



USA Volleyball
www.usavolleyball.org

Things I Have Learned the Hard Way In Coaching

By John Kessel, USA Volleyball Director of Education, Disabled, Grassroots & Beach Volleyball

I have a moral duty to make things better - so I want to share with you that I have learned....I HAVE LEARNED THAT...

...What I learn or teach in the classroom can only be truly understood by coaching in a gym.

...No matter how much I care, some players don't know how to care back, so I must teach them and remain steadfast as a role model in caring.

...We are teaching people, not players, so I must respect, care about, and know them beyond their competencies in the skills of my sport.

...The things done by the best teachers I ever had, are the things I should also be doing in the gym.

...It's not how many wins you have on your team, but the kind of people and leadership you have on your team that counts.

...Socratic coaching – asking the players questions - may take longer than telling them what to do, but in the end, it always makes for better thinking players.

...Every time someone tosses a ball, they are stealing from the gamelike reading and anticipation skill development of at least two players, themselves and the person they are tossing to.

...You can get by on a certain amount of charm and obfuscation for a practice or two, but after that you better know something.

...It has taken a long time for me to become the good coach I want to be, and I want to shorten that learning period for others coaching.

...Sometimes you are the windshield and sometimes you are the bug.

...Most coaches are reactive - the easy option - rather than proactive, which takes a lot more thinking and creates players who can think ahead and for themselves.

...Anticipation and reading are skills vital to a player's success, and in our sport the vast majority of these key skills are done *before* the ball crosses the net.

...Coaches tell me the game is 70-80% mental, but when asked how much mental training they do in practice, there is a huge chasm, dropping down to some 10-20% - a gap that must be closed.

...Either you control your attitude, or it controls you.

...When you are going through hell, it is best to keep going, and you will be surprised at how long you can keep going.

...No matter how skilled a player is, tactically or technically, that they will make stupid mistakes.

...While it is great if your players encourage or forgive you through your learning mistakes, you should encourage or forgive yourself as well.

...Two members of the team, coach or players, can look at the same rally or match, and see two totally different things.

...No matter how specific I think I have expressed something, I still am too general too often in practice.

...The reason the players love monarch of the court, is because the ball comes over the net, starts with a serve, is competitive and makes a player move and touch the ball more, and is player controlled – all things that are lacking in most drills coaches do.

...You can't teach what you don't know.

...In training, competing and life, pain is inevitable, but suffering is optional.

...It can take months of gym time to build trust, and only seconds to destroy it, so I may be demanding, but *never* can be demeaning.

...The best players on my team do not have the best technique.

...The one word that best describes my coaching is – teacher.

...The best honor my former players can give me is to give back to the sport by coaching.

...There is great power in giving players powerful, positive nicknames.

...Proof of the power of positive reinforcement can be clearly seen in how hard a player will work for a mini-sized tootsie roll, or the chance to hit the coach as a flat target and make the coach then do pushups.

...How you start your season's first two to three practices, sends a message that will impact the rest of your practices and season.

...It is good to have a great player on a team, but is it better to have a player who makes the team great.

...No matter how heart breaking a match can be, the sport does not stop for your sadness.

...No matter how gamelike I think my drills are, the players are right when they say – we just want to play.

...I cannot nor should not treat my players equally, but I must treat them all fairly.

...Being consistent with my players is the most important thing for me to be.

Feel free to pass along those things you have learned the hard way, to share with your fellow coaches for an updated version. Email me at john.kessel@usav.org Thanks for coaching our most precious assets, our children.