

# Training the Block

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When training the block, I break the components down into: Footwork patterns, Posture, and Eye Sequencing. One can certainly add training the athlete's conditioning and plyometrics training to improve their vertical, but that is beyond the scope of this material.

**Posture:** The blocker should remain "coiled" at the net. That means having the knees bent and loaded to jump. An upright posture forces athletes to gather prior to jumping and greatly affects the timing of the jump. Athletes also have a tendency of standing too close to the net with elbows out to the side. This leads to athletes batting at the ball rather than penetrating cleanly to block. Elbows should be up at 90 degrees and inside. Remember, blocks occur with the hands, not the arms. Fingers should remain open with thumbs up (reduces the chance of injuring the thumbs when a ball is being blocked).

**Footwork pattern:** The initial step is the two-step which allows athletes to move 2-3 feet along the net; the shuffle step (step and a hop) allows between 3-5 feet of movement while the step, cross-over step will permit athletes to move approximately 6-8 feet. When attempting to get athletes to move 10 or more feet along the net I generally have them perform a step, cross-over with a shuffle step to finish (hop jump to finish). This can allow female athletes to travel up to 15 feet along the net with little difficulty.

**Eye sequencing:** Read blocking is broken down into the following sequence: Ball, Setter, Ball, Hitter. The first assignment for the blocker is to determine if the pass is in or out-of-system (ball); secondly, the blocker must learn to identify visual cues from the setter that might give away their intended set (setter); thirdly, the blocker must quickly assess the set. Is it low or high and what hitter is being set (ball); and finally, the attacker must be watched to determine their angle of approach and hitting tendency (hitter).

**Team Tactics:** You may decide that your team's base position for blocking is "Spread" with blockers spread along the net; "Bunched" with blockers bunched in the middle; "Stacked" this can be either right or left and all these formations have their advantages and disadvantages. These considerations are beyond the scope of this material and I would encourage every coach to discuss this strategy with other coaches. Others may see something you don't.

Other considerations when preparing your team's strategy for blocking is that the outside blocker sets the outside block while the inside blocker sets the inside block. Although this may appear obvious to many coaches, training your athletes to make sure they close the block and jump together requires good communication between the blockers and must be practiced regularly. Many coaches at higher levels also use defensive net zones (generally called the A, B, C, D & E zones) to train blocking assignments. Although the outside "A" & "E" and the inside "C" assignments will be obvious to almost any coach it is when athletes are having to defend against the "B" & "D" inside balls that assignments may get confusing between athletes. Depending on the level of play of your athletes this is something to keep in mind.

## Cue Words:

- Coiled – ready position at the net with elbows in and knees bent;
- Penetrate – reach over the net;
- See your hands – blockers should see their hands at all times. If they lose sight of their hands that generally means that they are swinging their hands back and swatting at the ball;
- Jump after the attacker – for timing the jump;

- Pike – compress the abdominal area prior to contact to help re-enforce the shoulders and arms.

**Note:** The blocker's cardinal rule for timing is to jump after the attacker jumps. The blocker's hands need to be open and strong and should be facing zone 6 of the opponent's court (initial progression to blocking). At higher levels many coaches will ask their athletes to use their hands independently of each other and I'm a big supporter of that progression.

There is also some debate about the "Show and Take" move that has become popular in the men's game. I believe that most coaches in the women's game prefer to have their athletes penetrate effectively and not attempt to swing their arms to take away that part of the court that they have left open. Liberos, for one, hate to see their blockers get tooled by a ball they could have dug. If you want to be an effective blocker, simply remember to penetrate over the net (it reduces the hitters hitting angles) and allow your defense to adjust around you.

**IMPORTANT:** The following are blocking drills and the focus must remain on the blockers. Whenever live hitters are hitting into blockers they should reward the blocker when he/she has read the hitter properly. Hitters should not be cutting balls around the block attempting to score. That is not helpful to your blockers.

Until next time,

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