at his first all-star game, in New Orleans. That weekend confirmed how far Stephen Curry has come. The undersized kid from Charlotte, the longshot, has become the talk of the NBA.

Del: I often get guys that I play with, guys still in league say, “I pay to watch you son play”. That’s the ultimate compliment.

Stephen: *(speaking to a banquet filled room)* I just to say thank you to everybody in this room. To enjoy this whole experience with each and every one of you is definitely something I will remember, so thank you. Every bit of the journey was worth it. Who would have thought? This is crazy.

[E60 show on Enstein U channel](#)

## Bradman and Bubba

May 10, 2014

Some of you may know I was fortunate to live in Australia for a period over two years in order to grow their game in each of their major cities. I walked Kessel Road in near the Queen Elizabeth the Second Rec Center in my months in Brisbane, woke up for months to kookaburras singing in old gum trees in Adelaide, fly fished with men from Snowy River while in Sydney, breathed the cleanest air in the world in Tasmania, and saw the swans of Perth that inspired the title to Nicolas Taleb's great book on the impact of the highly improbable – The Black Swan.



I also learned some important ideas from a sport that is popular with billions around the world – yet basically unknown here in America – cricket. Yes it is played at a very high level of sportsmanship – including serving tea mid match – over many days, or more recently in “quick” matches that take just a day to finish. I learned enough that when I came down to Sydney to prepare for my role at Team Leader for our USA Beach Teams in 2000, our hodgepodge USOC staff/team leader group of baseball/sports players was able to win a friendly cricket match over our Australian hosts, much to their chagrin. In my office I have displayed a statuette of Brian Lara, honoring his record for the highest individual score in a test match when he scored 400 not out against England in Antigua in 2004. He is also the only batsman to have scored a century up to a quintuple century in top level competition.

The one person that stood out among the millions of amazing sporting Australians, was an athlete who played cricket at a level no other person has ever come close to. Sir Donald Bradman. His fame led Australia to honoring him. He competed for Australia for over 20 years, despite being declared physically invalid and dropped from the Service in World War II – and despite having poor eyesight. He played no organized junior cricket growing up, and received no coaching. When he started playing on real, grass fields, he resisted all attempts to change his batting style to a more orthodox style.

Then there is a guy who just won his second Masters, the lefty Bubba Watson, a player who also has never had a golf coach or lessons, just like the best athlete in ball sports – Bradman - had no coach growing up in the sport. A recent *Sports Illustrated* article on Bubba made me smile – in that his dad, Gerry, was purported to only have offered Bubba one piece of advice as he hit whiffle balls in the back yard – “Swing hard.” Like Agassi in

tennis, Wagner in baseball – when young it was about speed first and accuracy second.

Ben Crenshaw said of the new two time Master champion – *“He’s out of this world. I mean, that drive on 13, are you kidding me? What game is he playing? It’s not golf. It’s different than that. It’s like a symphony, a painting, a sculpture. It’s artistic expression. Bubba sees the course in big parabolas and arcs, not in straight lines. The power is one thing, but what makes him so unique is the creativity. Put those together and he can play this course like nobody else.”*

We all know the importance of the mental game. PGA golfer Ricky Fowler when asked if his friend Bubba is finally maturing said, “yeah he’s gone from like 12 ½ to 14. He’s getting there. He’s always going to be a kid at heart but mentally and with his golf game and as a dad and as a person, he’s definitely growing up.” PGA caddy Paul Tesori said “As he becomes older and a little wiser, people are starting to get what he’s all about. And you know what, as big a talent as he is, his heart is even bigger.”

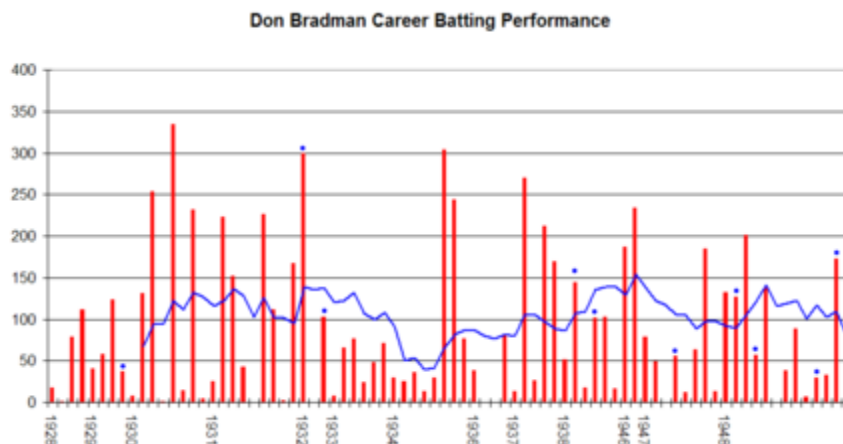
Bradman grew up by playing backyard cricket. bouncing an old golf ball off a water tank and hitting it on the rebound with a cricket stump 'The run-making machine,' as he would become known in his later life, showed talent throughout his younger years, scoring his first century for the High School cricket team while still only twelve. At 17 he was a regular player for the Bowral senior team and during the 1925-1926 season, he made 1318 runs in 23 innings. He moved up to the state side in 1927 then in 1928 played his very first Test match representing Australia against England in the Ashes series,. He scored only 18 runs in the first innings and 1 in the second. He was dropped from the Second Test, but was given a second chance for the Third Test and did not disappoint. In the 1928-1929 season he amassed 1690 runs of which more than 700 were scored in the form of a century on the batting oval. He hit the record books as the youngest ever player to score a Test century at the age of 20 years and four months.

Tony Shillinglaw in his book Bradman Revisited did a biomechanical analysis of Bradman's style which concluded that the hook in his swing that coaches wanted to change technically, actually created a rotary action that gave extra power and kept the ball on the



ground. “The Don” also ALWAYS stood completely still as the bowler began his run – again simplifying his reading of the bowler’s intent. The only weakness seen in his skill over time was in batting during “sticky wickets” when it would get hot and sunny after a heavy rainfall. From my experience watching cricket I don’t think any batter was too good during such conditions

So what makes him someone to be a role model for all sports? Simple, his performance – especially compared by standard deviation to all others playing not just cricket, but any ball sport. His average was 99.94 per – the next three closest batsmen in the sport’s history are at 60.97, 60.83, and 60.73.



Bradman's Test career batting performances with red bars for his innings, blue dots capping where he finished “not out” and the blue line being is 10 most recent inning average.

Bradman’s records still exist over half a century later in Test Match cricket – 99.94 as the highest career batting average, 201.5 for the highest series batting average, 36.25 for the highest ratio of centuries per innings played and 15% for the same double century ratio. He also scored the most runs in one series – an astounding 974. Statistician Charles Davis analyzed the top athlete’s stats, comparing the number of [standard deviations](#) that they stand above the [mean](#) for their sport.

Athlete	Sport	Statistic	Standard deviations
Bradman	<a href="#">Cricket</a>	<a href="#">Batting average</a>	4.4
<a href="#">Pelé</a>	Association football	Goals per game	3.7
<a href="#">Ty Cobb</a>	Baseball	<a href="#">Batting average</a>	3.6
<a href="#">Jack Nicklaus</a>	Golf	<a href="#">Major titles</a>	3.5
<a href="#">Michael Jordan</a>	Basketball	Points per game	3.4

Over a career in baseball, the batter would have to bat .392 (current record is .366) and in basketball the shooter would have to average 43 points (current record is 30.1)

One of Australia’s most beloved heroes, he was revered abroad as well. When [Nelson Mandela](#) was released after 27 years in prison, his first question to an Australian visitor was, “Is Sir Donald Bradman still alive?”

The eyes are important, but it really is less about how good your vision is and what you direct your vision towards. Too many players watch the ball, in no small part based on doing drills and not learning through the net game flow. Arizona USA Volleyball Region’s outreach director [just posted a great blog](#) on what the eyes see that I urge you to read. In closing, I will offer a comment to start off

other comments. From Orioles manager Buck Showalter about Derek Jeter – *“He didn’t take himself too seriously, but he took the right things seriously.”* Thanks for your help in growing the game together and enjoy the return to the summer weather that lets everyone play doubles outside!