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7 Effective Volleyball Coaching Strategies for Children

By Emine Busra Yilmaz

Volleyball is not just a sport but a powerful tool that can shape children's future success. It provides numerous physical, cognitive, and social benefits for their development. Playing volleyball helps children develop physical fitness, coordination, and motor skills essential for their growth and health. Volleyball and other physical activities can complement educational programs by providing a balanced approach to child development, enabling children to succeed academically and become well-rounded individuals

who can positively contribute to society. Studies have shown that integrating daily life skills into volleyball training improves teamwork, goal setting, time management, emotional skills, interpersonal communication, social skills, leadership, and problem solving, which are crucial for personal and professional success (Saputra et al., [2023](#)). Therefore, it's vital to recognize the role of volleyball in shaping children's future success and to promote the sport for its comprehensive developmental benefits.



Importance of Effective Coaching

Effective coaching strategies are crucial in children's sports for several reasons. First, they ensure that coaching practices are developmentally appropriate; this alignment between coaching practices and children's developmental abilities can make early sport experiences positive, thus increasing the likelihood of continued participation in sport over time (Fraser-Thomas & Harlow, 2022). In addition, effective coaching can have a significant impact on young athletes' participation, skill development, and attitudes. Coaches who lead with character and focus on teaching the fundamentals of both sport and life can profoundly influence their players' love for the game and overall development, inspiring the audience with their coaching style (Christofferson & Deutsch, 2017). Furthermore, studies show that effective coaching leads to better teaching and better learning outcomes for children, and effective coaching strategies can have a broad educational impact beyond sport (Elek & Page, 2019). In brief, it is important for coaches to teach volleyball to children (10–13 years old) using effective coaching strategies.

The purpose of this column is to introduce seven key coaching strategies that support the holistic development of children in sports, with a specific focus on volleyball. While the strategies are presented in a general framework, practical applications and examples tailored to volleyball are provided throughout the text and summarized in Table 1 to guide volleyball coaches in applying them effectively. These strategies include communication skills, personalized training programs, motivational techniques, team cohesion and cooperation, strategic planning and game analysis, stress management, self-assessment, and feedback.

1. Communication skills

Emphasizing the importance of clear and direct communication on the field, coaches can instill a sense of awareness in their team. This not only helps them play more effectively by reducing confusion within the team but also fosters a harmonious team dynamic. Listening skills, when honed, create a trust-filled environment among team members. Volleyball is a fast-paced game where split-second decisions are crucial. For this reason, students should be taught to call out “mine” when receiving the ball; this prevents collisions and confusion while also strengthening communication skills within the team. Especially during serve receiving, verbal cues such as “I got it” or “leave it” enhance teamwork and cooperation on the court. For setters, using tactical calls like “back,” “quick,” or “front set” can further improve team communication and coordination.

2. Personalized training programs

Coaches, as responsible mentors, should recognize that each player has different strengths and areas that need improvement. Therefore, individual training allows players to develop their personal skills and maximize their potential. Regular monitoring of players' development, a task that requires attention to detail, helps coaches to evaluate their performance objectively

and adapt training programs when necessary. As a volleyball coach, it is essential to structure exercises according to students' individual needs. For example, if a student is struggling with serving accuracy, targeted drills with specific zones can be used to improve their aim and consistency, or if a student has underdeveloped passing skills, wall-passing drills can be effective. Coaches can use regular video analyses to track individual progress and adjust training programs accordingly.

3. Motivational techniques

Positive reinforcement keeps players' morale and motivation high. Coaches should support players by appreciating their achievements. Additionally, setting achievable and measurable goals for players helps them succeed by increasing their focus. Simple recognitions, such as “Most Improved Player of the Day,” can highlight effort and progress. Technical performance goals may include: “Whoever lands 7 out of 10 serves in the target area gets a star today.” These small, attainable goals can significantly enhance intrinsic motivation.

4. Team cohesion and cooperation

A strong team spirit increases players' commitment to each other and enables them to play more harmoniously on the field. Various games and activities can be used to increase intra-team collaboration, helping players communicate better with each other. Coaches can organize mini tournaments during volleyball practice, switching up teams regularly to build bonds. Fun drills like “Don't Drop the Ball: 2 Players – 50 Passes” encourage cooperation. Creating team chants also strengthens the sense of unity and belonging among players.

5. Strategic planning and game analysis

Coaches play a crucial role as strategic leaders and can help young volleyball players develop game intelligence by incorporating deliberate strategy-building and opponent analysis into training. For example, during practice matches, students can be given specific observation tasks such as identifying which court zones opponents target with spikes or serves, or recognizing patterns in an outside hitter's play under pressure. After these observations, coaches can facilitate short reflection sessions to discuss tactical adjustments—such as repositioning a skilled passer to frequently targeted zones or implementing a double block against strong front-row attackers. Setters can be trained to use simple but effective offensive strategies like quick sets to middle hitters, back-row “pipe” attacks, or front-row dump plays to exploit gaps in the opponent's defense. By regularly practicing these techniques, players not only improve their skills but also learn to approach volleyball as a strategic game, enhancing both their confidence and in-game decision making.

6. Stress management

Training players to perform under mental pressure helps them cope with stressful situations. Mental preparation increases players' self-confidence and improves their performance on the field. To reduce anxiety when serving in front of others, fun activities like “silent serving” can be used. Pregame

Table 1. Strategies, Sample Drills, and Applications for Effective Volleyball Coaching

Strategy	Sample Drills and Applications for Volleyball Coaching
1. Communication skills	Name drill: Set up a passing drill in which players call out the name of the player to whom they are passing. This reinforces clear and direct communication.
2. Personalized training programs	Individual skill-development card: Assign each player a daily, weekly, or monthly goal (e.g., “increase overhand serve accuracy from 30 to 60 percent”). Include short, focused training segments within each session to address this goal. Role-specific training: Setters spend more time on precision-setting drills, while hitters focus on approach timing and spike techniques. This ensures each player develops skills most relevant to their role.
3. Motivational techniques	Goal-setting drill: Have players set specific, measurable goals for each practice session, such as improving serve accuracy or increasing successful blocks. Celebrate when goals are achieved to maintain motivation. Highlight reel: Create a highlight reel of players’ best plays and share it with the team to boost morale and reinforce positive achievements.
4. Team cohesion and cooperation	Team cohesion and cooperation stations: At each station, players work together for a set amount of time to complete a specific task. For example, they might be asked to complete 25 passes without letting the ball drop, create a passing loop where each player passes at least three times, or successfully serve to a designated target five times. After completing the task, the group engages in a brief reflection, and the coach provides feedback focusing on communication, team support, and cooperation. These types of activities eliminate the pressure of competition and allow children to develop both their social and technical skills. They also ensure active participation from every player and contribute to the strengthening of team spirit.
5. Strategic planning and game analysis	Video review sessions: Watch footage of past games to analyze opponents’ strategies and identify areas for improvement in your own team’s play. Encourage players to suggest strategic adjustments.
6. Stress management	Stress management drill: To support stress management effectively, volleyball coaches should include low-pressure, supportive serving exercises in training. In this drill, players aim to serve to a designated zone, but the primary focus is on relaxed execution and correct technique rather than hitting a target under pressure. After each well-executed attempt, the coach offers positive reinforcement (e.g., “Great stance!” or “Nice consistent height on the toss!”). Light background music may be used, or teammates can offer words of encouragement to one another. This approach not only prepares players for serving during real games in a calm and confident manner, but also helps them build self-esteem, focus, and emotional regulation—making it a truly effective stress-management technique. Mindfulness exercises: Incorporate breathing exercises or visualization techniques into practices to help players manage stress and maintain focus during games. To support players’ mental well-being and concentration, coaches can introduce brief mindfulness routines at the beginning or end of practice sessions. For example, start with a 2-minute guided breathing exercise, where players close their eyes, place their hand on their chest or stomach, and breathe in slowly through the nose for four counts, then exhale through the mouth for four counts. Coaches may use simple cues like “breathe in confidence, breathe out tension.” Additionally, before competitive drills or scrimmages, players can practice visualization by imagining themselves performing a successful serve or spike. Coaches can guide this by saying, “Picture the ball going exactly where you want it. Feel your body move calmly and confidently.” These small yet powerful exercises help reduce pre-performance anxiety, improve focus, and build mental resilience, especially in young athletes who are still learning to manage emotional pressure.
7. Self-assessment and feedback	Feedback circle: At the end of each practice, have a feedback circle where players share what they did well and what they want to improve. Coaches can also provide constructive feedback during this time.

breathing exercises or mental visualization techniques, such as “close your eyes for three seconds and recall your best pass,” can boost self-confidence and readiness.

7. Self-assessment and feedback

Players’ ability to evaluate their performance supports personal development and learning. Constructive feedback helps players learn from their mistakes and improve their performance. Coaches should support players’ motivation and development by providing positive and constructive feedback. At the end of practice, players can be asked reflective questions like, “What was your best move today?” or “What would you like to improve?” Coaches should give feedback that highlights growth; for example, “Your serving has really improved. If you stay balanced a bit more, you’ll be even more accurate.”

Table 1 provides sample drills and applications for each of these coaching strategies.

Conclusion

Effective volleyball coaching for children focuses on developing essential physical, cognitive, and social skills that contribute to their overall growth and future success. By integrating critical life skills such as teamwork, leadership, and problem solving into volleyball training, coaches can significantly impact young athletes’ personal and professional development. The seven critical coaching strategies presented in this column are fundamental in shaping better athletes and well-rounded individuals. These strategies emphasize the holistic development of children through sport, fostering a love for the game while equipping them with the tools to excel both on and off the court. Therefore, physical education teachers and volleyball coaches might consider adopting these approaches to maximize their athletes’ potential and positively influence their long-term development.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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Submissions Welcome!

Readers are encouraged to send “Coach’s Corner” submissions to *Strategies* Editor at lstrecker@shapeamerica.org.

The purpose of the Coach’s Corner column is to feature short articles about one specific coaching lesson that readers can immediately implement with their team. Articles should contain a brief introduction, followed by quick-hitting information such as bullet points or lists. Submissions should not exceed 1,000–1,500 words (or roughly four typed, double-spaced pages).