Special Report:
Tips for Training the Setter

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How to Develop Soft Hands

Common Mistakes with Hand Technique

1. Deep Dishing the Ball

I’m not a big fan of deep dishing the ball for indoor 6 vs 6 competition. Deep dishing is when the setter catches the ball, lowering the ball down slow and bringing it back up slow for a cleaner release.

The advantage of this technique is the setter takes spin off the ball, allowing for a more controlled release. Also, when this set is done well, the setter is much less likely to be whistled for an illegal double contact. The hands are much softer contacting the ball.

However, there are many reason why I would avoid teaching this technique. First of all, this technique is more difficult to perfect. Secondly, this type of set is more difficult to backset. Third, it’s easier for the opponent to read. And last of all, a referee may decide to whistle for “catching or “throwing” the ball.

2. Jabbing at the Ball

Setting by “jabbing” at the ball is common problem. Fingers shouldn’t ever be pointed at the ball when setting. The hand position at pre-contact should closely mimic the same position as when the ball is in the setter’s hands.

This is why coaches commonly tell setters to start with the hands in the shape of the ball. To take this concept a step further, have the setter hands always “finish” the same as they “start.” So basically, from pre-contact to post-contact, the hand position never changes.

Best Technique for Setting a Volleyball

The following technique helps with making good back sets and also helps maximize the wrist action for first tempo sets.

Place the thumbs and forefingers into a triangle with approximately equal distance between the thumbs and forefingers.

Make sure your hands are slightly rounded prior to contact with the ball. The hands are kept in the shape of the ball before, during, after contact.

This allows for a greater area of the ball to be contacted. The more surface area contacted, the better control of the ball and the better the release.

Don’t make the common mistake of bringing the hands back towards the eyes prior to contact. This is a mistake because this allows the hands/fingers to move in only one direction.
Improving Setter Quickness

Developing Speed and Agility Specific to the Setter Position

The average rally in volleyball lasts 4 to 6 seconds.

The length of time in between rallies is on average 11 to 16 seconds.

This is important to know when designing a setter speed and agility program specific to the setter position.

So the work:rest ratio is about 1:3 or 1:4.

Knowing the work to rest ratio is important for designing a program that works the correct energy systems.

When training speed and agility, “rest” is a critical variable.

Without the appropriate recovery time, the setter won't adequately recover for the next bout of explosive effort.

So if you want your setter to maintain the same level of explosiveness throughout a match, then train at the correct work to rest ratio.

And it’s important to realize that when the setter makes a play, the setter is usually traveling a very short distance (most often just a few quick short steps).

And the greatest distance the setter ever travels when making a play is about 3 to 5 meters (10 to 16 feet).

This is important to understand because when the setter is training quickness, it’s important that the setter improves quickness at the appropriate distances.

Sprinting 3 to 5 meters makes more sense than sprinting the length of a volleyball court.

And then also the setter needs to make quick “change of direction” movements for chasing down difficult passes and playing defense.

Improving Quickness by Focusing on Footwork Patterns

Learning the correct footwork for setting has many advantages.

The goal of setter footwork is to help the setter become more efficient at getting in position to set.

As movement becomes more efficient, the result is a quicker, more athletic setter.
Improving Court Awareness

Seeing the Defense and Block
As the setter advances in skill, court awareness becomes more important. The skill of “anticipation” involves the ability to predict what’s about to happen.

A setter that anticipates well is a setter that has great court awareness.

A beginner player needs to focus on learning how to play volleyball. More specifically, the setter needs to understand how the best players/teams succeed.

In order to be great at anticipation and make great decisions, the setter must be WELL PREPARED.

This means understanding the game and ready for what’s likely to happen.

To improve court awareness, the setter needs to focus on learning to predict what the opponent is about to do.

In order to anticipate, you need to know what your opponent is capable of and any common tendencies.

First, start by thinking about what your opponent is trying to do.

What are they good at? What are they focused on? This is where scouting is important.

From the setter’s perspective, the setter needs to know how the opponent is trying to defend. What defense are they playing? Is the opposing setter on the front row or back row?

How good is the blocking? Are the blockers tall? Are they slow? How about the defense? You have to know your opponent.

Processing Information Quickly
The setter with the best court awareness is usually the setter that processes information the fastest.

For example, how long does it take your setter to recognize the defensive system your opponent is playing? Things happen very quickly and the setter has to make quick split second decisions.

Two Important Tips to Improving Court Awareness
1. Increase Volleyball IQ – The more knowledgeable the setter, the more prepared the setter will be. Since things happen so fast, it’s important for the setter to focus on the “correct” information. Focusing on the correct information will lead the setter to improving anticipation skills.
2. Study the Opponent – As a setter, focus on tendencies of the block and defense.
Knowing What’s Important

The Coach Defines Team Objectives
Since the setter is a player that has such a big influence on the game, the setter needs a clear understanding of what’s important.

The coach needs to state their personal mission in writing and create a list of core values.

Don’t just assume players know your coaching philosophy.

Understanding the role of the “Setter”
Everyone on the team has a specific job or role.

And the setter needs to understand everyone’s responsibilities, especially their own.

The coach should make it clear what each player’s role on the team is.

20 Important Tips for Setting
Here are 20 tips I would consider to be important for the setter position.

1. You’re the leader on the court.
2. Know your limitations.
3. Know who the hot hitter is and use them.
4. Use a reference point on the court to aim your sets.
5. Develop your second ball attacking skills.
6. Make all passes look good.
7. Know when to take risks.
8. Know when NOT to take risks.
9. Learn to see the block using your peripheral vision.
10. Be aware of gaps in the defense.
11. Be in control of the game’s rhythm.
12. Recognize emergency situations.
13. Desire to be involved in every play and be relied upon.
15. Communicate and connect with teammates on a regular basis.
16. Jump set at every possible opportunity.
17. Know your opponent’s blocking scheme.
18. Play defense first before transitioning to set.
19. As you are moving to set, keep an eye on where the ball is being dug.
20. Set Deceptively.
Who Should be your Setter?

Selecting a Setter
One of the most important decisions a coach must make is selecting the right athlete for the setter position. The setter must be motivated and willing to put in the technical time to developed a high level of technical skill.

This is especially important in the beginning. The setter must understand the team goals and how to best achieve those goals. The setter needs to understand every player on the team has a different personality and is motivated in different ways.

Great setters know how to take the pressure off of teammates. A great setter is willing to take blame for attacking mistakes even when it’s not the setter’s fault. This will free up the attacker emotionally, allowing them to focus and make a good play for the next attack.

The setter shouldn’t shy away from hard work and should show a relentless attitude towards both physical and mental challenges.

Great setters also have great court awareness. Great setters are aware of everything that is going on around them. Not just focusing on the movement on their side of the net, but also the opponent’s movements.

Physical Characteristics
Quick feet and hands are important for setting.

Volleyball is a sport that requires great movement skills since the ball doesn’t come to rest between contacts. A setter with great footwork is a valuable asset to a team.

The setter doesn’t necessarily need to be tall. However, the more athletic a setter, the more upside they have for reacting to difficult situations. Strong fingers and hands are important for controlling the ball and also while jump setting.

The setter must be able to set accurately while moving. It’s a common thing to hear a coach tell a setter to get the feet to the ball. You’ll often notice that the location of the ball will prevent the setter from getting in a good stopped position to set the ball. This is why it’s essential for the setter to be able to set while moving or while off-balance.

Leadership
Have a Consistent Work Ethic
The setter is the leader and must know everything. Great leaders work hard, compete, and want what’s best for the team. The setter is the glue that holds the team together, physically, mentally, and emotionally. Great leaders bring your team together and get you to believe in something bigger than yourself.
Be an Inspiration
Great leaders have a dream. Your dream drives your decisions. You want your teammates to get caught up in your dream.

Know your Responsibilities
The setter has to be thinking constantly about what’s going on and what could possibly happen next.

The setter must learn how to break down another team and dissect what they are doing. As you can see, there is always a lot of things going on. And the setter is a key player on the team that is constantly making decisions on the fly.

The following are examples of things the setter should be thinking about.

1. Who is hitting well tonight?
2. What's the game plan?
3. What players are struggling?
4. What are we doing in each serve receive rotation?
5. What style of defense is the opponent playing?
6. What worked last time in each rotation?
7. Is the block committing?

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I hope you found these Training the Setter Tips helpful!

Talk to you soon!

Dennis

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