**DOING YOUR BEST IN CLUB VOLLEYBALL**

*There is an old saying that goes “You never have a second chance to make a first impression”. Nowhere is this truer than in the game of volleyball. Serious volleyball players are given many opportunities to prove themselves at practices and competition each season. Doing your best at all times can be the difference between being on the court, on the bench, or even on the team.*

Coaches use practice and game situations as evaluations…sort of like a “mini tryout”. This evaluation is used to rank players into groups according to abilities. In these scenarios, an assessment of your abilities determines whether you’ll be grouped with the best tier of players on the list or with the lesser-talented group. To get the most from playing opportunities, you should always want to be playing with – and against – the best athletes. What can you do to perform your best at all of the practice or competitive opportunities you attend? The following are some tips distilled into a list of eight “BE’s” to help you “BE” your best.

**BE PREPARED**

Coaches are not babysitters and don’t want to spend their time and energy looking after their players. They expect their players to be mature enough to be prepared when it’s time for a practice, a game or a tournament. Any player who shows up for an event unprepared already has a strike against them.

There are many ways to get prepared for a practice or game. Make sure you know when and where your specific practice or game is being held and how to get there. Showing up late or not at all for a practice or game is a sure-fire way to get noticed, but it’s not the kind of attention you should be looking for. Plan to arrive well before the event starts. Besides revealing your maturity level and character, arriving early allows you to relax and start focusing on doing your best. Rushing in at the last minute will leave you tense and flustered.

Plan to warm up after you arrive early. There are several reasons for warming up before a practice or game. The most important reason is that by warming up, you’re more likely to perform at your peak. Getting your blood flowing and your muscles ready also reduces the chances of an injury during the practice or game. Finally, it shows that you are mature enough to understand the correct way to prepare physically for an athletic event. The same is true for players on the bench. They need to be as warm as the people on the court in case they need to go in for any reason. Often times the score of a game does not allow for a “warm-up” play and the team needs an instant contributor. Movement on the bench and attention to the game from the bench contributes to preparedness.

Be sure to get enough sleep the night before a practice or game. For most growing adolescents, this means at least 8-10 hours of productive sleep. Don’t expect to do your best if you spent the previous night at a sleepover.

In addition, your body can’t perform at its peak without proper nutrition. Make sure you eat correctly the night before and the morning of the practice or game. If you skip breakfast, you’re likely to run out of energy midway through the event. Also, this isn’t the time to make radical changes to your diet. Eat what you are used to eating and know what works for you.

Be sure to bring all of the equipment you’ll need. Have your kneepads, contact lenses, water bottles and “well broken-in court sneakers” in your gym bag.

One of the most important – but more difficult – ways to be prepared is to be in good physical shape. If you haven’t been playing volleyball or doing any conditioning work in the days leading up to the practice or game, you’re not likely to be as sharp as you’d like to be. To prepare for this, you should begin a workout schedule early enough to be physically fit. To a very large degree, your performance at a practice or game is heavily dependent upon your physical conditioning. Touching a ball the day or two before a tournament will help you prepare for competition. Find someone to pepper with and touch a ball as often as possible. Make up drills and games to play by yourself.

**BE CONFIDENT**

Have confidence in yourself. You need to believe in yourself and your abilities. A player with a great deal of confidence isn’t as likely to crack under pressure during a match. After all, if you don’t believe that you can play and perform a given skill, why should the coach believe it?

You can play confidently in the following ways: Show poise even when things are going badly. Be aggressive and go after every ball that comes your way. Be fearless while hitting and blocking. Go all-out on EVERY PLAY. You should also have confidence in your teammates…coaches love individuals who lead by example on the court and build up their teammates through positive comments and actions!

**BE COACHABLE**

No matter how good a player you are, every coach you ever play for wants to know that you’ll improve under their instruction. For this to happen, we have to believe that you’re capable of being coached. Behaviors you display during practices or games can convince us that you’re open to guidance.

Each time that you are addressed by a coach, you need to give them 100% of your attention. Make eye contact with us as we are talking. Nod your head when we ask if you understand what we’ve told you. If you don’t understand our directions, raise your hand and ask for clarification. It’s better to ask a question than to look like you weren’t paying attention.

If a coach tells you how to improve some facet of your game, take the suggestion positively. Don’t tell them that this is how another coach told you to do it or that you have always done it that way. Verbally acknowledge the suggestion and then *immediately* start performing the action the way the coach has suggested.

Every coach who ever laced up a pair of sneakers and hung a whistle around their neck tells players the same thing: “Call for the ball!” Have you ever had a coach who didn’t tell you to do this? By doing simple things like calling the ball during practices and games, you’re demonstrating that you’ve learned something from past coaches and you’re likely to learn things from your current and future coaches as well.

**BE A HARD WORKER**

Playing volleyball at a high level takes a tremendous amount of work. Coaches are drawn to players who are willing to work hard enough to play at that level. Never assume you’ll get playing time if you’re giving anything less than the best of your abilities. We will select a player who is hard working over a more talented athlete who is hardly working at all.

Another way to demonstrate your willingness to work hard is by hustling everywhere. If you’re shagging balls, run to get them. After taking your turn at a drill, run back to the line for your next turn. When you take a water break, run to the drinking fountain or to your water bottle.

If we are looking for a volunteer to shag or feed balls, be the first to volunteer. Be willing to help out in any way you can during the practice or game. Show that you’re ready to lend a hand and be willing to go that extra little step for the team.

**BE A TEAM PLAYER**

The rules require that six players be on the court during a volleyball game so it’s impossible for even the best player in the world to win a match by themselves. In addition to athleticism and skill, we are looking for players who work well with others to build a team. It will be a miserable season for us if the team lacks the chemistry that allows us to work well together.

You can help other players do their best by giving them the best pass or the best set possible. Taking that extra step to make them look good makes you look good too! During practices or games, you can demonstrate that you’re a team player by doing your best to get along with other players. Cheer for others when they make a good pass. High five someone who just had a monster block. Get excited when a teammate serves an ace during a scrimmage. Players who exhibit a positive attitude toward teammates are likely to make good team leaders during the season.

**BE POSITIVE**

We want to coach players who love playing the game. Show your enthusiasm during the practice or game by keeping a smile on your face. Be friendly to everyone you interact with – especially opposing players, coaches and officials. Always have fun and make sure that the people who are watching can tell you love playing volleyball. Make a positive comment about the team or the practice/game and ask intelligent questions in a positive manner.

Avoid negative talk about yourself, the practice, the game, and teammates. If you start getting down on yourself for making a mistake, you’re likely to make even more. Nobody wants to hear negative talk about the team you are on. When you speak negatively about experiences on teams from the past, we can only believe that you are likely to do the same about this particular team as well. This includes your choices regarding the use of foul language…please refrain from this!

**BE A LEADER**

Sometimes the difference between winning and losing a match comes down to one player stepping up and being a leader at a critical moment. Being enthusiastic and positive at the right moment can inspire the rest of the team to pick up its level of play. We are always looking for players who have leadership potential to do anything they can during the practice/game to show the ability to be a leader. A leader leads by example. If you’re familiar with a drill, don’t be afraid to go first and demonstrate. Someone has to go first…if it’s you, then you will be noticed. Be a vocal leader by encouraging other players to do their best. Cheer for them when they make a great play. Always call the ball loudly during drills. Help teammates by telling them whether a ball is in or out during play.

**BE SERIOUS**

Coaches invest a great deal of time and energy to their group of players. We want to be confident that the athletes we select are equally serious about their commitment to volleyball. Show that you are serious by the way you present yourself at practices and games.

Volleyball is an extremely competitive sport and we realize that nobody is perfect. Numerous athletes compete for a limited number of positions on the court. Proper preparation and focus before a practice/game can make the difference between playing and going home disappointed. Try to maximize your chances of getting onto the court by following some of the tips above.