



Summer Volleyball Camp Selection

By John Kessel, USA Volleyball Director of Sport Development

Many players would benefit from attending a summer volleyball camp. These are generally fun and a chance to learn a great deal in an intense, brief time. For those attending out of shape, the second and third day of camp can seem to be too long but such muscle pain passes and by the final days, you'll wish camp wouldn't stop.

The problem is that in your first camp, where you train two to three times a day (usually after never practicing more than two hours a day ever), you think you learn a great amount. You do learn in any camp, for you are touching the volleyball, rather than watching television or doing yard work. It is just that the best camps give you so much better training. Once you go to a good camp you'll understand what the difference is. Unless or until you experience this difference, you'll never know what you really could learn in camp.

These better camps generally are "full service" camps. Your day is filled with volleyball, from morning to night. Local camps that provide one or two workouts a day are certainly helpful, but this full day environment is the most rewarding. Full days can be long days, but when everyone around you shares the joy and desire of learning this great sport, the days and nights are full of special, fun learning moments. The chance to eat with an all-America, or ask questions while in the lounge watching a volleyball movie after practice really adds to the camp experience.

Other camps exist on a "night session" basis (five nights a week rather than a class of one or two times a week) in certain USAV regions. USA Volleyball regional commissioner in your area should know of these camps. USA Volleyball may also offer a full day of coaching some weekends, where any individual may attend. If you're serious about taking your game to the highest level, you should look into trying out for USA Volleyball's High Performance Program, which trains players with the same methodology and practice plans that are used by the USA Men's and Women's National Teams. All players who are selected for the HP Program are eligible for USA Volleyball High Performance summer camps. (For more information on this elite level of training, go to <http://usavolleyball.org/volleyball-disciplines/high-performance-indoor>)

The Coaches are the Key

The coaches and the drills you do are what makes or breaks a camp. It doesn't matter how "great" the head coach might be, for you'll never get too many moments with this person. What is important is how that coach has organized the camp. You should be grouped at the start by a skill test or some method so you are training with those skilled nearly equal to yours. Don't worry about being placed at the top; just make sure you get together with players of about your own skill level.

There are some special camps organized for "elite" players. Others are "specialist" camps where you are trained with a higher emphasis on a particular skill, such as setting or spiking, although you'll still certainly need to work on all your skills. Hopefully you won't be doing any back and forth, against the wall, or pair drills as camp, like any real practice, should be that chance to develop your abilities and experience in the angles of the game.

Get the Attention you Deserve

The ratio of campers to coaches should never be more than 14:1, ideally 12:1, and each such group *must* have their own entire court. Camps which place your group on half a court, or have you "sharing" a court with another group (same difference) are cheating you from learning the whole game.

What is equally important is who your own coach is. The best camps bring in coaches who are from outside the area or out-of-state. Beware not to confuse players with coaches. At some camps you are "coached" by players, who have never really explained to themselves, let alone anyone else, how to play volleyball. Find out if all the coaches have coached before, especially at camps. Teaching you at a camp is very different than coaching a team for a season. After four to six days, you'll leave camp and may never see that coach again. If the camp has a head coach, whose job is to help train these novice coaches, then you are probably safe. If there is no head coach to help develop these novice coaches, you will be the trial and error training ground for such a player's entry into coaching. That's fine for those later, but you sure could do better.

Other Key Services

There are also other important services. These would include the minimum of a full-time athletic trainer, meal services near the training site and lodging with other campers and chaperons close to the training site. The better camps also provide mostly indoor courts. Playing outside enables a camp to have more campers, but weather is not what any indoor player must learn about. Training can be hard enough indoors. By adding wind, rain and sun may get you a tan, but also can be trouble. You sure don't want to hear the old line "Gee, you should have been here last week, it was beautiful..." There are good camps with outdoor courts, but indoor courts are preferred.

A swimming pool will help take away some of your muscle soreness and provide a diversion from all the court action. Film sessions of the Olympics and other audiovisual training aids are a plus. A camp manual for each player is a very good indicator that the camp is looking at ways to help you even after the camp is over. Getting a camp t-shirt or photo shouldn't be any big deal, such items don't help you play better. All that might do is serve to remind you of what a lousy learning experience it was!

Beware of camps that make you condition while you train. Certainly a warm-up is needed, as are drills that will challenge you. However, camp is not the place to condition, but the place for SKILL learning. You'll get sore and in shape from just doing the many hours of skill training every day. If you learn of a camp that warms you up for long periods of time (the only time you need long warm-ups are on the mornings of those "sore" second and third days) or runs you often, beware. Your running and getting in shape should be done before you get to camp, not at camp.

The "Camp Appraisal Work Sheet" can be used to help make educated decisions between camps that you might attend.

USAV CAMP APPRAISAL WORK SHEET

Camp _____ Location _____
Dates _____

Use one work sheet for each camp. List or circle appropriate choice for each question on the left side of the page, then overlay camp sheets so only the figures show. Make up your own master sheet of pluses and minuses for all camps to get the highest rankings. Then determine if it is a match for your child at this stage of his or her development.

1. Number of days in the session?
2. Number of actual training hours?
3. Number of campers expected?
4. Accident insurance supplied?
5. Liability insurance supplied?
6. Athletic trainer on staff?
7. Videotaping of individual players provided?
8. Player skill manual provided?
9. Special college recruiting help if desired?
10. Campers per coach ratio?
11. Balls per camper ratio?
12. New or used volleyballs on the court?
13. Camper per court ratio?
14. Indoor or outdoor courts?
15. Camp store for volleyball specific purchases?
16. Daily camp newsletter?
17. Pool available?
18. Concurrent coaching clinic available?
19. USAV Coaches Accreditation Program available?
20. Percentage of staff who are coaches, not collegiate players?
21. Cost of camp?
22. Cost of round-trip travel?

- | | |
|-------------------|---|
| 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 | 1. Probable competence of directing staff. |
| 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 | 2. Probable competence of court coaches. |
| 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 | 3. Local or imported staff. |
| 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 | 4. Probable number and diversity of staff. |
| 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 | 5. A full service camp? |
| 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 | 6. Probable level of support for local program. |
| 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 | 7. Overall assessment. |

Profile the range of player for which this camp is a match

Class:

- | | |
|---------------|------------|
| 1-Junior High | 2-Freshman |
| 3-Sophomore | 4-Junior |
| 5-Senior | |

Skill:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--------------------|
| 1-Beginner | 2-Freshman starter |
| 3-Junior varsity starter | 4-Varsity starter |
| 5-All conference elite player | |

Player commitment desirable:

1-2-3-4-5

Player independence and self-reliance necessary:

1-2-3-4-5

Other special items worth noting from the information brochure:

Resources:

Staff:

Other: