

6 qualities that coaches want in a libero

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by Jeff Smith

While the setter is the leader of the team's offense, the libero leads the defense. They are the captain of your team's back row and the heart and soul of the team's serve receive and defensive units.

A good setter and good libero are like two sides of a house roof; they are each essential to the home's protection or, in the case of a team, your team's success.

So, what are the qualities that coaches look for when considering candidates to fill the odd-colored jersey on their roster? Here are six libero traits that are vital to most college, high school and middle school coaches:

1. Serve receive passing consistency

Every coach will tell you that serve receive is the most important part of the game. Since liberos play most of the match in the back row, they have to be strong in this area to be effective weapons for their team.

2. Reading and digging

Being able to dig up spikes and tips is only half of a libero's role here. They also need to be able to look across the net, read what the opponent is going to do, make a split-second plan for how to defend the opponent's attack and then execute it properly with good digging technique. To do this, liberos need to have a high volleyball IQ and ability to analyze opposing setters and hitters' movements and patterns instead of merely watching the ball and reacting to it.



3. Relentless work ethic and energy

I believe libero is the second toughest position to play on the court after setter. Becoming an effective libero takes tremendous work habits and desire. It's not considered a glamorous position due to the nature of the role, and learning how to play this role with excellence requires many extra hours outside of practices. If you're not willing to pour in the extra time that this position demands, then it's not for you.

Liberos also need to play with great energy on the court. They typically play every rally of the game except when they briefly come out while one of the players they are replacing in the back row serves. Teammates look to the libero to provide defensive leadership and to be a spark plug for their team.

4. Hustle and grit

Liberos routinely must dive to the floor, scramble for errant passes, cover hitters and then immediately return to base defense, dig up hard-driven hits and compensate for teammates whenever they forget or fail to perform their defensive or serve receive duties. It's a challenging position that requires mental toughness, outstanding effort and a never-quit attitude, especially when you're struggling in a game and the opponent seems to be targeting you on most of its serves and attacks.

5. Consistent platform and passing technique

To be a consistently good passer and digger also takes developing strong fundamentals. Liberos need to master a variety of different passing techniques so they can handle a range of serves and attacks on balls in front of them, to their left and right and even behind them.

Among the skills they need to learn and excel at are:

- shuffle steps and crossover running steps in all directions
- stationary digs
- the drop and drive
- drop step side shuffle
- overhead digging
- platform angles to their left and right
- run-through digs
- side digs
- the side and slide
- lateral dives to their left and right one-step and two-step forward
- dives collapse digs
- extension and pancake (emergency) digs

Just as importantly, liberos need to be fundamentally sound in their lower-body technique. Always begin in an athletic, balanced, stable defensive position with your weight on the balls of your feet and slightly on the insides of your feet and your shoulders positioned over and slightly in front of your knees. This stance leaves you ready to quickly move in any direction for the ball. This includes a deep knee bend that enables you to get close to the floor so you can get your platform under any ball that comes your way.

6. Serving prowess

An underappreciated aspect of the libero position is serving. Most liberos serve for one of their team's front row hitters. This is the one time when liberos can be an offensive weapon for their team. Most coaches expect their libero to be one of the top servers on the team both in terms of aces, consistency and getting opponents out of system.

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