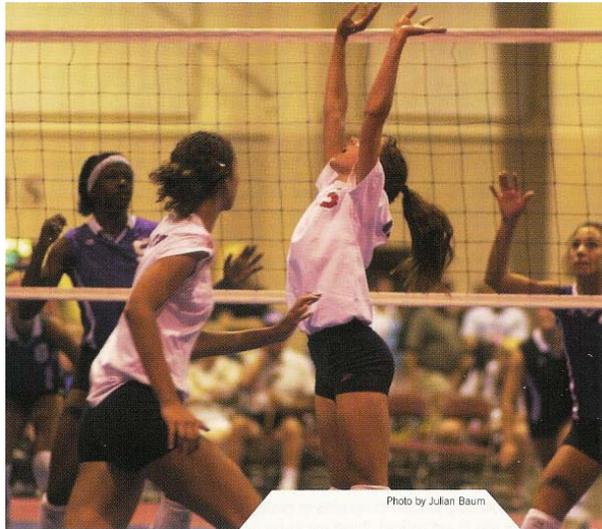


Doing Your Best at Tryouts

By Kelly C. Bourne

There is an old saying that goes, "You never have a second chance to make a first impression." Nowhere is this truer than at a volleyball tryout. Serious volleyball players participate in several tryouts each season, and can include club try-outs, school team tryouts and High Performance or National Team tryouts. Doing your best at the tryout can be the difference between being on the team or being on your way home.



Volleyball camps and clinics usually have an initial evaluation that is much like a mini-tryout. This evaluation is used to divide attendees into groups of players with similar abilities. In these scenarios, a relatively rapid assessment of your abilities determines whether you're grouped with the best tier of players or a lesser-talented group. To get the most from the camp, you want to be playing with-and-against-the top-level athletes.

What can you do to perform your best at all of the tryouts you attend? Club directors and head coaches from across the country generously provided their suggestions on what steps players can take to ensure their best chance of succeeding. Following are some of their tips distilled into a list of nine "BE"s to help you "BE" your best.

BE PREPARED

Coaches aren't 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 a tryout unprepared already has a strike against him or her.

There are many ways to get prepared for a tryout. Clubs frequently hold tryouts for different age groups at different dates, locations or times. Make sure you know when and where your specific tryout is being held and how to get there.

Showing up late for a tryout is a sure-fire way to get noticed, but it's not the kind of attention you should be looking for. Plan to arrive at least 15 minutes before registration starts. Besides revealing your maturity level and character, arriving

early allows you to relax and begin 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 tryout. 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 tryout. Finally, it shows the coaches that you're mature enough to understand the correct way to prepare physically for an athletic event.

Be sure to get enough sleep the night before the tryout. For most growing adolescents, this means at least eight to 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 tryout. If you skip breakfast, you're likely to run out of energy midway through the tryout. This also 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, hair ties, extra contacts, water bottle and well broken-in court shoes in your gear 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 weeks leading up to the tryout, 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 tryout is heavily dependent upon your physical conditioning.

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 make the team, why should the evaluators 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.

BE COACHABLE

No matter how good a player you are, every coach you ever play for wants to know that you'll improve under his or her tutelage. For this to happen, the coach has to believe that you're capable of being coached. Behaviors you display during a tryout can convince him or her that you're open to guidance.

Each time someone on the staff addresses you, you need to give him or her 100 percent of your attention. Make eye contact with the coaches as they are talking. Nod your head when they ask if you understand what they've told you. If you don't understand their 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 him or her this is the way your old coach taught you to do it. Verbally acknowledge the suggestion and then immediately start performing the action the way he or she has suggested.

Almost every coach who ever laced up a pair of shoes and hung a whistle around his or her neck tells players the same thing: "Call the ball!" Have you ever had a coach who didn't tell you to do this? By calling the ball during tryouts, you're demonstrating that you've learned something from past coaches and you're likely to learn things from your next coach, as well.

BE A HARD WORKER

Playing volleyball at its highest levels 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 selected if you're giving anything less than 100 percent of your abilities. Most coaches 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 a coach is looking for a volunteer to shag balls or feed balls, be the first to volunteer. Be willing to help out in any way you can during the tryout. Show that you're ready to lend a hand and 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 him/herself. In addition to athleticism and skill, coaches are looking for players who work well with others to build a team. It will be a miserable season for coaches and players alike if the players lack the chemistry that allows them to work together well. 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 tryouts, 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 tryout competitors are likely to make good team players during the season.

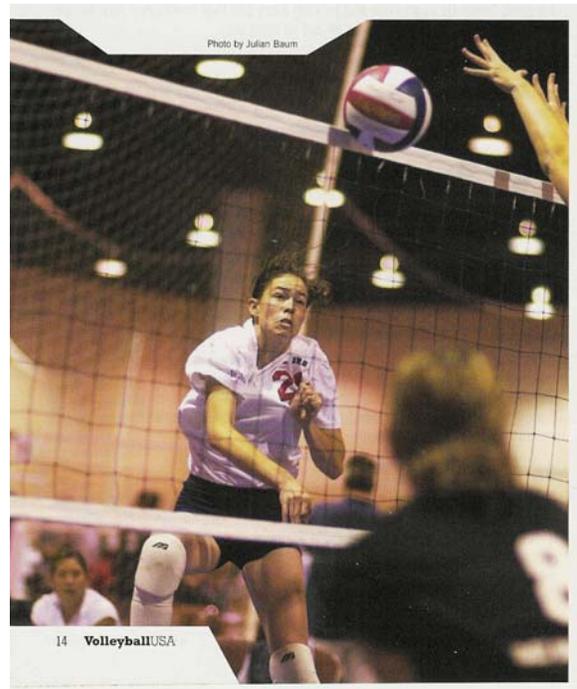
BE NOTICED

Most volleyball tryouts attract dozens and dozens of prospects. It can't hurt to do something that makes the coaches more likely to notice you. One way is to wear something that makes you stand out. A brightly colored t-shirt with either your name or an inspirational word or phrase can get you that little bit of extra attention. Introducing yourself to coaches or evaluators before or after the tryout is another way to get noticed. When you arrive early for the tryout, that might be a good opportunity to introduce yourself. Make a positive comment about the club or the tryout or ask an intelligent question.

BE POSITIVE

Coaches want players who love playing the game because they're more likely to maintain their enthusiasm for the entire season. Show your enthusiasm during the tryout by keeping a smile on your face. Be friendly to everyone you interact with. Have fun and make sure people who are watching can tell you love playing volleyball.

Avoid negative talk about yourself, the tryout and former teammates. If you start getting down on yourself for making a mistake, you're likely to make even more. No one wants to hear negative talk about the team you were on last year. Coaches know if you speak badly about previous seasons, next year you're likely to speak badly about this particular team, too.



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. Coaches are always looking for players who are leadership potential to do anything they can during the tryout 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. Someone has to go first and if it's you, then you're likely to be noticed.

Be a vocal leader by encouraging other players to do their best. Cheer 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 scrimmage play.

BE SERIOUS

Coaches can select only a limited number of players for their teams. They will invest a great deal of time, energy and commitment to this group. They want to be sure the athletes they select are equally serious about their commitment to volleyball.

Show that you're serious by the way you present yourself at the tryout. Wear appropriate clothing, i.e. volleyball shorts, kneepads, etc. Don't show up in street shorts: Don't wear jewelry. Girls should think twice about wearing outrageous fingernail polish. You wouldn't look like that during a tournament, so why would you show up that way at a tryout?

Volleyball is an extremely competitive sport. Numerous athletes compete for limited numbers of positions on the best club teams everywhere. Proper preparation before a tryout can make the difference between making the team and going home disappointed. By following the above suggestions, you can maximize your chances of getting onto your dream team.

(I would like to thank the following people for suggesting tips used in this article: Terri Baranski of Uno VBC, Erick Beck of Impact Volleyball, Tony Carrow of Nebraska Elite Volleyball Club, David Jackson of Coult Masters VBC, Wes Lyon and Dave Shondell of Asics Munciana VBC, Jim Miret of Front Range VBC, Connie Nicholson of Nolph Alabama Spikers Association, Bob O'Brien of Seal Beach Volleyball Club, Kathy O'Neil of Empire Volleyball Club,. Bill Rounis of the Nanaimo Volleyball Club and Pat Ryan of Husky VB)

This article can be found in the Spring 2003 issue of **Volleyball USA**.