

Creating Optimal Learning Environments For Our Athletes



SVENSK
VOLLEYBOLL



*USA*Volleyball

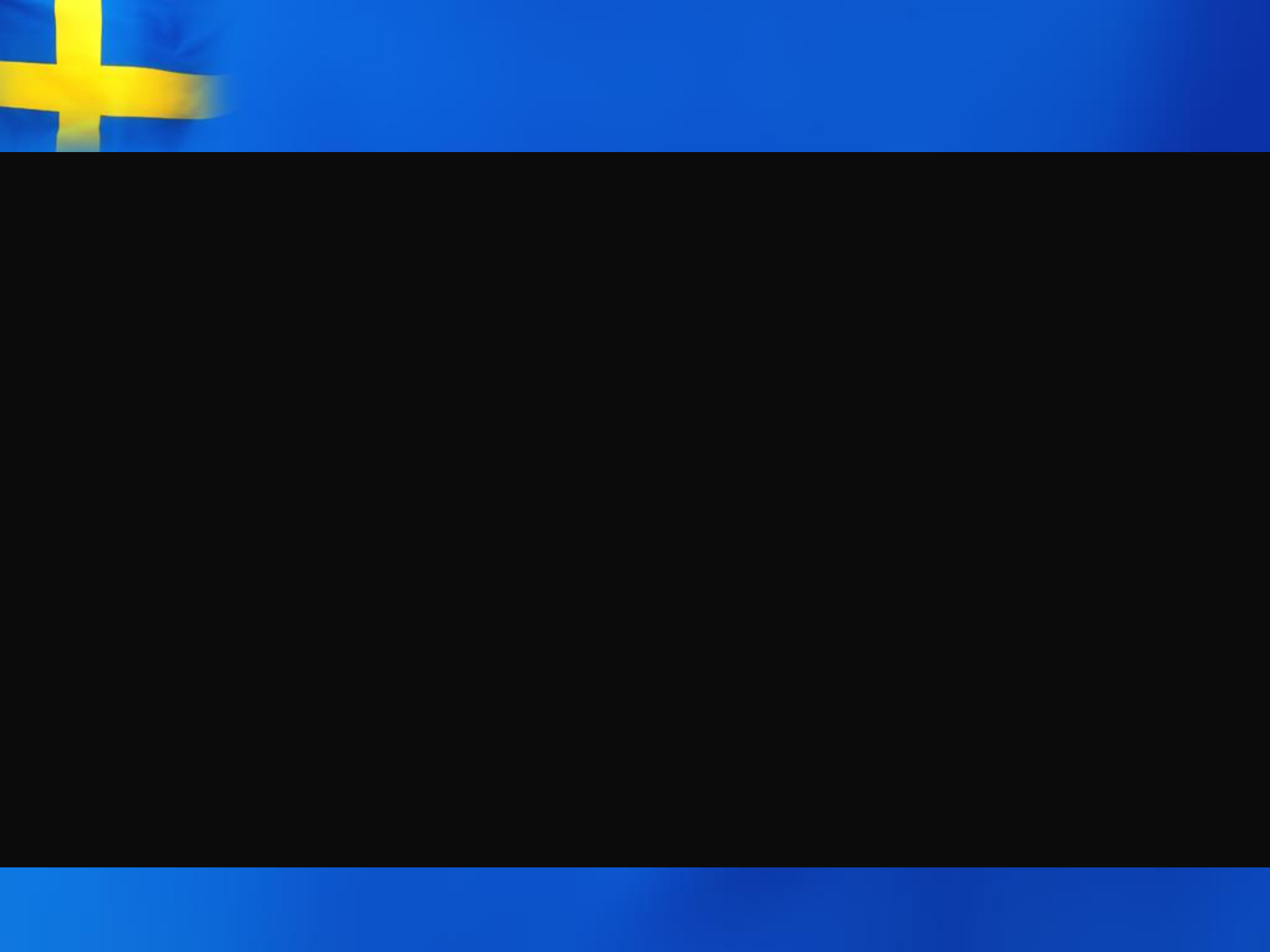


CEV

Eric Hodgson- erichbke@msn.com

- Cadre and National Coach Faculty for USA Volleyball
- Director of Education and Outreach for the Arizona Region of USAV
- Worked as Sports Envoy for indoor, beach and paralympic programs in Philippines (X5), Honduras, Netherlands, Morocco, Canada, Mexico, Greece
- Coach Developer Clinics in Bulgaria and Croatia (CEV), Philippines (Sweep), Morocco, Honduras, Pakistan (FIVB)
- Owned and operated a volleyball club in the US for 17 years







Tonight, Let's Talk About....

- Why are our practice designs not evolving with our players and our game?
- Importance of “Contacts in Context”
- Must we learn before we play or can we “Play to Learn?”
- Maximizing Training:
 - Engagement, Efficiency, Transfer, Retention
 - SSG's
 - “Touches Per Minute”
- How to keep ALL kids active even with limited resources
 - Large groups
 - Few nets
 - Small or shared gym spaces
- How to maximize the quality of training with less coaches
- Discussion, Questions, Better Ideas...

(If it's in red, it's important!)

84 Years Apart

From the 1942 book from Robert Laveaga titled, "*Volleyball*," this was a standard 90-minute practice plan:

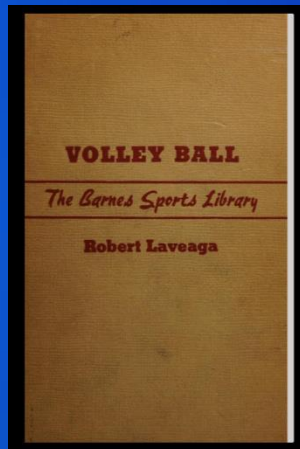
Warm-Up & Limbering (10 minutes)

Handling Fundamentals (20 minutes)

The Service (15 minutes)

Attack & Set-Up (20 minutes)

Scrimmage (20 minutes)



Taken from a popular YouTube Volleyball Coaches channel from Jan. 17, 2025

Pre Practice Talk (10 mins)

Warm-Up (15 mins)

Skill Development (30 mins)

Team Play/Games (20 mins)

Cool-Down/Wrap-Up (5 mins)

Both Practices

85+% of Practice was spent on NON-Transferable activities:

- Running, stretching, limbering
- Ball handling and fundamentals
- Serving fundamentals, zones, no reception
- Attack and set, but no blocker or defense

FINALLY....

20 minutes of play at the end of practice....



Why Are We Stuck?



Path dependency- We Coach the way WE were coached

Updated Science lacks accessibility and is written for other researchers, not coaches

Change is hard for human beings- our brains are wired for the safety of familiarity

Athletes don't know any better and most don't take an active roll in their training, especially young athletes

If Not Now, When?

As Coaches, if we aren't willing to change, then we can't say we are doing all we can for our athletes.

We can't hold our athletes accountable to make changes when we aren't willing to do the same.

We have the science, we have the research, we just need to show courage and do it!



Let's Talk About Contacts

We can toss 100 balls to Astrid with her one knee on the court, from the same side of the net, segmenting her platform from the rest of her passing form.

While some coaches might find this productive, **research and science tells us it is inefficient for training.**

These are contacts but NOT in the context of the game. The ball is on the same side of the net, she is on one knee and the ball is tossed directly to her.

She is learning to pass a volleyball tossed right at her while on one knee. She is getting very, very little information on how to pass in a game.

This is an example of **Contacts OUT of Context**



Contacts with ADDED Context



Here we are with 60 Moroccan school children who are learning to pass a volleyball for the first time.

Instead of breaking the skill into pieces, we give them variable tosses, (EVERY tosser is different), some movement (a shuffle) and the beginning of learning to READ where the ball is going to go and how to solve the problem of where to move to pass the ball.

There is no coaching, just these young athletes figuring things out themselves, getting 100 or so touches with added context in about 4 minutes time.

Will they fail? Absolutely!

Will they fail a lot? Absolutely!

Are they learning in context? Absolutely!

HIGHER Transfer to the game!

Contacts in Context

Here is our team playing a small sided game where the ball is coming over the net, multiple contacts on one side, reading the passer and the ball's flight and speed.

They are working on skills during play, in the context of the sport.

This is our **GOLD STANDARD!**



An Age-Old Argument

Do you have to “learn” (i.e. fundamentals) before you can play

OR

Can you Play to “learn?”



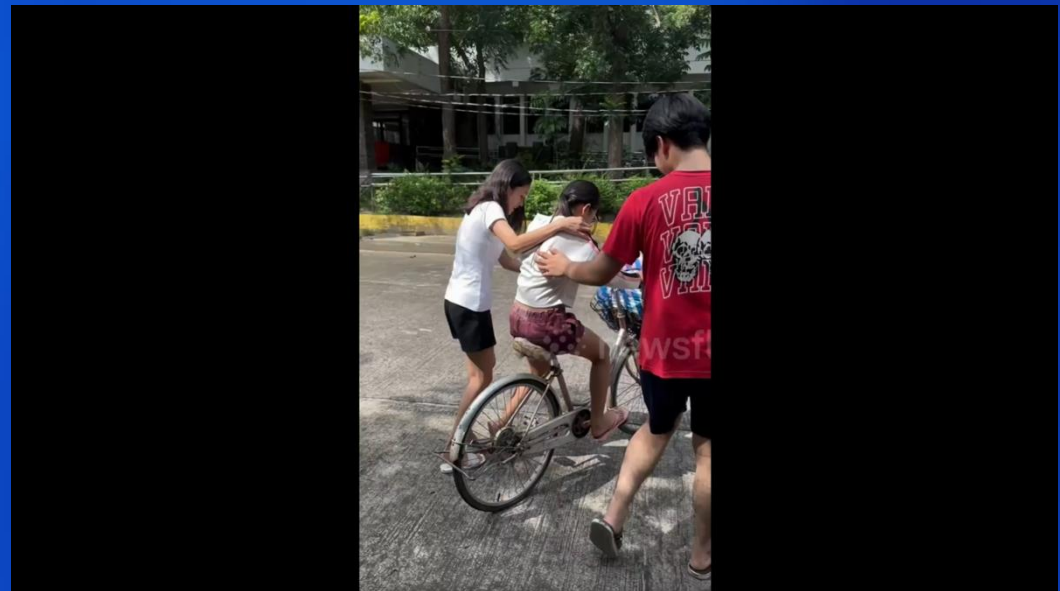
Do You Ride A Bike?

Who was your bike coach?

How many bike camps did you attend?

Did you focus on the fundamentals of riding a bike?

Intrinsic v Extrinsic








Original research article

International Journal of
Sports Science
& Coaching

“Train as you play”: Improving effectiveness of training in youth soccer players

Albert Deuker^{1,2} , Bjoern Braunstein^{3,4,5,6} , Jia Yi Chow⁷ , Maximilian Fichtl⁸, Hyoek Kim⁸, Swen Körner¹, and Robert Rein⁸

International Journal of Sports Science
& Coaching
1–10

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Conclusion

“The findings indicate that even when there is an emphasis on ‘technical skill’ enhancement, **more effective improvement in young development players may be observed through dynamic learning environments (Play).** Consequently, this study *encourages coaches to design training regimes that afford players to train as they play.*”

Let's Start Building From This Base...



Putting Play Into Action

In the coming slides, we want to talk about using play to enhance the four pillars of optimal training!

Engagement
Efficiency
Transfer
Retention



The Four Pillars of Training

Engagement- MOST Important. If your athletes aren't engaged, they aren't learning and if they aren't learning you aren't teaching.

Efficiency-the art of maximizing developmental gains while minimizing "waste"—whether that waste is time, physical energy, or unnecessary risk of injury.

Transfer- essentially, it answers the question: "Is what I'm doing right now actually making me better at what I'll do in a match?"

Retention-is the metric used to determine if an athlete has "learned" a movement or if they were simply having a good day in practice.



Halftime Summary

We understand the idea of Contacts

Contacts without Context are anemic training tools

Contacts with added Context is a bridge from basic to complex

Contacts WITH Context are our Gold Standard

We understand the idea that the MORE Contacts in Context, the better the training

We understand that Engaging your Athletes is the most important part of training

We understand that Efficient trainings will get your Athletes to their goals faster

We understand that Transfer of what we practice to the game we play helps define both the training and the tools we use to train

We understand that Retention is imperative and the tools we use to train directly affect an athlete's ability to remember and recall

Time to put this into Practice

Incorporating Play as Training

Let's start with our traditional "run and stretch" warm up.

FIVB now states: *"New studies suggest that stretching prior to training is likely to promote injuries rather than preventing them."*

Warm-Up and Cool-Down



Modern approach to a warm-up

Today, the general view of warm-up exercises and their importance has shifted. New studies suggest that stretching prior to training is likely to promote injuries, rather than preventing them. These findings have been widely accepted as medically sound, and as a result, many athletes now avoid stretching before a workout, unless a specific existing injury requires them to do so.

In regards to volleyball, general warm-ups can be easily incorporated into the practice, by gradually increasing the physical demand on the players throughout the session. The players will then warm-up during the exercises themselves.

If a player is required to stretch in preparation for the training due to an existing injury, the player should do so before the practice session starts. Players should be advised that injury related stretching exercises should always be created with the consultation of a medical advisor.

Instead of Run and Stretch....



Volleyball is a LEARNING Competition and if your athletes are NOT touching a ball in warm-ups, they are behind.

From ASMBVA Beach Volleyball in Casablanca, **every practice starts with touching a ball.**

Use Warm-Ups Efficiently

Warm-Up WITH the ball


Use the Warm-Up to “introduce” the athletes to the focus of practice

Use Warm-Up to get engagement

Use Warm-Up for FUN!



Inefficiency?



In a 32-week season with two practices a week, 10 minutes of running and stretching, *which the FIVB has deemed ineffective*, your team has lost 10 and 2/3 practices of Contacts in Context over the season.

Ten and 2/3 practices where they could have been playing, learning, contacts in context.

How much better could your team be?

Small Sided Games (SSG's)

Small Sided Games are a staple of a training that is engaging, game-like in its efficiency, transfers directly to the sport and is high in retention.



SSG's Advantages

More Contacts for Players

Skill Work in Game Like Environments

Fast Paced, Attentional Focus, Error Adaptation

The Importance of Decision Making

Solving Problems, Learning Adaptation

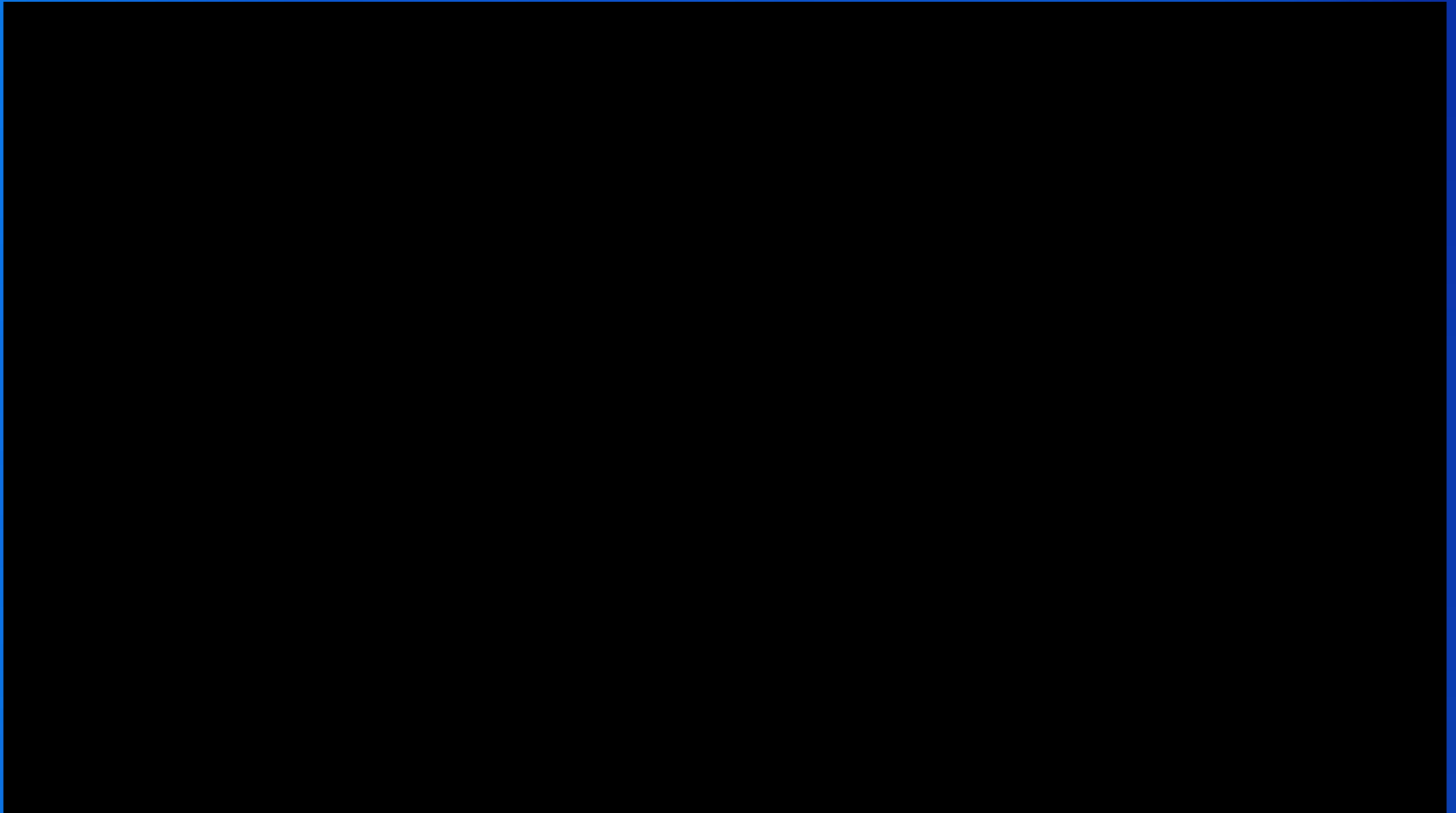
Simple Manipulations/Constraints

Change Speed, Reaction, Reading, Court Awareness





The Brilliance of 1 v 1



Manipulate and Add Constraints

Team sizes varied: 2 v 2, 3 v 3, 2 v 3, 4 v 4, etc.

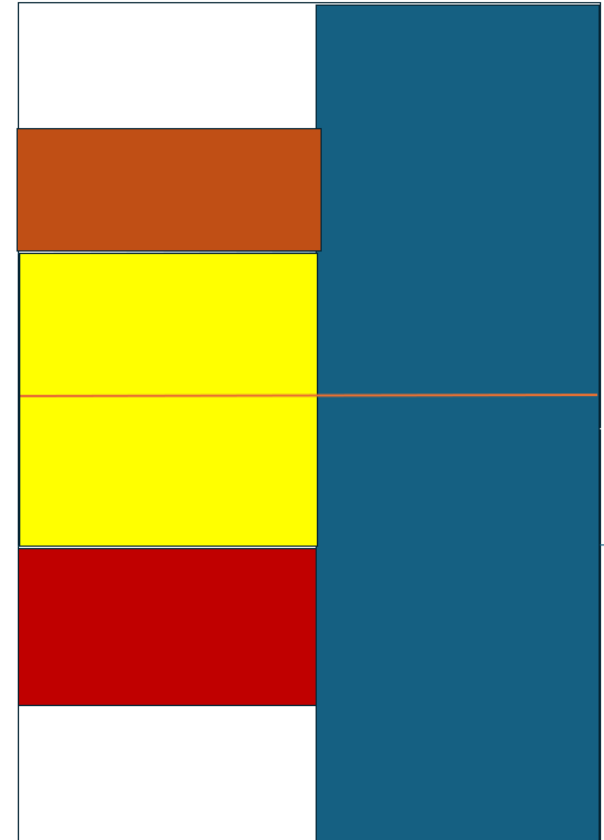
Shorter Distance = Faster Reading and Reaction Time

Longer Distance = More time to Read and Adapt to the ball/play

When Working on a specific skill, the court size can be helpful or more challenging for an athlete

Coaches can give constraints to these sizes for added stress on the athlete

Cross court, different configurations can be added stressors



USA Olympians 5 v 5 on 6 x 6m



Contacts Per Minute

Players were tracked on teams of 6, 4 or 2 players and the number of contacts they had during that game divided by the duration of the game in minutes = **Contacts Per Minute**



2 v 2 was 3.48

4 v 4 was 1.55



6 v 6 was .71

In a **LEARNING** Competition, which is more productive in training?

How Can We Train “Too Many?”

If engagement is a key to learning, how do we keep a large number of players invested in getting contacts in context?

Play can take on many forms using coaching imaginations and the space around us efficiently.



Let's Introduce You To....

Be the Net



Be The Net

1 v 1 v 1, 2 v 2 v 2, 3 v 3 v 3, 4 v 4 v 4 or a combination of any.

Teams play one point, whoever loses the point becomes the net.
Teams can play to 3 points or to the Coach's preference.

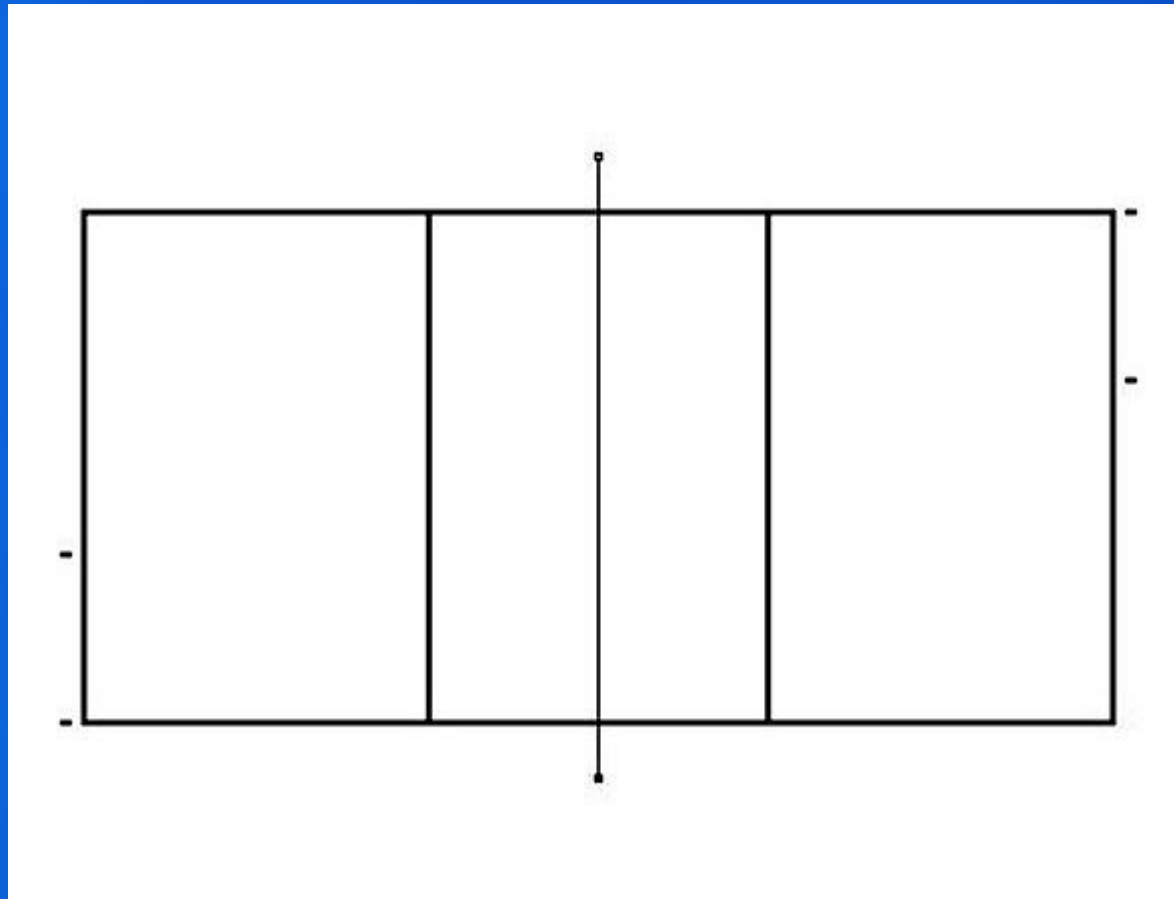
Rules can be manipulated. Maybe let the "net" block. Maybe let the teams only tip or they have to attack out of the "backrow."

Let the teams decide the rules, the parameters of the court. Give them some autonomy.

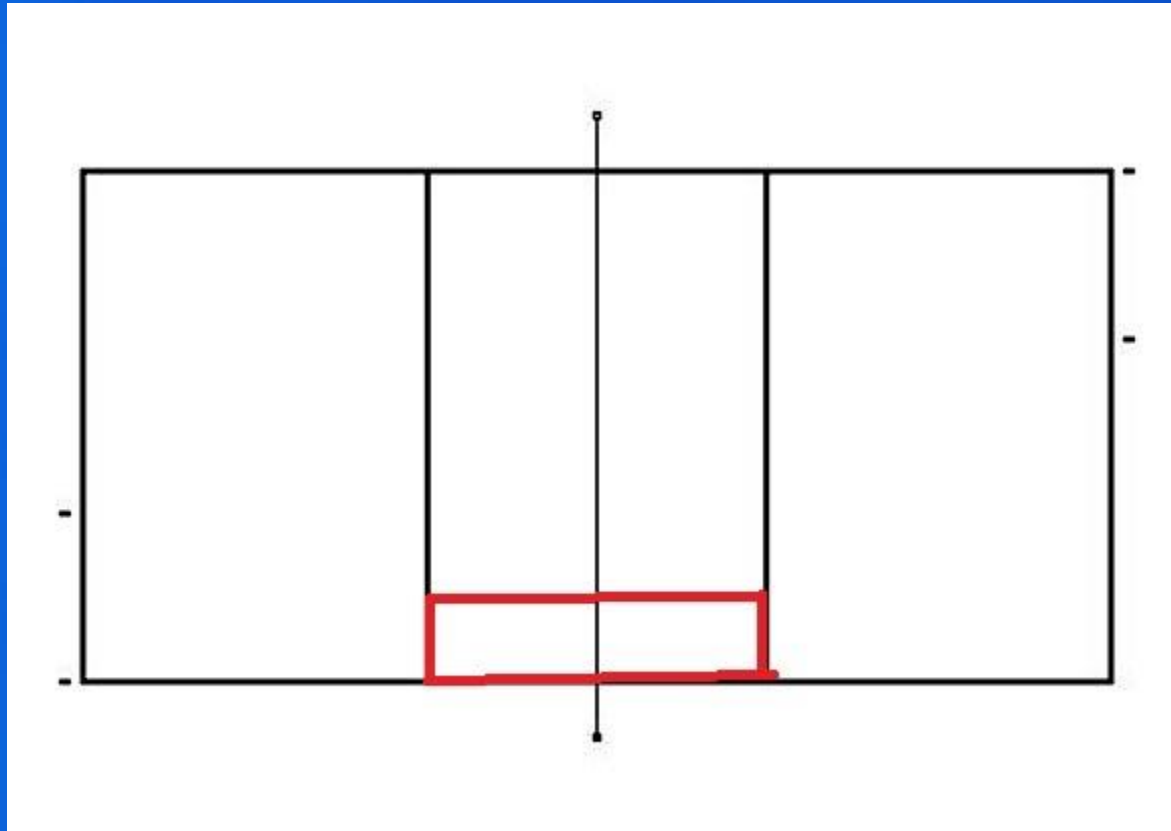
Autonomy is vital in engagement!



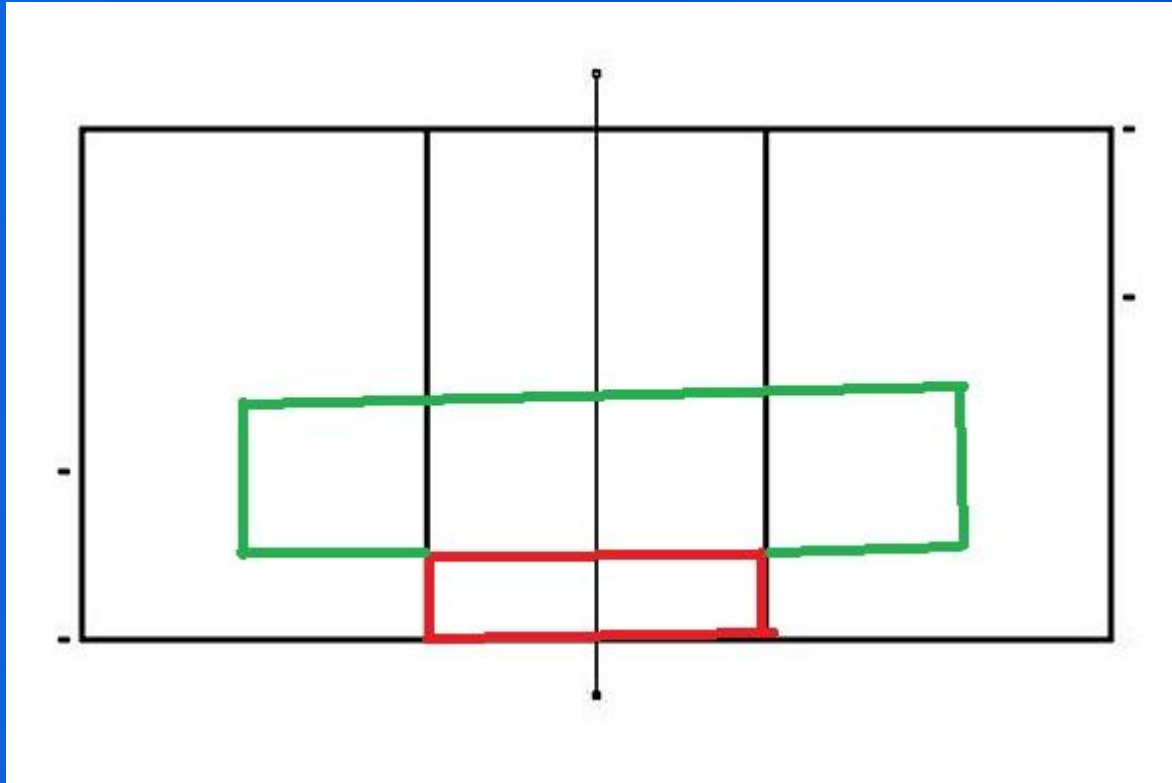
Let's Build an Optimal Learning Environment



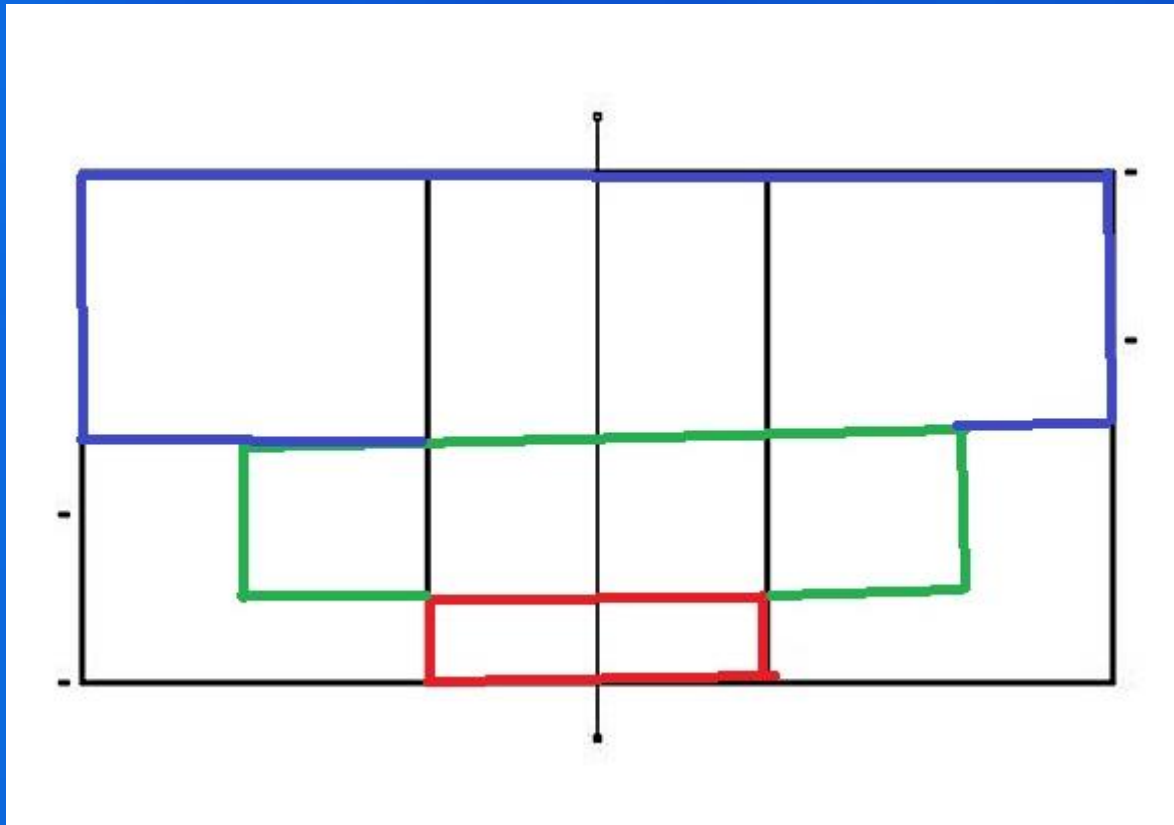
Add 1 v 1 Court



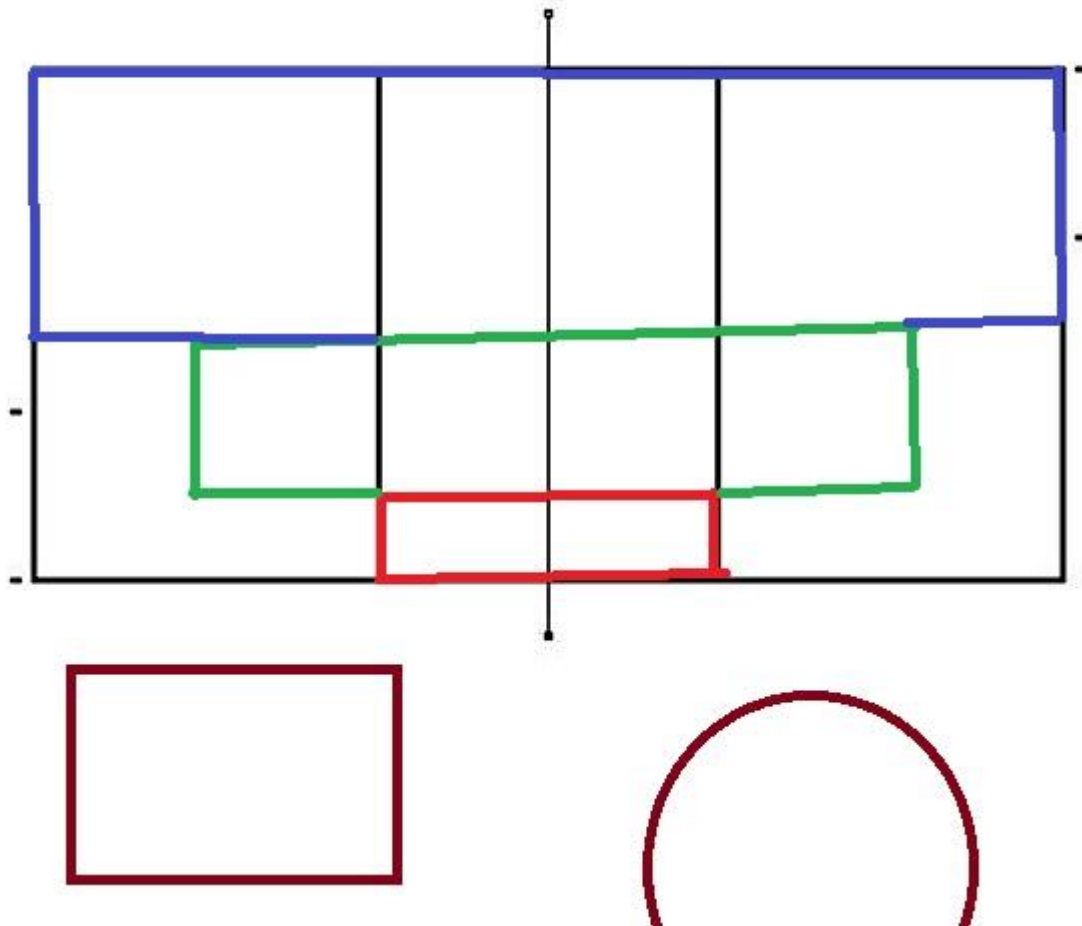
Add 3 v 3 Court



Add 4 v 4 or 5 v 5 Court



Add Wall Ball

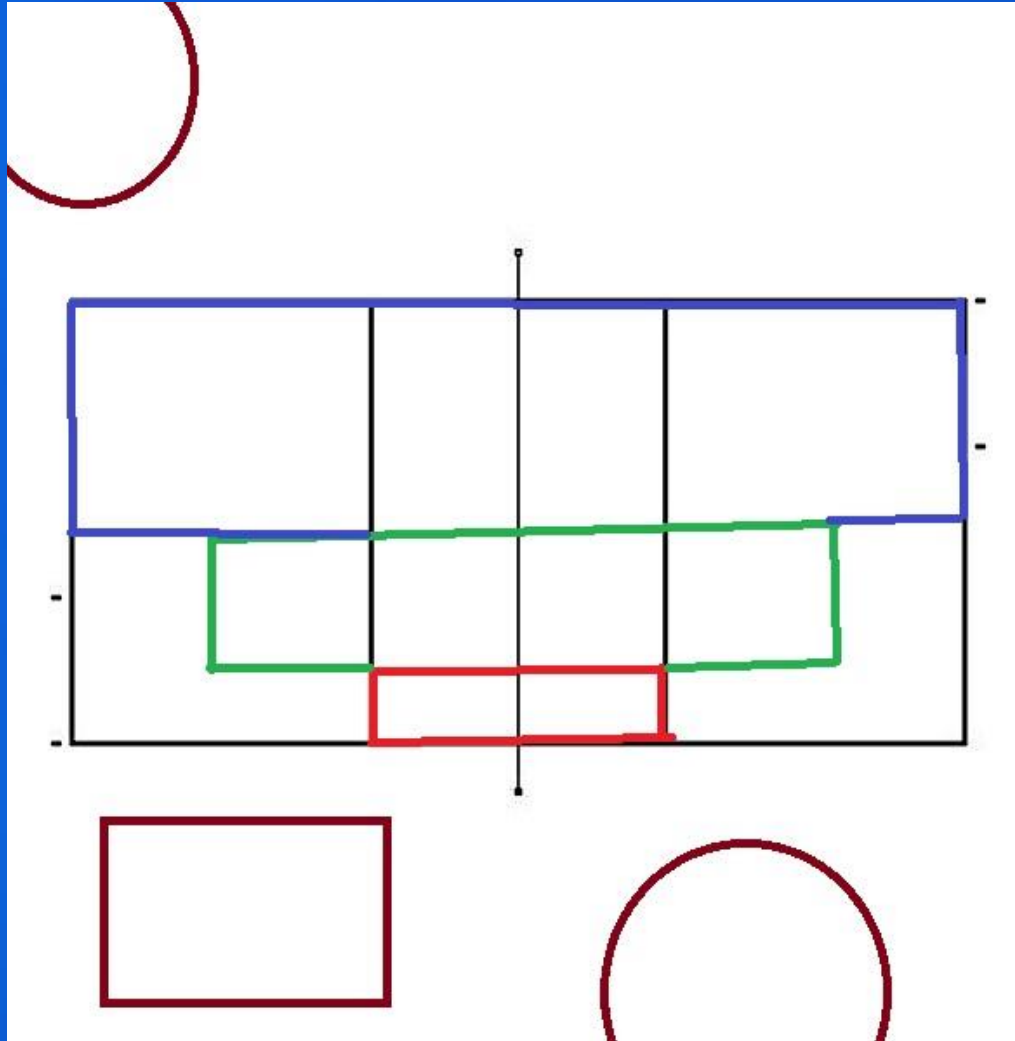


Playing Against the Wall

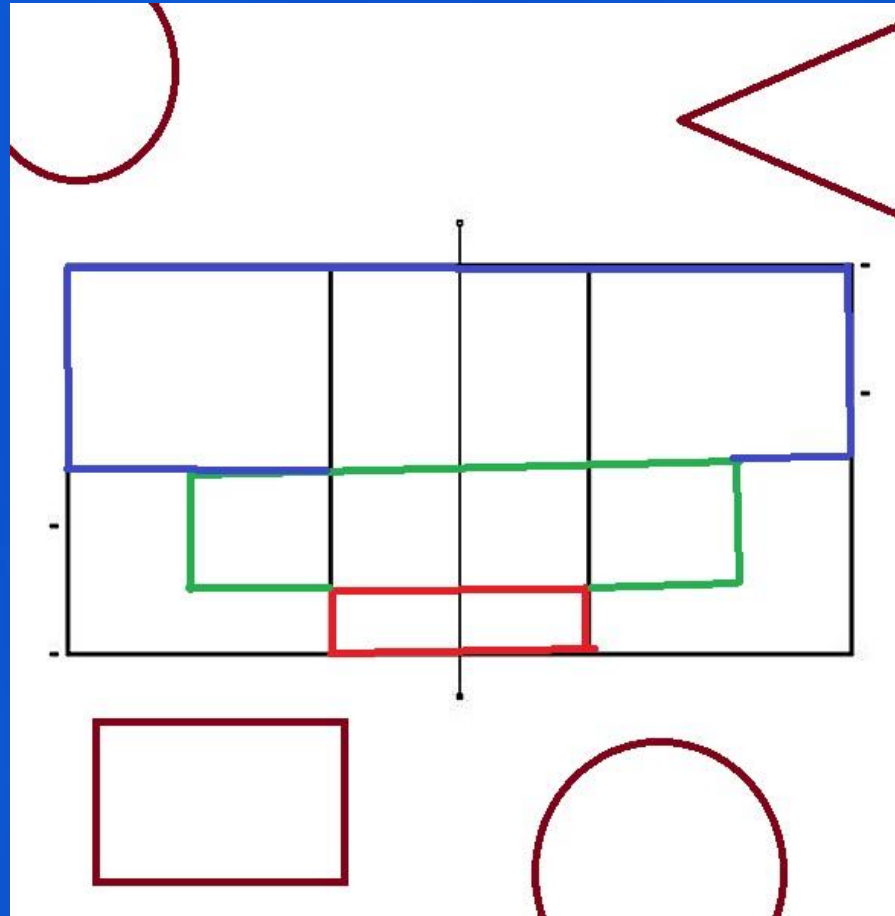


Put a piece of tape on the wall, play 1 v1 up to 3 v 3

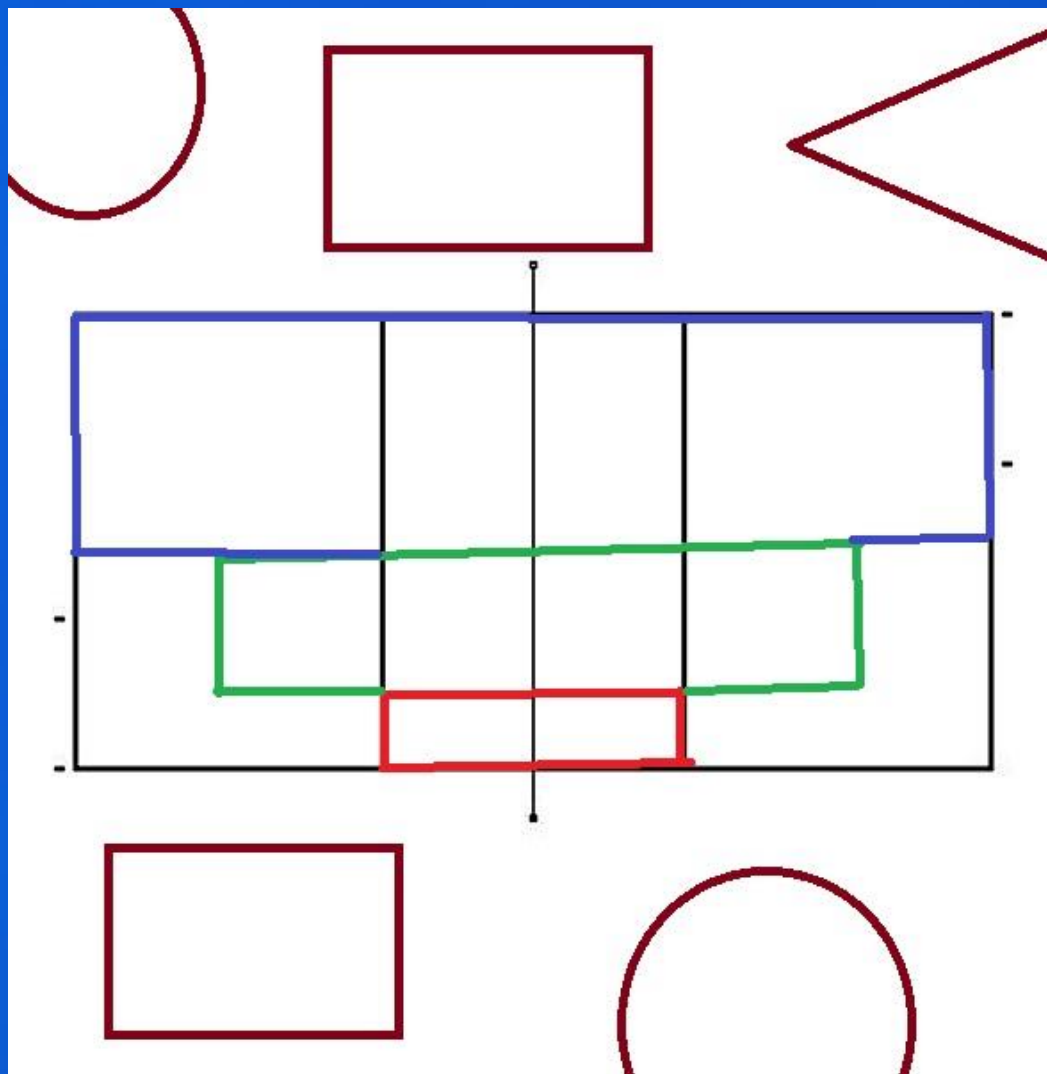
Passing Station w/ Corners



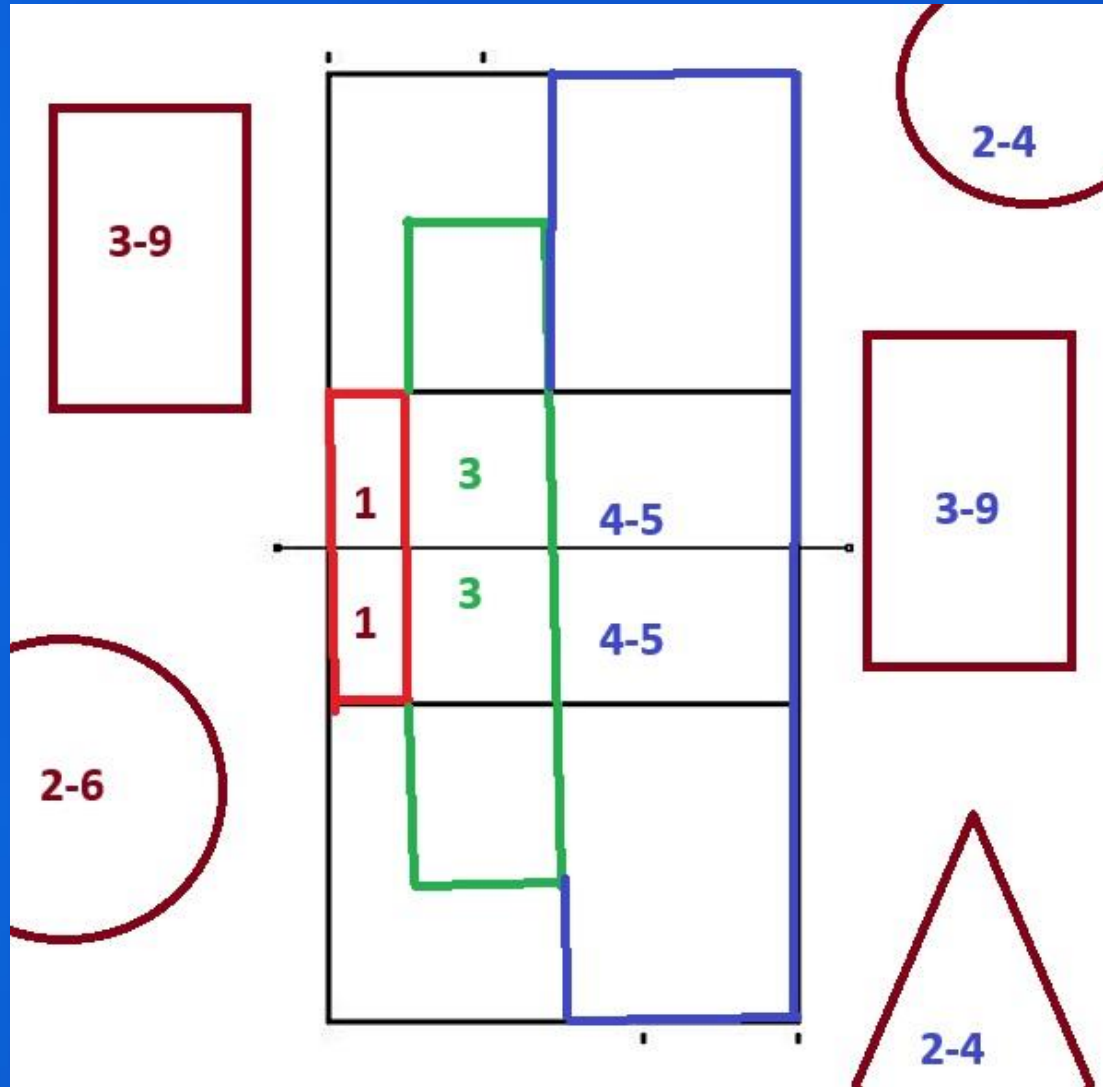
Add Hitting/Serving Station



Add Be the Net II



How Many on One Court?



Optimal Learning Environments



We could max out at 50 young athletes on this one court.

Optimal amounts of touches.

Optimal amount of learning.

From one station/game to the next after designated time

Letting the athletes “figure things out for themselves”

Letting the athletes set the rules, boundaries or “constraints”- autonomy



Can I Coach Them All?

When athletes are playing, they are learning. As a coach who might have 20 or more players on a court, giving players the opportunities to improve with short but specific feedback can be invaluable.

Walking around the court and “catching players doing it right” is a way to connect with any athlete.

Offering help to those players that are struggling is integral in being a coach, but can we use Guided Discovery to let them figure out the answer instead of you telling them?

Does Any Of This Matter?

Meet Elsa on your left and Karin on your right.



Both are 17 years old. Both aspire to play as adults. Both are athletic, work hard and up till this season have enjoyed similar training as Outside Hitters. However, they are going to different clubs with different coaches this season.

Elsa's Club Practices

A typical practice plan consists of:

- Run and stretch to warm-up (10 min)
- Hitting and Blocking footwork (15 min)
- Butterfly passing drill (15 min) {17 game Like touches}
- Serving Practice (15 min) {21 game like touches}
- Skill work taught siloed by OH position with assistant coach (25 min w/ 4 OH) {19 game like touches}
- Serving and passing (15 min) {22 game like touches}
- 6 v. 6 Scrimmage (20 minutes) {26 game like touches}
- Cool Down and stretch (5 min)



Elsa practiced two hours, got 105 game like touches, 46 Contacts in context.

Karin's Club Practice

A typical Practice Plan consists of:

- Warm-Up with 3 v 3 Small Court/Sided Games (15 min) {47 game like touches}
- Serving and Passing Partner work (10 min) {31 game like touches}
- Hitter-Blocker butterfly with setters and libs (15 min) {34 game like touches}
- 4 v 4 game with a skill emphasized and scored more (15 min) {38 game like touches}
- 6 v 6 fast entry scrimmage with constraints (25 minutes) {41 game like touches}
- 3 v 3 speedball with setters (15 min) {46 game like touches}
- Cool Down and stretch (5 min)

Karin practiced for two hours, got 237 game like touches, 206 Contacts in Context.



Over the Course of the Season

(Based on a 32-week club season, two practices a week)



Karin

15,168 Contacts on the season
13,184 contacts in context



Elsa

6.720 Contacts on the season
2,944 contacts in context

Karin will be getting 56% more touches this season than Elsa, 78% more contacts in context.

Practice Decisions can make a HUGE difference in our Athletes



What are things Coaches Can Change?

We can recognize that too much information is worse than NO information. We need to talk less in training.

We need to involve the athlete in their training, so questions should become more prevalent than direct instruction.

Using Guided Discovery is an optimal training resource.

What Kind of Athlete Are You Training?

What words would you use to describe the greatest players in your favorite sport? Creative? Adaptive? Passionate? Problem Solvers? Great teammates?

Are WE training these qualities in OUR athletes?

Are we telling them what to do or letting them figure out what to do?
(Prescriptive v. Autonomous)

Is your drill looking for solutions from your athletes, problems to solve or is the drill focused on just one movement or skill?



Information Processing v. Ecological Dynamics

There are two main Coaching Theories at the moment.

The **Information Processing (IP)** framework for sport coaching is a model that describes how athletes perceive information from their environment, process and interpret it in the brain, and select and execute appropriate motor responses.

The **Ecological Dynamics (EcoD)** framework for sport coaching is an approach that views skill and decision-making as emerging from the continuous interaction between the athlete, the task, and the environment. It emphasizes designing practice environments and constraints that allow athletes to self-organize and adapt their movements to real performance situations.

(We will discuss in greater detail in a future webinar)

Your Coaching Theory Defines Your Training



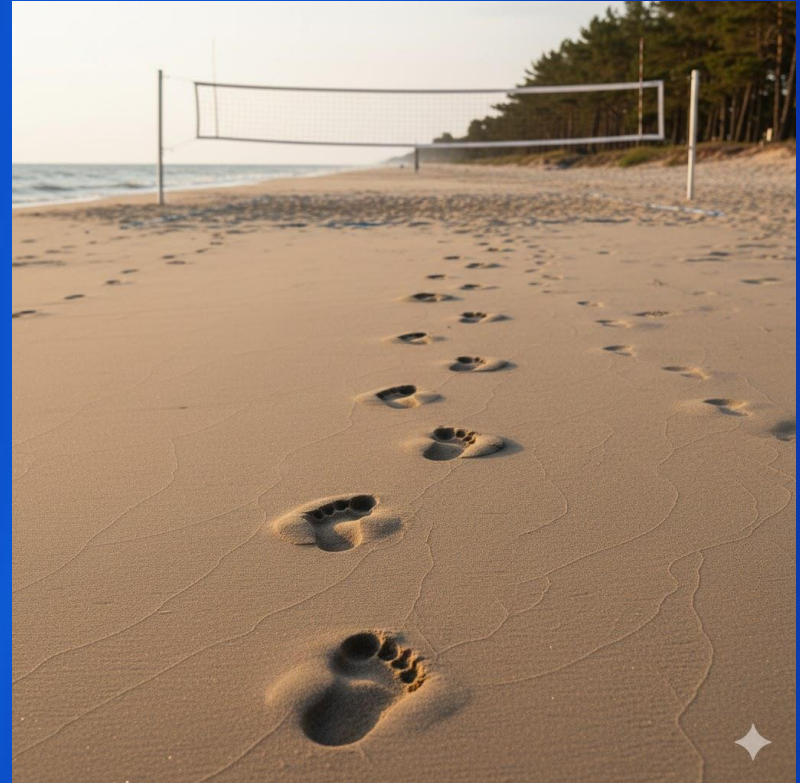
IP will be more prescriptive, giving answers to your athletes, focusing on skills and fundamentals, relying on the recall of your brain and memory to accomplish tasks and movements.

EcoD will be less prescriptive, using constraints to force athletes to find their own movement solutions and using these constraints to better decision making and self organization.

Where do I start???

What can I do at tomorrow's practice to start changing the way I coach?

Step by Step, let's get better...




Small Changes Weekly



At your practices this week, start the training with 15 minutes of small court games instead of running and stretching.



Next week, still using SSG's to start practice, ensure every drill or game you do has the ball coming over the net to a player.



The week after, still using the two suggestions above, check to see if each drill or game you are doing is game like and would transfer to your next match.



Getting Better Each Practice

Too much change too quickly can disorient the athletes.

Write down a practice plan and use the following to help:

- Is this practice time being spent touching a volleyball?
- Does the drill or game look like the game of volleyball?
- Are my players engaged? If not, what can I do to reengage?
- Are my athletes solving problems?
- Are my athletes adapting in this drill or game?
- Are my athletes getting the maximum amount of touches in this drill/game?
- Can I adapt this drill to focus on another skill or problem to solve?
- Is my team having fun?





Lagom

“Just the right amount.”

This applies to Coaching as well. Just the right amount of engagement, efficiency, transfer and retention in our trainings.

Just the right amount of fun and learning in our practices.

Just the right amount of balance in your personal and professional life.

Tack Sa Mycket

Let's open it up to Questions, Discussions
and Better Ideas!

