



**PANTHERS**  
**Coaches Manual**

## INTRODUCTION:

Parkland and Pine Grove schools wish to pursue excellence and quality in our joint Volleyball and Basketball programs. We recognize that developing, supporting, and maintaining a strong coaching staff is a key to our success!

Coaching athletes can be an extremely rewarding experience; however, it can also come with its share of challenges. Many coaches begin their coaching careers with a good understanding of the sport and its skills; however, there is so much more to coaching than having knowledge of the game. Coaches need to develop a number of other skills and competencies in order to become a successful coach.

This **coaching manual** is not a technical manual, rather, it is a collection of “tried and tested tips and strategies for success”, covering a wide variety of coaching areas.

The manual is divided into four main topics:

1. Building relationships with athletes
2. Building relationships with parents
3. Communication and management of roles and expectations
4. Strategies for running your team including:
  - tryouts and athlete selection
  - season planning
  - goal setting
  - running efficient practices
  - playing time
  - consistency and fairness
  - sportsmanship and character building
  - effective time outs, pre/post game team meeting
  - motivating and challenging your athletes
  - developing mental skills of athletes
  - scouting / developing game plans
  - coach development

It is our hope that this manual might provide you with a few new ideas or insights to help you have a more successful, rewarding and enjoyable coaching career.

# PANTHER COACHING MANUAL

(Tried and tested tips for success!)

## 1. Building Relationships with the Athletes

- Get to know your athletes right away! Plan some team building activities, pre-season questionnaires, social events away from the gym
- Have fun! Go for a team supper; serve/shoot for doughnuts, slurpees after practice, etc.
- Communicate with your players – make sure they know what you expect of them and communicate their roles and changing roles on a regular basis. If you take them off the court during a game, let them know why.
- Be approachable and open to talk to your athletes when they need to discuss anything.
- Always respect your athletes and earn their trust and confidence in you. Swearing at your athletes is unacceptable!
- Remember the power of positive feedback! For every skill correction you give, try to give one positive comment as well.
- Coach using the “As If” philosophy: Coach each athlete “as if” he/she were a superstar! Your job is to develop EVERY player that you have selected for your team.
- Try to connect with each athlete every practice in some way. Have fun with them, ask them how their doing, how’s school going, etc.

## 2. Building Relationships with Parents

- Earn their respect and trust! With it, things will go smoothly.
- Communicate your coaching philosophy, goals and expectations upfront.
- Insist that athletes tell their parents what their role on the team is, and that they re-tell every time their role changes!
- Keep lines of communication open. (You may be criticized and condemned when parents don’t understand your choices.) Encourage parents to talk to you about a problem. Don’t take their comments personally and get defensive as it will only make the situation worse. They just love their kids!
- Explain to parents the behavior you expect from them. Remind them to be fans, not fanatics! Make it clear you expect them to show respect for officials and that you do NOT want them to yell instructions to players. Cheering is welcomed, but coaching from the stands or speaking negatively about players is definitely not!
- Build / train a strong team of parents (manager, treasurer, officials, food providers.) This will make your job SO much easier!
- Run effective and timely parent meetings / info. sharing.

### 3. Responsibilities / Expectations for Practices, Tournaments and Road Trips

- **Coach Responsibilities**

- The safety and behavior of the team members at tournaments and practices is the responsibility of the coach.
- Design an **Emergency Action Plan** to assist you in responding to emergency situations.
- Make sure you have a medical profile of each athlete and emergency contact information with you at all practices and games. (sample in Appendix 1)
- **At least one coach must be present at the Hotel with the team at all times during away tournaments.**
- You need to establish rules for behavior, on and off the court, and communicate them clearly to players and parents.

- **Communicating Expectations for Tournaments**

- Call a meeting for players and at least one of their parents prior to the first away tournament
- Review your rules / expectations and allow parents to ask questions / give feedback.

Sample Discussion Items:

1. Review your expectations. Be specific and set expectations high!
  - Remind athletes and their families that they represent themselves, their team, Parkland, Pine Grove, and Edson.
  - Review the “Athlete Code of Conduct” and highlight some of the key expectations
  - Stay with teammates and do not leave designated area without permission
  - Respect facility and other hotel guests – no running/hanging out in halls, no excessive noise in halls and rooms, etc.
  - No members of the opposite sex in the athletes rooms unless supervised.
  - Respect curfews and everyone’s need for sleep!
  - Swimming / pool rules: up to coach and only with coach and/or chaperone supervision
  - Team meals, activities in down times
2. Transportation? When will everyone arrive? Team meeting time?
3. Schedule / gym locations
4. Chaperones / scorekeepers & linesmen

- **Expectations of chaperones**

- It’s a huge job to be responsible for all the athletes at away tournaments, therefore we may expect parents to assist with this task.
- Coaches must be very clear in communicating with chaperones as to what you want them to do. Managers can also be a great help in

communicating these duties with chaperones.

- the more help you can get from them, the more time you can spend on coaching tasks (reviewing the day, calculating distribution of playing time, game plans for tomorrow, scouting reports, etc.) and getting the necessary sleep you need for the next day

Possible Chaperone duties:

- supervision of athletes, room checks, pool supervision, arranging for team meals (choosing a restaurant, making reservations, ordering food in ) helping plan activities for down times
- morning wake-up calls, making sure athletes are up and ready to go for morning breakfast / game
- final room checks before athletes check-out
- ask front desk to block movie rentals/game rentals in rooms if you want

#### 4. Tips for Running Your Team

- **Tryouts and Athlete Selection**

- Find other coaches to assist you at tryouts
- Run lots of player led drills so you can mostly observe
- Consider grouping similar skilled athletes together for some drills to make it easier to compare their skills
- If you are seriously interested in a student athlete, talk to them and ask their level of commitment to this team, any other sports or activities they are involved in, conflicts with practices / tournaments, which sport would be their #1, etc.
- At the end of each tryout, make yourself available for athletes and parents to speak to you.

- **Planning Your Season**

- The four corner stones of development for any athlete in any sport are: *Technical, Tactical, Mental, and Physical.*

**Technical: (Unopposed practice)**

The emphasis is on development of a game technique. Gradual challenges to development of the technique are in the form of increased or decreased time, area, or degree of difficulty in practice, depending on the rate of improvement in player performance.

**Tactical: (Opposed practice)**

Skill practice, emphasis on developing the bond of technique and decision making. All players are given objectives from the technical theme being practiced. Appropriate areas, number of players involved, and imposed “conditions” will vary around the developmental theme.

**Mental (Psychological)**

Factors that influence performance by contributing to individual and team

success. They range from players being motivated by frequent praise, fun and enjoyment, game preparation, setting goals, coping with winning and losing, responsibility, mental toughness, self motivation, self confidence and preparation for competition.

### **Physical Training**

The “ABC’s”; Agility (Co-ordination), Balance, Core and Speed. All movements originate in the core. Working the muscles in your body core will improve effectiveness of movements in your limbs, and can be simply stated as “training our bodies to move.” Core strength is important at every age, ability and fitness level.

- Develop a basic outline of your season and what you’d like to teach and accomplish. Research options for team systems that might be appropriate for your team’s age level. (Serve reception, offense and defensive systems, etc.).
  - **You need to start your coaching “where the kids are at both mentally and physically”.** It’s so easy to start over their heads and they don’t have a clue what you are talking about!
  - Your “season plan” may need to be adjusted depending on the skill level and development rate of your team, as well as areas of weakness evident after a tournament.
  - Having a year calendar with practice and tournament dates works well.
- **Goal Setting**
    - It is recommended to do both individual and team goal setting.
    - At start of season, establish “Why your players are there.” Get their feedback on why they think they want to play.
    - Have each player complete some type of goal setting worksheet. Have them answer questions like: why they want to play on this team, specific skills they would like to improve on, and team goals for the season. (see sample in Appendix 2)
    - Provide opportunities for your athletes to work on as many of their individual goals as possible over the course of the season. Refer back to the goal setting sheet later in the season to evaluate their progress and try to work on areas that may have been missed.
    - Compare each athlete’s team goals and use this feedback to help establish some common team goals for the season.
- **Running Efficient Practices**
    - Use your practice time as efficiently and effectively as possible throughout the season.
    - Plan practices according to your teams needs in advance and facilitate this

learning in a positive and encouraging atmosphere.

- Provide corrective feedback and don't ignore poor technique.
- Run practices with a steady pace so your players are physically and mentally developed. Running the same drill too long or too often will result in boredom, less focus, reduction in skill development, and potential for athletes to fool around!
- Motivate your athletes and keep them interested! Do goal oriented drills (e.g. Need to get 20 good passes to finish the drill), competitions, place a reward or consequence on the outcome of the drill /competition, etc.
- **Let the kids play.** Too often we give way too much verbal instruction!
- Have the kids running the drills as much as possible (e.g. tossing balls, passing to teammates, serving in service reception drills.) This gives the athletes more contacts with the ball and allows you more opportunity to observe, provide skill correction, pull athletes aside while others continue to run the drill.
- Try to plan some practices / practice time for positional or individual skill development.
- Remember, coaches are there to COACH, not to get a workout! Athletes should not be sitting on the sidelines while coaches are playing.  
Exceptions: you are short on players and you need an extra body for team drills / scrimmages; or sometimes it's motivating for your players to have some "Kings/Queens Court" time against a coach's team!

- **Playing Time**

Distribution of playing time in competitions depends on a number of factors:

- The age level of your team.
- The stage in the season and type of competition. Is it an exhibition game, invitational tournament, a league game, GYAC Championships?
- When do you want your team to peak?
- Your placement in pool play / tournament play. Which games do you really need to "coach to win?" If you have already secured a spot in the championship side for play-offs, how important is winning your last round robin game?
- Effort, attitude and level of commitment shown by the athlete

Suggestions to help distribute game time:

- Arrange for exhibition scrimmages.
- Try to enter at least one tournament.
- Utilize subs often. If you are winning by 10+ points, put in some other players who may not see the court as much in playoffs. It's okay for your starters to sit the whole match too!
- In more critical games, utilize player's strengths.
- Consider keeping an accurate record of playing time in games.
- Be aware of who is in the stands watching. If grandma and grandpa have driven down from Alaska to see Georges play, and he doesn't see the court

all day, especially during the round robin play, you are asking for trouble!

- If you are going to put a player in the game, try to put them into a situation where they have a good chance to be successful.
- Check out these great articles about playing time:  
“Coaches Always Play Their Favorites” (Appendix 3)  
“Where Can You Find That Missing Vain of Gold?” Suggests ways to keep kids and their parents happier with their playing time! (Appendix 4)

- **Consistency / Fairness**

- Be consistent with your behavior and your behavior towards the kids!
- Be consistent with your rules and consequences, regardless of the skill level of the athlete.
- If you say you’re going to do something, do it! If you tell a player at the start of the season that they will be trained for a specific position, then train them for that position. If you change your mind, make sure you tell the athlete why you are no longer training them for that role.
- Treat everyone fairly! Do not make some participants feel more or less worthy as persons than others on the basis of athletic skill or potential.
- Be especially careful to provide equal help and encouragement to your “second” line players...they often need it even more than your “starters!”

- **Role Model Good Sportsmanship and Positive Character!**

- Consistently display high personal standards and project a favorable image of the sport and coaching.
- Abstain from use of tobacco products, alcohol and drugs when working with athletes
- Always be first to practice / games
- Work on establishing and maintaining positive relationships with officials and opponents.
- Panther expectation is that you always shake hands with officials and opponents following the match as a sign of good sportsmanship! (COVID dependent)
- Respect officials and try to refrain from yelling at them during the game. Discuss concerns or interpretation of calls in a calm manner, after the game.
- When playing a weak opponent, try not to “run up the score” but rather use this as an opportunity to give your weaker players court time.

- **Building positive character and sportsmanship in your athletes**

- Expect your athletes to act in a respectful, responsible and reasonable manner at all times!
- Maintain an atmosphere of mutual respect at all times! Listen to how players talk to each other, opponents, officials. Negative comments towards others must be dealt with immediately!



- Expect athletes to play by the rules and respect officials. Have your captains or entire team shaking hands with the officials following a match to thank them for their services.
  - Expect athletes to respect their opponents. No trash talking, etc. When you play a team with much lower skill level, athletes should never belittle their opponents.
  - Ensure your athletes respect all facilities they use. Players should always clean up after themselves, whether it's in a practice gym, the bench area at a tournament, in a restaurant, or in their hotel room.
  - Keep bench area tidy – bags should be lined up beside or behind bench area and sweats / tops should always be put away inside of bag.
- **Effective Time Outs**
    - Call a time out when the other team has just scored a string of points, etc., or you just need to talk to your athletes
    - Limit your talk to one or two points during the time out
    - For younger athletes; keep points short and simple
    - For more experienced athletes, identify open court areas, short blockers that they can hit over, serving targets, players to attack, areas of court to shoot from, where they are scoring on us, etc.
    - Make use of a coaching clipboard / diagrams for the visual learners
- **Pre / Post game team meetings**
    - Pre-game meetings give an opportunity to focus on things for that specific match. Depending on the age of athletes, you could discuss game strategies, goals for the match, etc.
    - Post - game meetings are useful to give athletes some immediate feedback from the game and to let them know when and where the next game is, and what they should do between the games. It is a good idea to do this before they talk to their parents.
- **Motivating and challenging your athletes**
    - Each practice is an opportunity to motivate and inspire your athletes! You will achieve this when they see your commitment to developing them and your attitude demonstrates your belief in them.
    - Athletes must also understand that you expect focus, energy and commitment from them; otherwise it's a waste of their time and yours!

**Formula for Excellence:**  
Consistency → Positive Results → Motivator → Excellence!

    - Don't hold back your most skilled athletes just because others on the team aren't ready to progress to the next level. Give them some "extra" skills / techniques to work on and add to their repertoire.
    - Exposing players to more advanced skills also prepares them for situations when other teams use it against them.

- **Consider the different learning styles of your athletes.**
  - Provide written handouts of your team systems for the visual learners
  - Verbally explain and physically demonstrate skills and drills
  - A picture is worth a thousand words! Use a video camera and show kids their skills / movements.
  
- **Developing mental skills of your athletes**
  - Building Confidence: How coaches and athletes respond to mistakes will greatly influence the confidence level in athletes.
  - Both coaches and athletes need to remember...”There are no mistakes, only learning experiences!”
  - Athletes need to learn that in order for their team mates to have confidence in them, they must display confidence in themselves. Techniques must be learned to minimize responses to mistakes and focus must be turned to the next play. Positive, confident body language is very important.
  - Check out a couple articles about developing mental skills:
    - 5 Step Plan to Mental Toughness (Appendix 5)
    - Steps to Developing the Ideal Volleyball player” (Appendix 6)
  
- **Scouting / Developing Game Plans**
  - Athletes must have the necessary skill level / ball control in order to carry out a specific plan i.e. you can’t expect them to serve/pass to a target/court position if they don’t have the control yet
  - Practice serving, hitting, tipping, passing, shooting to/from various locations in practice...you can’t expect them to do it in a game if they haven’t rehearsed the skill in practice enough!
  - Once athletes can hit spots in practice, then you can give them tasks in the game situation. Serving at weak passers can score you a ton of points and cripple the opponent’s offence off serve reception. Driving the ball to your opponent’s weakest player can also get you lots of shooting chances.
  - What kind of defense is the opposition using? Where are their weaknesses / open court areas, etc? Are there short defenders that you can shoot over?
  - What kind of offence do they use? Front or back row setter? Who are their big hitters? Where do they like to hit?
  - What is their starting line up? Rotate your line-up to get the match-ups you want.
  
- **Develop Leadership Skills in your Athletes** - See article (Appendix 7)
  
- **Improve yourself!**
  - Get NCCP certified!
  - Continue to increase your knowledge of the game.
  - Check out coaching articles on the internet.

- Observe and/or coach with a more experienced coach.
- Ask a more experienced coach for help or advice!

APPENDIX 1



**Athlete Health Information**  
**< Team Name Goes Here >**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_

**Parent Name(s)**

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Phone numbers:

Home: \_\_\_\_\_ Cell: \_\_\_\_\_ Work: \_\_\_\_\_

Home: \_\_\_\_\_ Cell: \_\_\_\_\_ Work: \_\_\_\_\_

**Alternative Emergency Contact(s)**

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone numbers:

Home: \_\_\_\_\_ Cell: \_\_\_\_\_ Work: \_\_\_\_\_

Family Doctor: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Alberta Personal Health Number: \_\_\_\_\_

**Relevant Medical History**

Medications:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Allergies:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Previous injuries:

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Medical conditions:

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Immunizations:

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Does the athlete carry and know how to administer his own medications?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

If 'Yes' to above, what is the medication?

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Other conditions (braces, contact lenses, etc.):

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**Note: Medical information is confidential. These sheets will not be available to unauthorized individuals.**

APPENDIX 1A

Player Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Alberta Health Care Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent / Guardian Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Work Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Cell Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Emergency Contact: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Medical Concerns that the coaching / supervisor should be aware (i.e. Allergies, Asthma)

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Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Student Athlete: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Parent / Guardian: \_\_\_\_\_

In accordance with the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIP), I give permission to share pertinent information with the media. (i.e. Name of player being published, etceteras.)

Parent / Guardian initials: \_\_\_\_\_

In accordance with the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIP) ,  
I give permission to share pertinent medical information with the entire coaching or supervision staff as needed.

Parent / Guardian initials: \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX 2

PANTHER GOAL SETTING WORKSHEET

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Why do you want to play PANTHER volleyball/Basketball this year?

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2. Did you play for a club team last year? \_\_\_\_\_

If so, what position (s) did you play? \_\_\_\_\_

3. What position (s) would you like to play for this team and why?

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4. List **at least three personal goals** that you would like to achieve this season? (These can be related to development of specific skills, positions, leadership, attitude, consistency, etc.)

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5. What are **three team goals** that you would like to see our team strive for this season?  
(Could be things like always playing 3 hit volleyball, always making a good inbounds pass, playing well as a team, winning GYAC Finals, etc.)

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\*Optional:

6. What qualities do you feel are important in a **team captain**?

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List any players on our team who you feel would make a good captain for our team and explain why you would choose them. (can list more than 1 player)

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## Appendix 3

# Coaches Always Play Their Favorites

From Dave Cross

### **The Issue**

We all know there are coaches out there that actually do play athletes in front of other members of the team that may be more highly skilled. Usually, these coaches have a personal interest in the situation-they are a parent of the player in question! Still these situations are rare. The majority of parents coaching their own children are harder on their own child than rest of the team. Therefore, if you are unfortunate enough to be playing on a team where this is really happening, you need to find another team-and quick!

Now, let us get to the real heart of the matter here. Whenever I hear a "loser's limp" statement, I simply reply, **"Hey, I play my favorites-all coaches should!"**

### **What's all the Fuss About?**

That is right-I play my favorites. You see, it is all in how the word, "favorite" is defined here. Who are my favorite players on my team? They are the ones who meet the following criteria:

1. They are respectful and pleasant to work with.
2. They listen and do their best to do what I ask them to do.
3. They bust it constantly-their physical effort is never in question.
4. They are honest with me. If they screw up, they admit it, we deal with it, and move on together.
5. They are team players-none of this "me, me, me" stuff.
6. They are goal oriented and focused on continuous improvement.
7. They are open to change.
8. They are loyal to their teammates, our program, and me.
9. They are willing to sacrifice personal things for what they need to do to improve and help the team.
10. They are committed to becoming the best player they can be.

### **Why Coaches Play Favorites**

#### **The bottom line:**

**Athletes that meet these criteria will be my best players about 98% of the time.**

When the better of the two players competing for a spot does not live up to my expectations, the player that has been doing things "right" will not be far behind them in terms of performance. Doing things the "right-way" will lead that player to making their game much more solid in the long run.



The team will play better with my "favorite" on the court. Simply because the other starters,(my other favorites), want to be surrounded with others that go about things just as they do. It is that simple!

## The "Losers Limp" Excuse

Now, I am sure some athletes will read this and say-"*but my coach really does play favorites.*" Well, unless you are in that rare situation I mentioned earlier, my response to you is, "*Just why aren't you one of your coach's favorites?*" What exactly is it that motivates your coach to favor some of your teammates over you? Can you actually answer these questions with a response besides, "*I don't know,*" or "*They just don't?*" You see, the vast majority of times a player makes the statement, "my coach plays favorites," it is what is called a "**loser's limp.**"

Have you ever known someone that conveniently seems to come up with an ache, pain, or illness when things are not going well? (Look everybody-I am not playing well, because I am hurt or sick) Alternatively, someone who always places the blame on someone else when things go bad? Here are some examples:

- "*That ref killed us,*"
- "*My setter wasn't getting the ball where I need it.*"
- "*That wasn't my ball*"

The player in question here is usually unhappy with their playing time, the amount of sets they are getting, or even the outcome of a particular play. Instead of "looking in the mirror" and finding out what the real problem is, they take the "easy way out" and dismiss and possibility that they, themselves, may be responsible for the current situation. In this case, by simply blaming the coach for playing "favorites," it takes the situation totally out of their hands. They cannot do anything. The coach just does not like them. Well, I have news for you. **Who plays and who does not play has nothing to do with whom the coach actually "likes as a person." It has to do with whom the coach "likes as an athlete."** These are going to be the players who are going to give the team the best chance to win-and the player's that go about things "the right way" are ultimately going to be those players-and in turn, the "coach's favorites."

## Where it Stands

### PLAYERS:

If you feel that you are not getting the playing time you deserve because of this "favorite thing," sit down and take a long look at the [criteria I listed before](#). Chances are your coach feels the same as I do. Do you meet all ten of them? If you are being honest with yourself, chances are, you do not. Why is that? Can you realistically look at any of those ten statements and say, "*I don't want to be like that?*" If you can, you need to sit down and do some serious thinking here. **Write down on paper why you should not desire to meet the criteria(s) you are having problems with.** My guess is you will have a very

hard time doing that!

**Look for areas you can improve in** and commit you to improving as much as possible as quick as possible! People will hear me say, "She's going to make me play her." What do I mean by that? It is simple, the player I am talking about is doing things so well as an athlete, (see the criteria) that their performance has improved to the point I just have to find a way to get them in the lineup. You will get the playing time you "feel" you deserve if the coach "feels" you deserve it too. It is really that easy!

# Where Can You Find That Missing Vein of Gold?

From [Coach Houser](#)

## It's Been Right There on the Bench

One of a volleyball coach's hardest problems, bench morale will be eternally linked to satisfying players' desire for playing time (PT). Solving this problem you must focus on how to keep the players satisfied and then turn your attention to the parents, who often can spoil the fun. Then you encourage all those happy kids to have a blast (that's the easy part). So, let About.com help you utilize that hidden vein of gold!

### **Problem #1: Playing Time: *How do you satisfy the reserves?***

It's important to tell the kids about your PT philosophy from the beginning. The worse thing you can do is try to hide it with false statements designed to satisfy immediate complaints. I'm a believer in coach to win during your high school season. Kids can play to improve during Junior Olympics, [camps](#) and other [tournaments](#). So I never compromise winning during our season to accommodate kids' need for PT. The worst moment of junior athletes' careers could be when they are put into a match that the starters thought was won, only to make a few mistakes, give opponents momentum and, regardless of the coach's or starters' efforts, the match is lost. This is the coach's fault and a mistake that coaches never want to experience. One of the nicest coaches I've ever known came into our conference tournament about 10 years ago as the #2 seed. His team came into the semifinals against the sixth seed, and after his team had easily won the 1st game of a best of 3 in the semifinals, he tried to give everyone playing time. The team lost 2 straight games (14-16, 14-16), a loss that he'll never forget. And to the day, the reserves believe that they *BLEW* the match, thereby costing their team a regional birth.

So let's try to preempt the uproar that's going to occur when you decide to coach to win every game. Hold an opening meeting after school with the girls who'll be trying out for the team a few weeks before the season begins. State, and place on a handout, the coaches' PT philosophy. After tryouts, mail a letter to the home of each girl. Give all the team info, including that PT philosophy. During the season constantly tell the players why the coaches are doing what they're doing, what each person's role on the team is, and what the reserves have to do in order to help the team win. Constantly remind the players how their concentration, preparation, and spirit is key to the team's performance.

Have you ever wanted to a player on your team who you didn't think was athletic enough to help you out? Some coaches say, cut the player in order to save everyone a lot of misery later. But there are some kids who would be satisfied if they just made the team, any team, regardless of their PT. The solution: give the kid the option at the end of tryouts. Ask the player to make the choice by saying, "You can stay with us knowing your playing time may be limited OR you can leave now. Your choice, and no hard feelings." If she stays, she's accepted the deal. Do not accept belly-aching from her (most likely this won't be a problem)!! If she decides not to stay with the team, then see if someone else wants the spot. In the past 5 years, we've invited three players back who were already cut, all three agreed to the deal, and all three made the team the next year also (on their own merits!!).

On the other hand, there are some kids "on the bubble," who, from all your research, seem like trouble from the start. Go ahead and let them go no matter how many promises they make. Do not jeopardize your team for an individual. Most of us have more girls trying out than we need anyway. Let a player go who will disrupt your team.

Now the team has been selected. They've agreed to the PT deal. But we, as coaches, must

remain diligent, and here's why:

1. Our young teens will say, "Yeah, sure, I can handle lack of PT," because they want to make the team. But for most of them, they equate sitting the bench with failure. The fact that they'd only get into a match once in 2 or 3 weeks didn't really sink in. But trouble may be boiling inside them or their parents.
2. On the other hand, some of our players accept the deal believing that **THEY WILL** show you, not understanding that you've already seen hundreds of players like him/her and you have an idea what their future holds.

So you must instill in them WEEKLY the belief that team is #1, individuals are not. Remind them of the long list of people who are below **THE TEAM**: yourself, your assistants, the players, the parents, the managers, the principals, etc. Remind them of how many of the JV and Varsity starters were in just that position a few short years ago. Then reinforce the our #1 rule:

**No one has the right to disrupt the team.**

### How to Raise Your Bench Moral

Now you're about finished being **Mr., Ms. or Mrs. Draw-the-Line-the-Sand**. You think you've squashed the problem. But if you want your kids to try back out (the life blood of your program) and if you want to maintain your credibility, then you must stick by your word and give the players an opportunity to play outside of the season. We say to our kids that if you want to play badly during our high school season, then play more the off-season. This allows us coaches to dish out PT during the season the way we prefer, because the players can play all they want during JO's, camps, doubles, and whatever else. For example, at one overnight JO trip to Virginia Beach, the kids played in 18 games to 15 points each. That's half of what our JV team played during their entire regular season! Several years ago, one girl played in TWELVE doubles tournaments. Another example, while attending a 4-day team camp at Appalachian State this past summer, the girls got more PT at the camp than the JV starters got in our entire high school regular season! And coaches, look at the benefits of all this:

1. These kids will be much better the next season, whether they are starter or reserves.
2. If they don't play in the off-season, who's to blame for no PT next season, or for them not even making the team?
3. The older ones will begin to tell the younger ones "Don't make a fuss about PT. I went through the same thing." That's a great help to all us coaches!

Finally, no player likes to feel useless. Continue to support these kids. Don't even keep a kid on your team if you're going to ignore them, or if you're going to allow them to be the dumping ground for teasing and abuse. If you keep the marginal kid, then **YOU'RE** responsible for the kid's self-esteem and protection. He/she must believe that there is something that they can do to help the team. As soon as they convince themselves that they're useless, whatever efforts you've put in are wasted. In fact, at that point, you've hurt the kid more than helped. Our job is to help kids, and there's no excuse for our lack of attention causing a kid pain.

Before we go to the next topic, these ingredients mixed together have worked at our school to keep the reserves satisfied (for the most part). Happy reserves are a gold mine!!

- Their spirit makes the starters work even harder
- Their teamness keeps the starters from feeling guilty (really important in girls teams)
- Their satisfaction spreads to their parents
- Their loudness, cheerleadersness & smiles are intimidating to opponents

- Their attention to the game will keep them ready when they're needed

## How to Satisfy the Parents

### **Problem #2: Playing Time. *How do you satisfy the parents?***

Handle problem #1 and this potential nasty doesn't occur as much as you'd expect. The letter the parents receive at the beginning of the year will stop some of your problems. The fact that their kids are happy will prevent nearly all the rest. But some parents will still get angry. First, don't take it personally; so, don't get defensive and make the situation worse. They just love their kid. But they don't watch the 10 hours of weekly practice. They don't hear their kid's whines or groans. Restate the position you took before the season started.

- We're going to try to win every ball game;
- People will get to play when we need them;
- Your daughter knew that it would be like this;
- I've been doing this for \_\_\_\_ years, and I know who to play when;
- Your daughter can play JO, doubles, etc. and get much more PT next year.
- (maybe) She can stay late on Mon & Wed & Sat if she wants some extra work.

When you start to get defensive, just remember that these parents would be irritated at the coach, whether it was you or Bobby Knight (ask James if you don't know who Bobby Knight is).....OK, I'm wrong. If Bobby Knight were the coach, your school wouldn't have enough kids trying out to field a team.

### **Problem #3: Time to let the kids have fun!!**

NOW, you've handled most of the player and parent problems. Encourage your players to have fun on the bench. Coach Tom Justice's reserves at Lock Haven University (Pa) do pushups, jumping jacks, high knee jumps, etc. for every kill. Each reserve has her jacket on the entire match. I was so impressed. My team has a pre-established celebration for every kill, every stuff, and every ace, but after seeing Lock Haven play, they began to do those kind of celebrations. The things your kids can do is unlimited, but they must be in good taste, celebrating their teammates' successes, not making fun of the other team.

## The Five Step Plan to Mental Toughness

### A five step plan to fool proof mental toughness.

**1. Explain:** Any time we let the events of the game get to us, any time we allow ourselves to react negatively, or emotionally to a situation, we are showing weakness. In times like these, we need to be strong. We need to focus and use the mental strategies we know to deal with the situation, keep our focus, and move on.

**2. Ask:** Are they willing to admit they aren't strong enough mentally to do this? (My girls took immediate offense to this suggestion-I'm sure yours will too- no one likes to admit they are weak mentally. And they absolutely do not want their teammates, coaches or opponents to think they are weak.)

**3. Explain:** (in detail) Snapping at a teammate, getting upset at a call they don't agree with\*, or focusing their thoughts on a past play is a display of their weakness at a time they need to be strong.

**4. Take this train of thought a step further:** Any time they decide to be weak and react negatively they are being selfish-"it's more important to me right now to let my negative feelings show than it is to control them as I can and help the team." (This is another very powerful point-no one wants to admit they are selfish, or putting themselves above the team.)

**5. Review:** How to positively handle these types of situations. Remind them they know how to react the way the team needs them to. Walk them through a few examples specific to your team's situation, showing them the way to be positive and focused and the effects on the team as a whole when they handle things correctly-and the negative consequences when they don't.

The effect on my team last fall was immediate. The internal snapping stopped. The on-court bond and the common resolve to "tough it out" through any series of events became much more evident. No one wanted to be perceived as weak or selfish. And the desire to prevent these perceptions became so strong it dwarfed any other individual desires significantly. You see, my group was being too hard on themselves, focusing on living up to other's expectations -and taking out their frustration on those around them when they weren't pleased with the outcome of their efforts. It should come as no surprise that we played our best volleyball of the season after that meeting.

This may not be the situation you are faced with as a coach, or as a player striving to help your team improve-but I'm sure you can see where this mental strategy can help your team improve their reaction to a wide variety of challenging situations. Good luck!

\*As coaches, many of us will at times disagree with a call and let our feelings show. If you have coached with or against me, or played against my Wildcats, you certainly know I'm no angel on the bench. Am I being a poor role model for my team in these situations? To the contrary, we operate under the premise that is my job, and my job solely, to disagree with a call. My girls know that when I protest a decision I am focusing on hopefully getting the officials in charge to consider a different point of view to the play in question in case it comes up again later in the match. My actions are based on what is best for us at that time. Explain to your players why you disagree with a call at times and they will come to appreciate the fact you are "fighting for them". Then teach yourself to "clear" the situation quickly after it passes and get back to focusing on your team-your girls will quickly notice this-which reinforces that you too are being strong in the face of adversity.

# Steps to Developing the Ideal Volleyball Player

From [Dave Cross](#)

## Introduction to the Mental Game

The head coach was faced with a problem many of us are all too familiar with: a team blessed with physical ability that could not quite put it all together. They needed something more, something that would bring them together and, “put them over the top.”

The next day a team meeting was called and the group assembled in a classroom. The coach presented a situation for the girls to ponder, “A coach entered the gym on the first day of tryouts and noticed a new face, an incoming freshman he didn't know. As the tryout progressed, it became evident to all that this was no ordinary player. The coach was quite impressed and immediately placed his newfound freshman on the varsity roster. Within a week it was obvious, this girl had it all, a virtual “coaches dream.” She was the “Ideal Volleyball Player.” The freshman went on to have a fabulous season. She was named first team all-state and led her team to their first-ever state championship.”

“I want you to think about this player,” The coach continued, “what is she like? What characteristics does she possess? How would you describe her?”

One by one, the players voiced their thoughts, “a good leader,” said one. Another offered, “She's a hard worker.” The description kept building, “she listens well”, “she has a positive attitude and doesn't get frustrated or down on herself”, “I think she treats her coach and teammates well”, “she probably jump swell,” and “always gives 100%”, were quickly added to the list.

As the team was giving their description, the coach had been writing each quality on the chalkboard. He then turned to his team and asked, “Look at the list we have here, how many of these qualities would you say are mental?” The response was immediate, “almost all of them,” replied the group in unison. “That's interesting”, continued the coach, a sly smile creeping over his face, “I told you about the ideal volleyball player and asked for a description of her, and from what I see on the board we all feel this player would definitely have an ‘excellent mental game’. So I guess there is a lot more to being the ideal volleyball player than simply mastering skill techniques, don't you think?” he coyly asked.

The room suddenly fell quiet as the girls shifted in their seats, sneaking glances at each other in the process. One by one, each player nodded in agreement. Some knew what was coming next.

“I want each of you to copy down all the characteristics we decided this player possesses on a sheet of paper right now. Then I want you to rate yourself on a scale of 1-10 for each one, with 10 being a perfect score. “Be honest,” the coach urged, “no one has to see the list except you.”

When all had finished, the coach asked, “How many feel you could improve on each of these?” Without exception, every hand in the room went up. “If each of you improved just slightly in half of these areas, would we be a better team?” he continued. “Without a doubt,” his captain replied quickly. The rest of the team hastily agreed. “Will we need extra practice time to do this?” he asked. “No,” was the immediate reply. “So, what you're telling me is if each player in this room simply dedicates themselves to improving the mental side of their game we can become a much better team, and very soon?” Again, the girls nodded in agreement. Well ladies, then let's get to work on it right now,” the coach concluded, “our best is yet to be!”

This scenario could have unfolded in any of a million teams around the world. So many times we as coaches become so enthralled with our teams passing, blocking schemes, or kill efficiency that we lose sight of what is really holding them back from reaching their true potential, the mastery of the mental game. A team can be blessed with an enormous amount of physical size and ability, and still waste their opportunity to achieve all that is possible if they ignore what really matters most, the mental skills that make reaching one's true potential achievable.

It is our responsibility as coaches to not only make our players aware of the mental skills needed to succeed in competition, but also to teach them how to develop these skills. Teaching players how to

develop mental skills is no easy task. However, if the following steps are adhered to, every player exposed to learning about and improving their mental game will ultimately benefit.

## Realize What Really Motivates Players

To begin, we as coaches must understand the one simple, basic psychological principle that motivates each one of us, including our players: the pain and pleasure principle. The Pain and pleasure principle simply states that each of us is motivated by a desire to **avoid pain and gain pleasure**. Our players make all their decisions based on this. They are motivated to work hard, lift weights, or seek out additional training in the off-season by the desire to improve their game and achieve more success. **Success is an obvious source of pleasure for all of us**. Players are also motivated negatively to avoid using skills they are not confident in or to shy away from changing old habits by a very basic, simple emotion: the **fear of embarrassment**. Alternatively, to be more exact, the fear of experiencing the pain of being embarrassed. This “fear of embarrassment” is the number one concern of the average young athlete today. It is the very reasons most never scratch the surface of their true potential.

## Re-define the Reaction to Errors

How do coaches help their athletes to overcome this fear? The first step is to get them to change how they view the results of their efforts. Players hate making mistakes. Why? Because it is, embarrassing and they despise the inner feeling of pain that is produced by this perceived embarrassment. We must teach our players to redefine their evaluation of a play gone badly. We must all learn to live by the rule, **“There are no mistakes, only learning experiences.”** A bad pass, serve, or attack is not a mistake - it is a “learning experience.” Teach your players to ask a simple question of them after each learning experience, “what must I do differently so that I succeed the next time?” Most experienced players will know the answer to this self-imposed question. ‘I’ve got to get my elbow up,” “I need to get behind the ball” or “I have to toss the ball in front of my serving shoulder” are just a few of the answers they may produce. By thinking about what must be done, the next time to succeed a player is essentially learning. Equipped with this goal, the player now focuses on achieving it upon the next opportunity. (If you're working with youth-level players who may not have the answer each time, then simply instruct them to ask for guidance - soon they too will build a mental library of positive answers derived from your feedback).

This subtle change in an athlete's view of a situation can be very powerful. Our conscious mind can hold only one thought at a given time. It can jump from this thought to another and back with the quickness of a state-of-the-art computer, but in any instant only one thought can be held. Therefore, by asking this specific question a player immediately focuses themselves on what they need to do to succeed the next time they are called on to perform that same skill. In doing this the mind is kept busy with positive thoughts until the next play demands immediate attention, thus eliminating the opportunity to dwell on the last poor play and the pain of embarrassment that inevitably attaches to it. When this method of positive self-talk is used continually over the course of a match, a much more consistent and higher level of play will be produced, since all those opportunities to feel pain and embarrassment are being ignored in favor a positive focus on the next task ahead.

Of course, there is always an exception to any rule. The exception to, “there are no mistakes only learning experiences” is this: it is always a mistake to give less than 100% physically or mentally. This may seem like a statement of the obvious, but it is very important to present our training method to your players in this manner. This is a very powerful motivational tool in two ways. First, as stated earlier, all players are motivated to avoid the feeling of “pain” experienced after a mistake. Therefore, when taught to believe the only mistake they can make is to give less than 100%, their focus on giving a maximum effort at all times increases dramatically. Your players will develop a very positive inner feeling that as long as they are giving their best effort those feelings of “pain” can be avoided. Secondly, this frees them up emotionally to constantly work to improve playing weaknesses since the fear of a playing error producing negative inner feelings is significantly reduced. The result of this approach then is players consistently focusing on giving



maximum effort while at the same time working to improve all of their playing skills, not just the skills in which they are already confident. As coaches, what more can we ask of our players other than to constantly give a maximum effort, while working to learn and improve their game?

### **Increase the Desire for Pleasure**

In order to lead players through this major change in response to a playing error, it is imperative that all negative feedback be avoided and only positive, technique-specific feedback be given at the beginning. As the learning process progresses, you will find that it will become necessary to provide technical feedback only periodically, as your player's build their own specific, personal list of "troubleshooting instructions" for each skill based on your earlier feedback. Whenever it is obvious that a player understands what is needed technically it is very important that positive feedback is given to reward their efforts to improve. Comments such as, "good effort," "great hustle", or "you'll get the next one" combined with a positive tone of voice and body language are extremely valuable in keeping a player focused on the immediate future, and necessary in demonstrating your appreciation of their efforts no matter what the results. Show them you respect, admire, and encourage their efforts to improve by consistently praising even the smallest of successes. By doing this, it will also become evident to your players that the feelings of "pain" produced by an error made while working on a specific playing weakness are nothing in comparison to the "pleasure" gained when positive strides are achieved. This will only lead to an even higher level of desire to continue working to improve.

### **Develop a Sense of Trust**

Your player's must develop a three-way sense of trust. First, they must trust in themselves that they are doing their best to improve. Many times, after error players will tell themselves, "You've got to try harder!" This leads to a response of making a conscious effort to give a harder physical effort, causing them to "over try" Facial grimaces, less fluid, robotic movements and ultimately a drop in their level of play is the usual result. Impress upon your players the belief they must trust in themselves that they are doing their best. A player must believe that giving their all is the most anyone can ask, and in knowing, they have done this, they must be proud of the effort and accept the results. By getting players to trust themselves you will ultimately lead them to avoid "over trying." Secondly, your player's must trust each other. Each player must believe that their teammates are all giving their best effort. If a player feels that, the other players are contributing his/her playing errors to a lack of effort, a sense of resentment and frustration may set in. A feeling of "they don't think I'm trying" comes over the player causing a deep sense of emotional "pain". This again provokes the "over trying" response, or causes the athlete to avoid using that skill all together. Instill in your team the belief that they all know each other, and know how hard everyone is working. Let them know that you will be the sole judge and jury of a player's effort. When the entire team knows the coach will immediately address any questionable physical or mental effort, it ceases to become an issue they have to concern themselves. Thirdly, your players must trust you. They must believe you know they are giving a maximum effort. Again, if a player feels you are questioning their effort one of two responses will occur: "over trying" or avoidance. Show your players their effort is known, respected, and admired. When things are going bad or they have had a rough day, reinforce to them you know the effort was there. Many times, after a tough loss where my team has not played very well we have sat down and I have expressed my continued belief in their effort. Remember, a maximum effort does not always produce the desired results. However, if your team knows you will recognize and praise their effort no matter the result, you will find very few times when the effort you desire is not given.

## **5 Essential Leadership Qualities for Parents, Players and Coaches**

by Bret Johnson

Whether you coach little league baseball or NFL football, all coaches look to their team leaders for the same 6 essential qualities that can mean the difference between a good season and a undefeated record. While it is believed that some people are born leaders, leadership can be developed through practice and conscious effort.

Parents spend countless hours and thousands of dollars developing the physical skill of their children to excel in their chosen sport. Coaches know that physical skill is only one essential quality in selecting key players. It's the intangible, sometimes immeasurable qualities that make a player invaluable to an organization. Parents, players and coaches who work to develop these 6 essential qualities will see their efforts pay off.

1. **Responsibility:** Leaders assume the responsibility of representing the coaching staff. During a game, players are often out of the earshot of the coaching staff. The team's leaders never lose control of the huddle. They take charge; remain positive, encouraging, aggressive and decisive. Leaders make good decisions on and off the field. They dissuade teammates from engaging in unsportsmanlike activities. They associate with other "good kids" and resist common temptations that others cannot.
2. **Morale:** Leaders have insatiable morale. This doesn't mean just leading the team chant or keeping a smile on your face when the team is down by 10. Morale can be heard in the voice of a player who is determined not to give up. Morale is a tall, confident posture with actions to match. Morale is a "must win", cheerful, vigorous and passionate attitude that a player brings to every practice and every game.
3. **Work Ethic:** It's not uncommon for a coach to be criticized for "playing favorites". The truth of the matter is hard work and the right attitude will gain players the opportunity to prove themselves that players of the same skill and lesser determination will never see. Team leaders should possess an amazing work ethic. The actions and behaviors of the team's leaders are contagious. A team leader who is complacent with his skill level is a malignancy. Leaders are the first to practice and last to leave. They seek assistance from the coaching staff on a regular basis. They ask what they can do to improve their ability. They are visible during the off-season. Leaders give it their all. They push themselves and others to do more.
4. **Skill:** Skill is an undeniable trait of a leader. However, skill is broader than the general notion of physical talent. Leaders possess both physical talent and the mental edge for the game. An excellent player must also be a smart player. He must become a student of the game. His intimate knowledge will allow him to turn opponent's mistakes into opportunities to score. The smart player is able to pull off the unexpected without it

being a gamble. The physically skilled player works on his craft constantly. He reads, attends camps, watches videos, practices and trains specific to his sport. It is this passion and focus even in the off-season, which elevates his game. Some players are born with skill, but a leader works tirelessly to improve his skill and the skill of his teammates.

5. Respect: Respect must be earned. It's often said that it takes time to "earn" the respect of others. I don't believe that to be true. A player should look to earn the respect of this coaches and fellow teammates on the first day of practice. Showing up early, demonstrating an exemplary work ethic, a winning morale, exhibiting tremendous skill and a sense of responsibility are things that will win the respect of your teammates and coaches immediately. Maintaining this respect day after day, week after week, season after season separates the leaders from the other players. Respect is tenuous. A player can lose the respect of his teammates and coaches with one careless comment or one thoughtless activity. Earning and then maintaining respect is a difficult job that requires self-control, sincerity, confidence, and determination.

Summary: As a high school football coach I speak with many collegiate recruiters. It's not surprising that they often want to know more about a player's personality and leadership qualities than their skill. Physical skill speaks for itself. It shows up in the paper and in team stats. Leadership qualities are not as easily summarized but of equal importance to the success of an organization. To win the opportunity to prove yourself on the field and perhaps more importantly, in life, develop the art of leadership.

Bret Johnson is the co-founder of Camp Quarterback. Known in the industry for his unique and successful approach to coaching quarterbacks he and his father Bob Johnson coach the Nations Elite 11 Quarterbacks each year as sponsored by Student Sports. To learn more, please visit <http://www.campquarterback.com/>

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