



Arizona Sidelines

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The Need for Clear Expectations from your Athletes

From his opening practice as the new coach at Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff, Craig Choate wanted his athletes to know where they stood. "I've always felt that coaches should make their expectations clear from the start. There are things that are okay in every sport and things that are not. Good athletes recognize the difference."

Brittany Stowers, the NAU libero and the 2008 Big Sky Conference libero of the Year welcomed the directness. "Coach Choate has a really high expectation level. Right from the beginning he told us, "This is what I expect! It's the little things where most coaches would be like, ah, no big deal. But he doesn't think like that. You know what he likes and what he doesn't like. It's not like a gray area like it has been in the past."

Craig Choate on the Need for Clear Expectations from your Athletes:

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Should Liberos be allowed to serve in Region Tournaments?

With a discrepancy in the rules depending upon the different levels of volleyball played in the United States and the world, we decided to ask several coaches and volleyball VIP's from all levels their opinions. Here's what we got...

"No - because the MB's have to learn how to serve." - **Hugh McCutcheon, USA Women's National Team Coach**

"Selfishly, I would like to see the Libero's serve! That said, I think you need to follow rules that the Club team has to follow when they are at JO's." **David Rubio, Head Coach, University of Arizona**

"Yes they should be able to serve simply because it is what they may do at the next level in college. It would be nice as a recruiter to see them serve in club tournaments so we can evaluate that part of their game also!" **Christopher Green, Head Coach, University of Alaska at Anchorage**

"Yes, we should. Leave it up to the coaches to decide per match/set within region play. It will only affect one middle blocker/player serving anyway. Because it is consistent with USA volleyball and the high school rules, kids can continue doing what they have already been doing. It may make region play more competitive. Let's be honest, how many teams will qualify for nationals anyway?" **Molly West, Head Coach Desert Vista High School**

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How to Turn a Program Around

By Christopher Green



At Western Nebraska CC where I started my college coaching career, I took over a program that had not won a Regional title in over 10 years. The year before I took the job at WNCC, the team did have a good record and a very respectable season. I think the biggest reason we were able to win a Regional Title and start a top JUCO program was simply getting one recruit—a setter who I recruited late from Kearney, NE. She, along with a couple other players I brought in helped to take a good team, with some good talent, and make it a regional power.

This year at UAA, getting Arizona's Calli Scott to join our team as the setter turned out to be one of the keys to the turnaround this year. In my experience, recruiting a talented setter is maybe one of the fastest ways to turn a program around.

Obviously recruiting is important to any program. Trying to convince a player to come to the middle of nowhere (Scottsbluff, NE) at WNCC was a real challenge until we established a winning tradition, and then the job became a bit easier. At UAA, convincing athletes to come to Alaska may also be a challenge, but will be the key to getting this program to be a GNAC contender.

I also strongly believe that a good coaching staff, belief in a system, and players willing to work hard all season long, can help take a team with only 5 wins previous, into a team that was middle of the pack (UAA this year). And good coaching will help make a team with some good talent, a team that can perform at great levels.

We set high goals right from the beginning and expect nothing but the best at practice. As coaches we try to install an attitude of competitiveness immediately, and then get the players to believe that a win can and will happen each time we step out on the court.

I think the confidence you bring with the system as a coach is very important. As coaches, we try to explain why we do what we do, to give the players a reason for learning something new or different. I don't think any player will completely buy into a new system until they see that it works. It's important to see those results at the beginning of the year.

Getting good recruits to come to Alaska may be a hard sell. Of course, this was my first year, so I don't know how the recruiting will end up. In Nebraska, we simply sold our program as being one of the best in the country and sold them on being able to play for Championships.

At UAA, I think we will be able to sell players on the advantage of being somewhere unusual. A once in a lifetime opportunity and a chance to be part of a program that we hope will be at the top of the conference very soon.

Shoot for the stars I say. If you can get one star, you will be on the way. Look for the hidden talent out there. Look for an athlete who can be trained to become a great volleyball player. The great players will already be grabbed by NCAA Division I schools. Look for athleticism first, attitude second and skills third.

Chris Green just finished his first season at the University of Alaska- Anchorage, where his Sea Wolves were a respectable 15-14 this season, tripling their wins from just a season ago. Green left Western Nebraska Community College where he spent the past 9 years building a dynasty, compiling a 453-55 record that culminated in the 2007 NJCAA Div. I National Championship. Green's Cougars finished in the top 10 at the national tournament in all of Green's seasons, including a current string of four straight 'Final 4' appearances. In his last three seasons, WNCC went 163-7 and finished national runner-up in 2006.

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“At NAU, we tell our hitters that it’s okay to hit an occasional ball out of bounds as long as they were aggressively attacking the ball. Makes sense right? However, if that same hitter was well off the net and in a position where a kill was very unlikely, she needs to simply keep that ball in play for us and give our defense a chance to win the point.

Sounds easy, but how many times have you seen someone take a rip at a ball they have no chance of killing and in fact, lose the point by hitting it into the net or out altogether? My point is, every set can not be crushed. Know when to bring the hammer and when to keep a ball alive to give yourself another opportunity to win the rally.

I have another thought along these lines. Players should NEVER tip out of bounds, it is simply not acceptable. During a tip, the ball essentially comes to a stop in your hand (you’ve caught the ball). You are then trying to throw it into a 900 square foot court! If a coach gave you a dollar for every tip you put in the court, you would never miss one, would you? It is much better that the other team plays your tip than to miss and give them an automatic point. At least if they get it, you still have a chance to block or transition them to win.

This stuff sounds simple, but the number of athletes who have trouble with these principles is amazing. So here is the bottom line to what I’m trying to say. In my twenty three years of coaching at the college level, most of the players who don’t get on the court ask me the same question, ‘Coach, how come I don’t play, I work really hard?’ My answer is almost always the same. “I know you work hard, but that’s expected. I don’t need you to work harder; I need you to work smarter.” There will always be room on a team for kids who play smart, whether they are the most physically gifted or not. I hope this helps and good luck to everyone this club season.”

Craig Choate just completed his first year at Northern Arizona University turning the program around from a 31-71 record the past 4 seasons to a 15-10 mark this season with nine new players on the roster. Before coming to NAU, Choate was the Pepperdine Men’s assistant Coach in 2007-08 and before that coached at San Jose State for 14 seasons.

On the Night Stand

In this feature, we will highlight articles, books and resources that may help you on your journey toward coaching excellence.

Outliers

Malcolm Gladwell

Is 10,000 hours the magic number of hours of training one needs to become an expert at their craft? Read Gladwell’s third book and discover his amazing insights into stories of success.

The Essential Wooden

By John Wooden and Steve Jamison

A step by step look at Wooden’s Pyramid of Success, a standard bearer for every coach in every sport.

USAV on Lookout for HP Coaches for the Pipeline

Heath Hoke, the Girl's High Performance Director is looking for coaches to help with HP tryouts across the country again this coming season. "It is time for me to organize all the coaches that have helped, over the years, and continue to make our National HP Tryouts a success." He says. "We certainly want to keep everyone involved that is able to help and schedule permitting. We are rarely overstaffed at tryouts and always have plenty of work to do. If you can help or know coaches that want to get involved, please have them contact me. Also, keep in mind most players learn about tryouts through their coaches, so if you haven't discussed the opportunities with your athletes yet, please do." Hoke can be reached at Heath.Hoke@usav.org

For many coaches looking for an opening to coach at the International level, High Performance is a great way to get a foot in.

"We are continuing to try to create opportunities for coaches and athletes alike. The more opportunities available the more likely the US can continue its international success. We have implemented several criteria for coaches to get involved if you are interested in more than just working tryouts, please check our website." Here is the link:
<http://volleyball.teamusa.org/content/index/2817>

For a schedule of where the tryouts are throughout the season, go to
<http://volleyball.teamusa.org/content/index/4834>

If you are interested in helping out at the Arizona Region tryouts for both boys and girls, contact Eric Hodgson at erichbke@msn.com before February 15.



Should Liberos Be Allowed to Serve in Region Events?

Contributed by USA Olympic Libero Nicole Davis

In my opinion, NO, liberos should not be allowed to serve in club volleyball, nor should they be allowed to serve at the collegiate level. The libero rule was created at the international level, as well as its rules, by the FIVB, which is the international governing body for volleyball. The NCAA has for some reason tried to differentiate itself from the international game, with which I don't agree. Here are some of my reasons why:

1. Our young players have a difficult enough time transitioning from the collegiate level to the international level when they come to the National team, adjusting to a new set of rules and skill sets puts our country at a further disadvantage.

2. I lead my team in service aces as a defensive specialist in college. I would have been a great "serving" libero. However, our 6'6" middle blocker that would stand from 20 feet back and serve a float serve was a much better server, as she should have been.

Your middle blockers should be better servers than your 5'4" liberos! We're specializing now, and we're seeing kids come out of college that aren't well rounded players. Middle blockers should be great servers, they should know how to play defense and pass even! Middles only play 3 of 6 rotations now with the libero rule, we shouldn't limit their ability or experience by having the libero serve and play an extra rotation of defense. TEACH YOUR KIDS HOW TO PLAY VOLLEYBALL, not to do a specific skill set and be good at only that! Great domestic example, Danielle Scott-Arruda. One of our best servers on the Olympic team. Can pass and play defense as well as most of our primary passers and defenders.

International example, Nancy Carrillo from Cuba. One of the best servers in the WORLD for the last 4 years. She passes in every rotation and plays defense in every rotation. She does not come out for a libero.

3. We are trying to promote the sport of volleyball. That's difficult to do when the spectators see a different game going on when they watch a collegiate match versus an Olympic or International match.

4. Our country is at a disadvantage in terms of how quickly our youth develop in the sport compared to Europeans or Asians. In the US, kids go through the club system, learning one style of volleyball, and certain techniques in volleyball. They reach the collegiate level, and they learn their coach's style of volleyball and maybe some other skill sets. Then, if they are lucky or athletic enough they come to the national team and have to start from square one. The international game is so different from the college game. It's a huge adjustment. So, at the age of 23 these girls begin to learn the international game. In Europe and Asia, all of the professional teams have club, the kids go through their club systems, and everyone in the country plays the same system, learns the same techniques as the national team. By the time they are 18 they are playing in professional leagues at the highest international level, and under the same system as their national teams. I'm not saying that our system is flawed, because we do it so kids can get an education, which is invaluable, however, changing the game to make it "more fun" or "more appealing" to spectators doesn't further our cause at the national team level.

The libero position was created as a defensive/passing position for a specific reason. Likewise, there are reasons for the rules which dictate the libero position. Let middle blockers play their positions. If the libero could set in front of the ten foot line, we'd have coaches trying to libero their setters out now too!

Should Liberos be allowed to serve- Continued from page 1

"The libero should be allowed to serve in club volleyball. That being said, the libero is not allowed to serve and as a region we should not use different rules. It would create a precedent for changing other rules which is not a good idea." **Matt Cohen, Head Coach Yavapai College**

YES because College lets you. **Tonya Lee, Head Coach Valley Vista High School**

It's not supported by USAV Admin or the Officials Division. It is not part of USAV regs, as an adaptation of the FIVB rules. It would not be used at National tournaments. It is not supported by our Region officials division or myself. According to our directors, it is not likely to be adopted by the FIVB in the near future. The few regions that are allowing it are seen as rogues. **Peter Meyer, Chairperson of Arizona Officials Division**

"My thought is they should be allowed to serve in large part because they can in high school and they should get to work on that skill in game situations in club. I think that the current restrictions almost make the position an afterthought as teams utilize a DS or two that can serve." **Tony Oldani, Boy's Head Coach Brophy Prep**

"Of course they should. How many of those kids will go on to play in college and how many will go on to play for the National Team?" **Craig Choate, Head Coach NAU**

"I say leave the rules as is, for we need to be playing the game like the rest of the world. Our liberos practice serving some, for, like Stacey Sykora, they also can be played as a defensive/serving specialist, and we are preparing them in part of HS, where they can serve. This time of the year, these months of JO development they just train in their focused role in game play, and more in practice, in getting to be better passers/diggers, and serving less because of it. They still can serve, and if they want to practice more, there is always the garage door and the 30 foot chalk line on the driveway, or gym wall with a 7' 4 1/4" stripe." **John Kessel, Director of Education, USAV**

"I do think they should be able to serve. This allows them to have a greater impact on the match." **Fred Mann, Head Boy's Coach, Mountain Pointe High School**

"Yes we should....why do we not let them serve in club when we let them serve in college? Why should our rules differ so much from one level to another? We are one of the only sports that does that." **Kristina Hernandez, Head Coach Hofstra University**

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What should we teach them that we don't?

Arizona Sidelines asked several of Arizona's finest college volleyball players that came up through the club ranks into college volleyball what should we as coaches be teaching them that we aren't? Here are their responses...



Middle Stephanie Snow at the University of Arizona- "I would say quickness. That's not saying that club coaches don't try and train their middles to be faster, but that is by far the biggest difference I have noticed from club to pac10 volleyball. I would also say that part of that quickness simply comes from being relentless. As a middle, if you're available on each set and try to be involved in every play, its not only going to make your team that much better, but makes you much more of an offensive threat.

Outside Hitter Lexi Sullivan at Northern Arizona University- "My answer to your question is that it is important to not play like a high school player when going to the next level! This includes being a smart player instead of just going out and playing. I have learned that no one cares if you can hit the ball straight down in warm-ups because there is always a BIG block in a game that will stuff your confidence as a hitter! It is all about reaching high and seeing the open spots and when the opportunity comes to go hard and swing big! I have also learned that swinging hard and getting blocked is better than going for a difficult shot that ends up going out or in the net! At least by getting blocked and shaking it off the blockers know that you aren't afraid of going hard again! College is a whole new level that expects you to be the absolute best player that you never thought you could be!"



Outside Hitter Nichole Wanninger from Yavapai College- "I wish I would have been more prepared for the speed of the game. It was a lot faster then I had expected and I was not ready for it. In club I was told of the fast pace but I never really got to experience it."



Outside Hitter Sarah Reaves at Arizona State University- "It's hard to know exactly what you are going to be up against when you make that transition so although I wish I had worked on hitting higher, it wasn't possible considering the girls I played against back then were not the PAC-10, 7 foot girls I face today. One thing that could have been controlled and worked on more however was my passing and working on a more aggressive serve"

Outside Hitter Amy Baum from Eastern Washington University- "The biggest change between high school and college volleyball was in the strategy and the mental game. We went from playing with the idea to hit the ball as hard as we could around the block to score points, to having a whole system of calling and hitting shots and dumps to specific areas of the opponent's court designed to score points based on what kind of defense they were running and where its holes were (of course we scouted this as a team before nearly all our matches). Our free ball plays got much more complicated, each one designed to pull the block away from a specific hitter or two so they would have the chance to hit against a single block, or if we were lucky and their middle got confused, no block at all. The blocking schemes became more complicated too, and they were designed to funnel the ball to our defensive players, rather than simply block on top of the ball every time. This change from raw athletic ability to power coupled with intelligence was an eye-opening one for me, but I learned that volleyball, played as a team with these kind of systems in place, can be far more than just pass, set, hit.

I think that teaching these kind of systems of thinking - how to maximize your points by recognizing and using holes in the opponents defense instead of just hitting hard, and specific strategy of free-ball plays and blocking schemes (and the goals behind them - to confuse the blockers so you have a one-on-one hitting opportunity, or to purposely leave line open or block line, depending on what a hitter has been hitting, but communicate with your back row so they know where they need to be set up to dig), would be very helpful in preparing girls for college ball. They have to start thinking about the game a little differently, and club is a great time to introduce that.

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Outside Hitter Leah Bradley at Glendale Community College- “I think it is important for your club coach to prepare you as best they can just by making the practices intense and beneficial. College ball is much faster and all about having the basics down. So, I think it is the coach's job to try and get their players ready for a faster tempo game. And teach their players how to have a good work ethic.”

Outside Hitter Margie Giordano at Arizona State University- “I would've wanted my club coach to work more with me on tight set balls. I know it's a "dangerous" skill to master but as a senior in college I'm just now being told and taught how to "swipe" off the blocker on a tight set. For me it's still a learning process, I never use to even try to do this skill so when I do it, it's like my birthday, I get really excited! Of course sometimes it doesn't always go my way but that's what being an athlete is all about you won't get better unless you try!!



Middle Megan Johnson at Cal State San Bernadino- “I would say the speed of the game. Transition to hit is a huge focus in my practices and speed is an important skill to have. I feel that my team works hard in transition to be up to get the ball and I think that is the main difference between us and the other teams we play. We run more middle and have more options. The only thing with that is that it is hard to really teach that. The other thing that I think I would have liked to see happen is the coaches being a little bit more well rounded, to be knowledgeable in all positions. I know it's hard to find a coach that is truly well rounded, knowledge wise.”



Outside Hitter Tara Mueller at University of Nebraska- I wish I had been better prepared for the extremely fast pace of the college game. Another would be the different shots that we are taught in college. It would of helped to of had a little more practice with these off speed, angle, line, cross body and wrist away shots that we are taught now. But overall if you go into college with the mentality that you are going to work hard to get better and you will try to take in everything that your coaches are telling you to change or fix, then you'll be fine.

Outside Hitter Nicole Morton from Arizona State University- “I wish I had been taught more of the basics. The pace of the game in college is so much faster. I learned passing by watching other people. It was never broken down for me. I got by in high school and club because the game wasn't that fast. As soon as I got to college, I couldn't keep up. My coaches had to start square one, and I needed more help than anyone...as an outside hitter.”

Setter Marina Mercer at Arizona State University- “The only thing I wish I would have been better prepared for was floor defense. My club team played a unique defense formation when the setter was in the back row. I played middle back. My base defense was at the ten foot line and I would shadow the block to pick up tips and anything of the blockers hands. While I love this style and it was a perfect fit for my team, it was no where near similar to Pac-10 play. It's been a constant challenge to improve my floor defense. So in short, teach your kids to dig with other 15 year olds hitting balls at them....so by the time 6'4" college girls are cranking balls at them they won't be scared and will know what to do. If they have basic defensive skills, those skills will improve as the level of competition increases.”



Should Liberos be Allowed to Serve in Region Tournaments Continued from page 5

“I think liberos should be allowed to serve in club because it prepares them for what is to be expected in college, which is the very reason most girls play club.” **Kuulei Salinas, Head Coach Mesa Community College**

“Yes, liberos should serve. Club should be about training athletes to be prepared for participating on a college team if they so desire. Liberos serve in college and it is the most “mental” of the skills we teach. The missed opportunities to serve in tough situations for liberos is a huge deficit in their training. I have seen the liberos in my program sometimes struggle with the intensity of the game situations they are in. I as a coach have addressed this problem and have made extra efforts in my program for the liberos to overcome this exact problem.” **Regina Mannix, Head Coach Scottsdale Community College**

“If it's allowed in high schools and colleges, it probably should be in the junior game as well. The only reason not to have it is that it further erodes the skill set of middles, who are now asked to take three trips across the front row and sit down.” **John Tawa, PrepVolleyball.com**

“Although I would like to see the libero serve at all levels of the sport including international, high school, USA/club, etc, etc, I think we should try to keep the rules as close to each other as possible. If all players are aspiring to play at the international level then we shouldn't allow the liberos to serve, but that's obviously not the case. If different regions are allowing their liberos to serve, I'd like to see our region disregard the new ball handling “directive/interpretation.” **Pat Mooney, Head Coach South Mountain Community College**

“Do whatever the FIVB is doing. USA Volleyball should and so should everybody else because we always end up following the FIVB eventually. ...This follow the guy that's kind of following the leader is getting old when the second guy in line is agile like a drunk.” **Ed Ratledge, AVP Pro**

Whatever the rule is at the National Tournament is what we should follow. Even though I disagree that the rules are different for club than college. Club doesn't segue to college well in that position. **Lisa Stuck, Head Coach, Glendale Community College**

“The USAV attempts to follow International rules (other than the substitution rules). The Libero is not allowed to serve under the FIVB rules. However, several regions, as relatively independent elect to use the NCAA rule allowing the Libero to serve. But it does explain why the USAV national tournaments adhere to the International Libero rule. My opinion? We should play straight International rules just like every other country in the world. But, alas, I doubt that will happen.” **Bill Neville, former Men's USA National Team Coach**

“Absolutely! I think it adds to the competitive nature of the game. My libero is one of my best servers and I know this is the case on other teams as well. I also believe that we should keep the game consistent with what is happening in college play. I think it only adds a positive element to play. I would love if our region would allow the libero to serve.” **Amanda Burbridge, Head Coach Phoenix College**

“The region should let libero's serve.” **Jason Watson, Head Coach, Arizona State University**

“From a college coach's perspective, yes. But, realistically, how many athletes continue to play in college from our region? If the numbers are substantial, then they should be prepared for the future. The NFHA has implemented the libero serving rule, so that is very unusual that the junior's program has not kept up to par with the change. Benefits include allowing for one less substitution which is more playing time for other athletes and less confusion for subbing two athletes in one position when using the libero. It prepares an athlete for college and it prepares an athlete for their high school season. The negative aspects? The Libero is not an effective server, Oops, coach needs to use a substitution?” **Vee Hiapo, Head Coach Chandler Gilbert Community College**