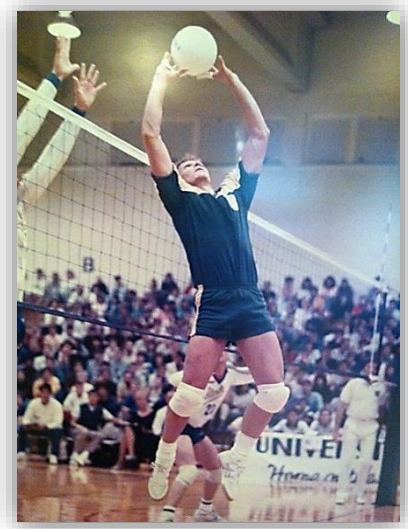


Setters Session

By Troy A. Lorenson, BSc.PT.

Setter . . . Captain, Alberta 3A Provincial Champions, 1982; Team Alberta Can-Am Champions, 1982, 1983; Captain, Juvenile “Selects” Alberta Champions, 1983; U of A Golden Bears, 1983-1988; Captain U of A Golden Bears, 1986-87, 1987-88; MVP U of A Golden Bears, 1986-87, 1987-88; Presidents Trophy Outstanding Leadership U of A, 1987-88; Assistant Coach, U of A Golden Bears 1988-89. Assistant Director Jasper Volleyball Camp; Canada Masters Men’s Volleyball Team, 2009-Present – US Open Champions, 2011; Bronze Medalist World Masters Games, Italy 2013; Silver Medalist World Masters Games, Edmonton 2009; Founder, Up With Volleyball summer camps. Founder, Beyond Sport, Inc.; Coach, VSS Panthers; Aberdeen Hall; Sky Volleyball Club, WL Seaton Sonics.



Author versus UCLA, 1988

Success is In Your Hands

I have a huge bias towards setters. I am proud to be a setter and have some degree of experience in the area, both as a coach and as a player. Over my 50 years, I have set thousands of games, for many teams, at many levels and for many coaches. Some things about the game have indeed changed: The players are bigger, stronger and more athletic. The game is faster and more dynamic. Player development is happening earlier and is more intense. But some things have not changed, and many of the basics still apply. The following document will outline the key priorities of the setter, the technical skill set required, the physical and mental preparation involved, and in general provide an overview of what it takes to play this position. Not everyone will agree with my points, and that’s okay! I am still learning as a coach and setter to this day. These concepts are not unique, and much more can be found in books, online and through much more experienced coaches and players than myself.

Setters handle approximately one-third of all the contacts by a volleyball team. Because of the number of touches afforded to you, you carry a dramatically over-weighted value. Perhaps more important is that setters are directing the middle contact of the normal volleyball sequence. Between the pass and the attack the setter is in control. The setter can make or break the hitters, build or destroy confidence in the passers, establishes the tempo and rhythm for the offense and generally runs the show. A team can generally compensate for a weak hitter on the court, but will undoubtedly struggle with a weak setter. Yes, the setter is the most critical person on the team and therefore more thought and time is demanded of you in training, for both the physical and mental skills, than any of the other players. After the coach, you are the next in line to influence the emotional and psychological characteristics of your team. Few football teams have any measure of success without a great quarterback and likewise few volleyball teams can perform to their abilities without a great setter or setters. The team’s success is literally **in your hands**.

Top 3 Priorities for the Setter

Here are the top three priorities, in order of importance to your development as a setter.

#1 The Hittable Set

Your primary role is always delivering the “hittable set”. The truly hittable set for each attacker is what each hitter can best handle in any situation. The hittable set will give the attacker the optimum possibility to succeed in their own skill set. It is truly hittable – for them.

The desired outcome is delivering a ball that the hitter can:

1. Contact at the peak of their jump
2. Hit all zones of the court

Location: “The Kill Zone”

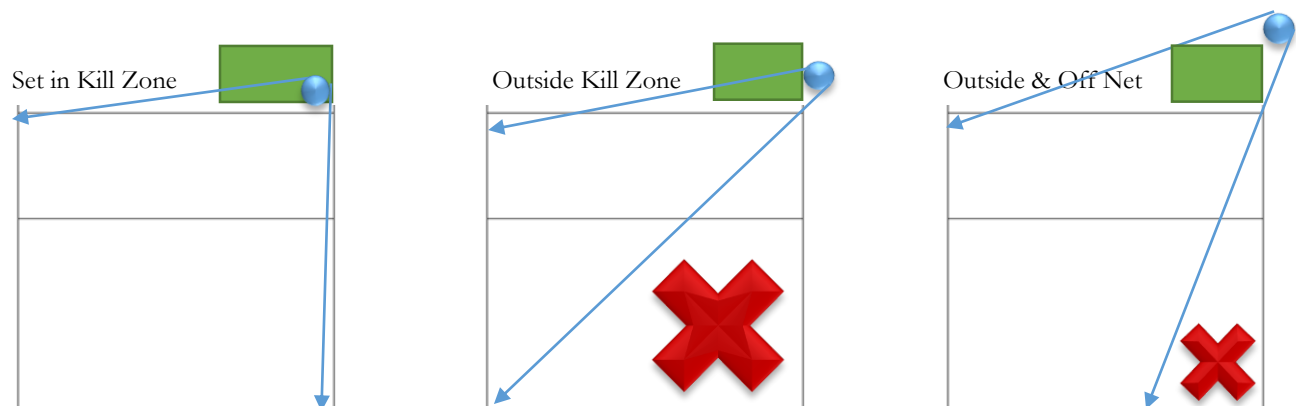
Most errors in setting, and therefore the offense, occur when you try to pinpoint the set. There is a **zone of success** for each set, or what I call the “Kill Zone” made by the setter and attacker working together. Give the hitters a range in which to expect to receive the ball, which includes a width along the net, off the net, and slight variations in speed or tempo (more later).

The attacker must be able to adjust to, and terminate, any ball set within this Kill Zone.



“A Simple Matter of Geometry”

A couple of feet can make a huge difference in your attacker’s success. Diagram 1 shows a set in the Kill Zone, with 100% of the court in play for the attacker. Diagram 2 shows a set outside of the antennae (and Kill Zone) with 1/2 of the court now taken out-of-play! Diagram 3 shows how a set outside of the antennae but off the net is somewhat better, but still almost 1/3rd of the court is taken out of play. Therefore, it is imperative that you **set the ball from the sideline – in!**



Tempo

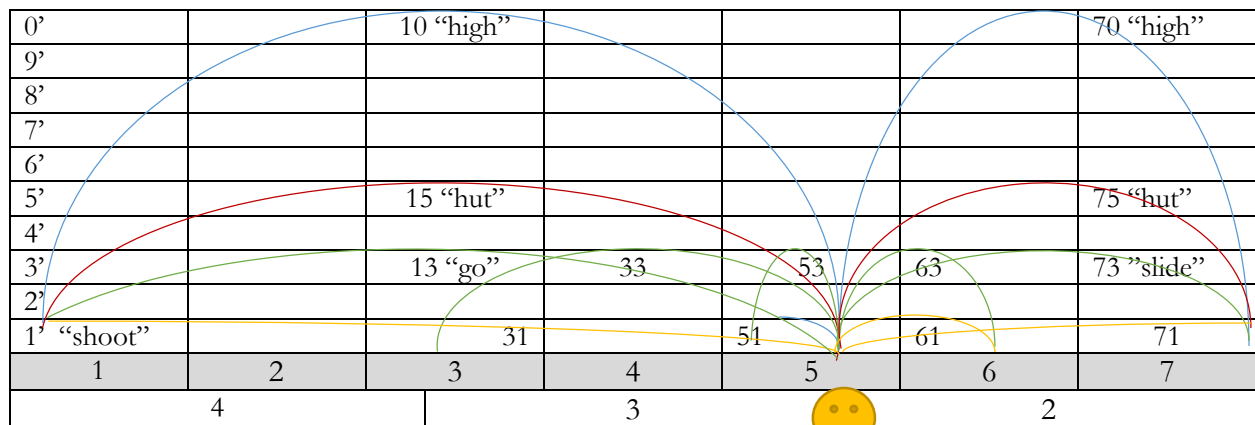
As a general rule, the faster set is better – but only to the point where the hitter can (a) contact the ball at the peak of their jump, and (b) hit all zones. A faster tempo places more demands on the defensive side. They have less time to react, set the block and defend around that block.

The illustration below shows just some of the various tempos available. Depending on the coach and offensive system employed, these **can vary greatly from team to team**. Not all teams will use a 7 zone system along the length of the net. Some may use 9 positions, others fewer. Some teams will give a specific name to specific set tempo and location – like a “high ball”, “go ball”, “shoot”, “step”, “slide”, “pipe”, “bic”, “hut” and so on. Others will use a numbering system, lettering system, or combination of both.

Example: Volleyball Numbering System

First Number = Net Position / Second Number = Set Height

Example: 31 = “3” position on net, and 1’ high.



Managing Risk

Based on the importance of the location and tempo of the set, there are ways to **manage risk** during a match, especially on non-perfect passes:

- A. It is better to set the ball too high, rather than too low.** This enables the hitter to at least adjust and get a good swing at the ball.
- B. It is better to set the ball slightly inside, rather than outside.** With high sideline sets the kill zone starts on the sideline and extends into the court for several feet. These sets should never travel outside the antenna, or over the net.
- C. It is better to set the ball off the net, than too tight.** The ball must stay off the net 1-2 feet to allow the hitters a chance to get a full swing at the ball and reduce the blockers ability to stuff the ball. As the block gets bigger, the ball must be set further off the net to allow for the attacker to create an angle around the block.

All sets, fast or not, can become reasonably high percentage plays as long as you work within your skills range and that of your attackers.

#2 The Smart Set

Once you can consistently accomplish the “hittable set”, then your role expands to executing the “smart set”. The smart set will match your teammate’s strengths to the opponent’s weaknesses, will take advantage of what your offense does best, and will effectively carry out the game plan.

A. Get Hitters Engaged

It is important to get each of your attackers into the match as early as possible. This will not only help their personal confidence, but keep the defense honest. By establishing a range of set patterns early in the match, the blockers and diggers will not be able to cheat.

B. Keep Hitters Engaged

Should an attacker make an error, it is often advisable to go back to that same attacker as soon as possible – or even with the next ball. It is important, especially early in the match, to show confidence in your hitters, and give them an opportunity for redemption and to get back on track.

C. Establish the Middle Attack

It is critical to make the opposing middle blocker honor your middle attack. If you do not establish the middle, the middle blockers will be able to release earlier and set stronger 2-3 man blocks against your outside attackers. It makes for a tough match for your outside hitters if the opposing team does not respect your middle threat.

D. Exploit the Block or Avoid the Block

Who are their blockers? Do they have a weakness in their blocking defense? Do they have a shorter player, or poor jumper, that can be exploited? Do they have a monster blocker that you want to avoid? This requires the setter, attacker and coach to communicate and relay what type set and attack (cross, line, etc.) should be executed.

E. Options 1-2-3 & 4?

What is your 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th option in each rotation? Where can you set the ball on a broken play – where are your outlets? Is there a back-row option in this rotation? This is similar to a quarterback with several receivers running different patterns – there is a first, second, and “check down” option (usually a safety valve pass) available - should the defensive coverage dictate. Often the pass quality will influence these choices. Setters must know the offensive patterns out of each rotation, which hitters are in each rotation – and how they can use their strengths.

F. Who’s Hot & Who’s Not?

When a hitter is “in the zone”, keep feeding the hot hitter. Establishing runs in volleyball is critical – so keep going back to what is working until the opponent stops it. Which hitters are having a strong game, and can be counted on to terminate the ball in key rotations and pressure situations? Which hitter looks mentally engaged and is asking for the ball?

G. Managing Risk

Know the game situation and when to try a riskier set, and when to go with the higher percentage play. This becomes more crucial in the later stages of a set or match.

#3 The Deceptive Set

The final stage in your priority hierarchy is for you to assume the burden for defeating the block. Your objectives can now include **deception** in an effort to allow your hitters to be working against less than the well formed two or even three player block.

I want to emphasize that this is far and away the last priority for a setter. A tricky set that fools the block but is not hittable is worthless. Generally, this role is beyond the skills of most young setters and will only lead to unnecessary errors. **The offense must always live within the skills and abilities of its players.** You must discipline yourself to never perform skills or tactics beyond your abilities in a match. Rather, utilize your existing skills, build upon them and add new ones with the help of your team and coach in practice.

Being deceptive or creative in sport comes **after the skill has been encoded**: First through technical competence, followed by automaticity (can perform skill without conscious thought), then fluidity (technique becomes smooth and effortless), then finally the athletes mind is free – for more complex thinking. Great athletes often describe the game as “slowing down” for them as they are able to do and see things that the average player cannot. Think of Wayne Gretzky’s ability to anticipate the play, or Magic Johnson’s ability to see the entire court.



Plays & Set Selection

Younger setters will generally have a pre-determined set pattern that they run in each rotation. More advanced teams and setters will communicate these plays verbally, or through hand signals, during the match. Some attack patterns will be run out of service reception, and others out of free-ball or down-ball situations.

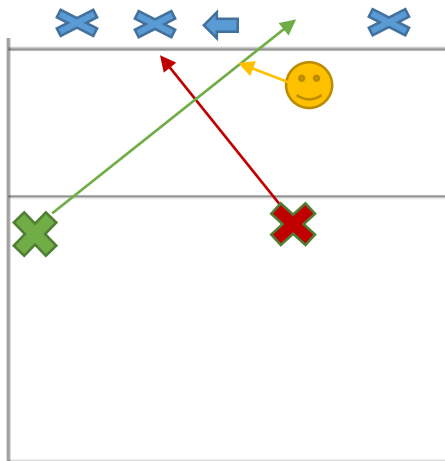


Four attack options for this setter.

Here are a few attack patterns and concepts that can put the blockers in a confused or over-matched position.

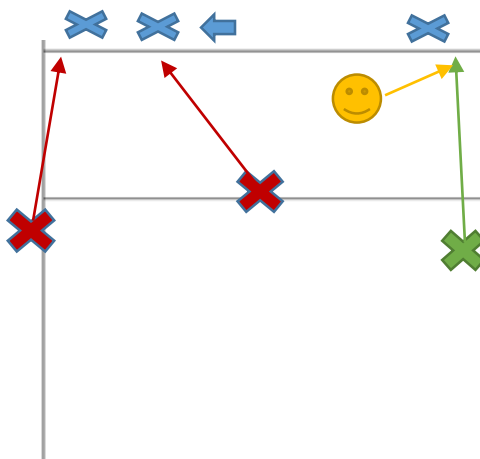
1. “Overload”

A setter may call an attack pattern that sends two hitters into one blockers zone, in an attempt to “overload” that blocker. This may be some form of tandem, causing the blocker to have to guess or choose which attacker to jump with. For example, a simple X pattern, with the RED player running a quick tempo 31, and GREEN player coming in behind for a higher 53, thus overloading the middle blocker.



2. “Isolate”

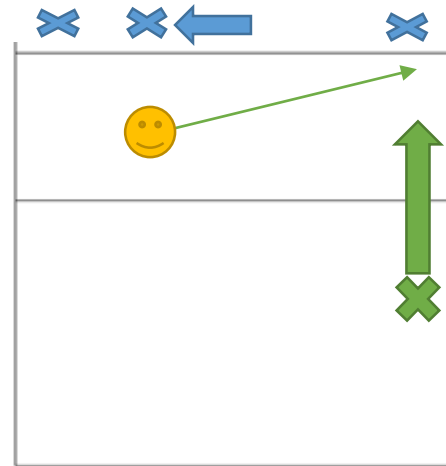
A setter will often run an attacker to a certain location, on a specific tempo, to purposefully draw the blocker with them. This can be done to eliminate a strong blocker and isolate a weaker blocker. By ensuring the blocker stays “with” the attacker, you can free up another hitter 1-on-1. For example a middle attacker runs a 31 taking the middle blocker with them, while the first option is to set the Right-Side hitter a 73 and create a 1-on1 advantage.



3. “Against the Flow”

When a pass or dig forces you to move toward the power hitter, a back-set to the right-side hitter is often the best play. The blockers will naturally follow the setter and flow of the play, so setting “against the flow” can create a 1-on-1 situation.

Similarly, if you are pushed to position 1 or 2, the long set to the right-side/power hitter is often the best option. Again, the middle blockers tendency is often to follow the setter and flow of the play. Setting against this flow is a smart option.



4. Setter Dump “Attack”

Referred to as a “dump”, the setter needs to be able to attack the second contact over the net from time to time. This is often used by front-row setters who receive a tight pass. However, by using it only as an emergency play, you lose out on the offensive power behind this skill. You should think of it as an **attack option**.

It is preferred to SET the tight pass, and ATTACK the perfect pass. If you reserve the setter attack for only imperfect over-passes, it becomes predictable and the opponent will react. This second-ball attack should not be over-used, but should be a weapon in your arsenal to keep them guessing, and keep the middle blocker honest.

When executing, use a firm hand and a quick wrist. Avoid using your elbow as a lever because this “slam dunk” technique will usually get you called for a throw or net violation. The wrist should be in neutral position, and not extended backwards – or you will likely be called for a lift.

Remember Where You Are!

Know at all times if you are front-row or back-row, and be prepared to react as needed!

- Where is the hole if you need to attack the second contact? Coaches can communicate this.
- Can you turn to block if the ball is over-passed?
- Do you need to save the ball with one hand?

Conclusion on Priorities

Setting needs to become a very high percentage skill that will hopefully lead to a minimum number of errors in the offense. Therefore, remember to be technically sound (the hittable set) first, perceptive (the smart set) second, and then creative (the deceptive set) third. You will naturally extend your limits over time and through experience.

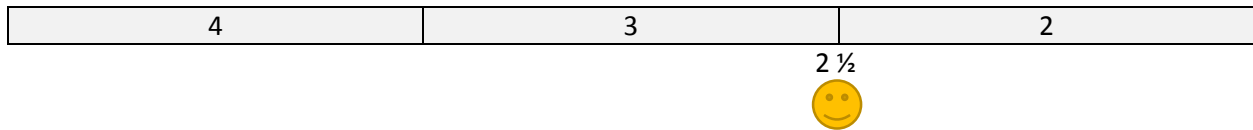
6 Essential Technical Elements

Here are the key technical elements, or cues, to becoming a great setter.

1. Quick to Base

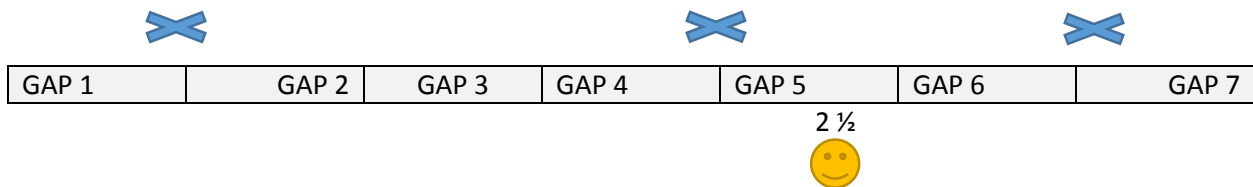
Whether on a penetration out of service reception, or in transition on a free-ball/down-ball, get to your ideal setter spot, or “base”, **before the ball is passed**. Generally this is court position 2 ½.

Court Positions



Position 2 ½ is the spot on the court that best separates the hitters attack zones, the opposing blockers, and creates “gaps” to attack.

“Gaps” Between Blockers



*Set selection should attack the GAPS between the blockers of the opposing team.

Trust your passers to put the ball to the Base. Laziness in getting to your base (perhaps not trusting your passers) can lead to your drifting toward the net on a perfectly passed ball. You want to be able to jump out and away from the net on a high tight ball and intercept its path, not drift toward the net. By jogging slowly to your base, your momentum is moving in the wrong direction as the pass is made – and you have to stop and reverse direction to react to the pass.

Demand an accurate pass, by presenting a physical target with your body, right hand raised, and voice cues. Be balanced, athletic and ready to move in all directions.

2. Quick to the Ball

The setter must read the pass or dig trajectory early, and move quickly to get their body balanced under the ball. This is imperative, especially when your middle attacker is using your position to judge their approach. If you are late in moving to the ball, **the hitter's approach is also compromised**. Your attackers need to adjust their approach angles based on where the ball is going to be set from. The earlier you get under the ball, the better they can read the approach angle needed.

3. Square & Stable

You should be square to your target and stable when you contact the ball. This means with the upper body (shoulders), and hips. If the ball is consistently off in one direction you should check your alignment. The feet form a stable platform, while the shoulders are more critical for good direction. The ideal is feet, hips and shoulders all facing the direction of the set (see photo).

If the ball is not going where you want it to, drifting or coming up short, it is likely you are either not square, or still moving during the set. Certainly it is unavoidable to be moving at times, but all effort must be made to be stopped at the moment of contact.



Footwork Pattern

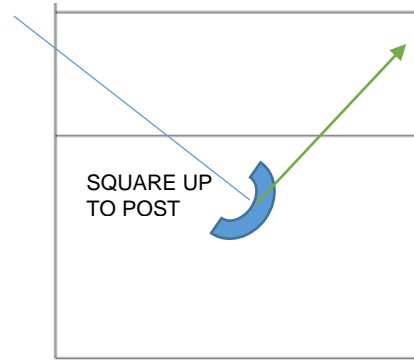
Footwork Pattern is Right-Left, with the right foot acting as your **pivot** foot when needed. The left foot rotates around with the hips squaring-up to the target. Another way to think about the footwork is using “Right-Left-Load”. The “load” being a strong athletic and balanced posture to generate power behind the set – knees flexed and ready to extend simultaneously with the arms.

The right foot, closest to the net, should be a little ahead of the left. This slightly opens your hips and shoulders **into the court** and helps keep the set from drifting too tight or over the net. The right foot slightly forward also allows for you to open up to your middle attacker (see photo).

On longer sets, the set should be made with a weight transfer off the back foot and onto the front - pushing through the ball to maintain an effective line of force from the floor, through the body, to the point of ball release. You must become comfortable and consistent with this foot position so you wind up with correctly planted feet every time.

Back-Setting: Exception to the Rule

When back-setting from a preferred base position in 2 ½, similar principles apply. Squared shoulders and hips are important. However, when pulled off the net the setter should **still** square up to the power/left-side, and extend over their right shoulder to perform the back-set. The left court “post” is often a good marker to use when aligning for a back set. The reason for this is to not telegraph the back-set, but to **remain deceptive** in your intentions.



*It is important to emphasize that the ball should still be contacted in the same consistent position in your midline (on every set) – it is the **follow-through over the right shoulder only** that changes.

4. Hands Shape the Ball

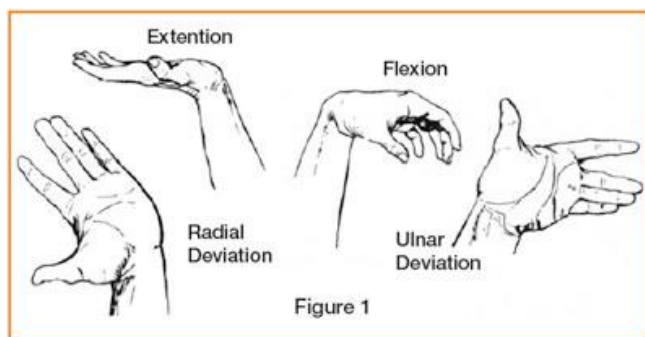
Your hands must simply be shaped like a volleyball consistently before contact. Wrists are “extended” back with slight radial deviation (tilt toward thumb/radial side).

One of the best ways to practice this shaping of the hands is to pick a ball up off the ground with this hand position. It forces the thumbs to surround the ball and maximizes the web space between the index fingers and thumbs.



All fingers and thumbs should make contact with the ball. This creates a larger pocket and more control. The outside fingers help control any spin on the ball. So surround the ball with a large pocket.

This “shape” needs to become rote. Hours of setting to oneself at home is probably the best way for it to become automatic.



The “Soft Set?”

Don’t think about absorption at the wrists for the “soft set”, or worry about the “sound” of the set. The wrists should be extended back **before** contact. Slight wrist and finger absorption will happen **naturally** as the ball hits the pocket. You want strong, firm hands – not stiff - with a slight amount of natural absorption. The ball should rebound quickly out of the pocket.

5. Consistent Contact Point

A consistent point of contact is critical. It creates the ability to go in every possible direction with the ball. A contact point approximately 10-15cm above the forehead (hairline) is preferred. It is important that you take the ball from a consistent position to allow the hitters to accurately judge the speed of release for good timing. Inconsistent contact points mean different trajectories to the same sets and poor timing for the hitters. It also ensures you have adequate elbow extension and power. As you get stronger, the ability to set the ball from a slightly higher position improves.

Elbows should point out comfortably at an angle of approximately 45 degrees. This should be a natural position if you are “shaping the ball” properly with your hands. A common error is having the elbows pointing straight out to the sides – which (1) tends to pull your pinkies off of the ball, and (2) make full extension and follow-through more difficult. Try it and see. Pointing your thumbs down more toward the bridge of your nose also will help bring your elbows into a better position.

Contact the ball too far in front of the face or nose, and it is difficult to back-set without extending your back & neck excessively, thus telegraphing the back-set.

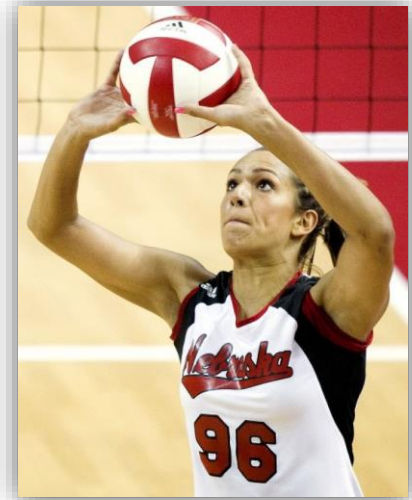
Finally, **presenting your hands early** will help avoid “poking” at the ball. Sight the ball through your hands – as if to be looking through a viewfinder - as it lands in the pocket.

Whether on your feet, in the air, or on your back, contact with the ball needs to be from a consistent neutral position, to get consistent results.

Midline Release

The primary cause of a double hit in setting, is taking the ball outside of your midline. Reaching for the ball to the right or left, causes the shoulders, and therefore hands, to become uneven.

Should the ball be tight to the net, it is better to turn your back to the net – and face your court – and still try to take the ball in your midline. This will also help prevent your right elbow from hitting the net (see photo).



6. Follow-Through to Target

You should extend completely with your arms on virtually every set. This full extension will greatly increase accuracy and help you look the same no matter where the ball is headed.

A great setter will have a consistent pattern for both middle/quick sets, and outside/high sets – making the set more deceptive to read.

Hands, arms and legs extend through the set.

Depending on force needed, particularly on long cross-court sets, a forward step may be used to transfer more weight and power behind the ball. This is not ideal when at the net, as it may interfere with your middle attacker.

Palms face or point to target on finish. Setters should exaggerate this follow-through and “hold” it longer to ensure they are doing it correctly every repetition.

Follow-through is critical in virtually all athletic skills. It generates maximum force and accuracy. If you are stopping your follow-through early, it is engaging muscles that are working in the opposite direction. Compare the follow-throughs of Shaquille O’Neil and Ray Allen if you are not convinced.



Jump Setting

Jump setting can be a tremendous advantage in many respects. Once the setter can **consistently deliver the hittable set** (remember this is your first priority) from a stable grounded base, a jump set is the next progression.

The basic principles of jump setting are the same. A stable body is still required under the ball, therefore the setter must anticipate early and ensure the jump is timed properly.

Why should all setters eventually learn to jump set?

1. Faster Tempo

Jump setting speeds up the attack tempo. The ball is contacted or intercepted earlier, from a higher point, thus quickening the overall time from your hands to the attackers hand. This may be a fraction of a second, but makes a significant difference to the overall tempo, and more difficult for the opposing block to adjust.



2. Trouble Sets

Jump setting is a significant advantage in saving trouble passes that are too high or close to the net. The ability to intercept the pass trajectory going over the net can save several balls each match. This should be drilled in practice along with other regular setting drills.

Start by jump setting the middle/quick attack in practice. However, in a game situation you do not want to only jump set the middle and not the outside attack. This is a dead give-away to the opposing block. Yes, using the jump set to “save” an over-pass is a better alternative than the opposing hitter slamming the ball back.



3. Deception & The Setter Attack

The ability to attack the second-ball when in the front row is heightened if you **jump set regularly**. The opposing blockers do not know whether or not you're jumping to set the ball, or to attack it. It keeps the blocker “honest” and they are not able to release early.

Back Row Fake

What if you are penetrating from the **back-row**, and the pass is going over the net? Rather than stand hopelessly as the opposing blocker crushes the ball back at your team, you can fake the set, and let the ball pass over/through your hands. If they are expecting to you to jump set, they may be fooled and think you are able to take the ball. It may affect their timing. You can also turn in the air, fake an attempt to block, pulling your hands down at the last second – which may cause them to make a poor hit or error. Not ideal, but better than eating the ball.

5 Key Mental Skills for Setters

Just like physical skills, there are specific mental skills that must be drilled, practiced and perfected to become a great setter. Many of these simply come with court time and thousands of repetitions.

1. Intelligence

The setter must have a high volleyball IQ. So what does this mean exactly?

- An understanding of the general flow and transitions of the game.
- Knowledge of all rotations, service reception and attack patterns out of each rotation.
- Ability to make split second decisions.
- Ability to assimilate information from the sidelines/coaches and translate it into action.

2. “See the Whole Court”

One of the best ways to describe what is needed from the setter is an ability to “see the whole court”. This implies understanding the team’s physical and emotional status - outside of your own personal performance. **It is an outward focus.** This is a key quality of leaders in general.

3. Self-Confidence

A certain amount of “healthy narcissism” can be a good thing in sport. You must carry a confidence and belief that you have the “best hands” and simply cannot make a ball handling error. You must know you can deliver the “hittable ball” every time; that you can and will get to every pass and dig; that you can lead your team to victory through stable consistent performance and leadership.

4. Broad Shoulders

While everyone understands the imperative for the hitter to **make the most of every set** – regardless of quality – it remains on your shoulders to accept the result of the attack as well. I am certainly not implying that you apologize if the attack is unsuccessful. However, a setter can never get into a confrontational situation with the hitter. You should seek feedback periodically from the hitters and try to give them what they want. **This should be done primarily in practice.** With this mindset, you continue to push yourself to higher levels of excellence. I have yet to see a benefit when the setter and hitter get into a verbal dual during a match - “higher!”, “lower!”, “too tight!”, “you’re too late!”, “jump closer to me!”, “approach earlier”, and so on. You will simply have to absorb the hitter’s frustration from time to time, and take it onto your broad shoulders.

5. Emotional Stability

As a setter you must be emotionally stable and **not exhibit dramatic highs or lows** which could easily affect the team. You must look for the good things in every play, whether the point ends up for or against you. You must avoid looking frustrated when the play, set or match is not going your way. All eyes are on the setter for this leadership. Show confidence – whether up or down.

“Nevers”

Never catch a passed ball in practice.

It shows a lack of respect for the passers, and sends a message of laziness. You want your passers to know you will work to bail them out, and in turn, they will work harder for you.

Never use a forearm pass in practice when you can possibly get to it with your hands.

Even if the result from a forearm pass might be superior. Practice and drill situations are the time to work on quickness and setting balls from the most difficult positions on the court.

Never give up on a tight set or over-pass.

Always treat the passes in practice as “game-like” and work on converting trouble passes into hittable sets. This is the time to perfect your saves on the net. If the pass is clearly going over the net – turn, jump and work on blocking the over-pass. These “recovery” skills are used frequently in matches, and can make a 2-3 point difference in a single set. Therefore, these skills must be drilled in practice just like any other setting technique.

Never quit on a ball.

At certain times in a match, the setter will have to call for “help” on an errant pass or dig. The team then goes into their “out-of-system” mode. This is often preferred, as another player may be in a much better position to make a quality set. During practice however, a setter should try to set as many of these poorer passes as possible. It is great practice for your quickness and athletic ability – so **stretch your limits** and try to take every 2nd ball possible.



Attackers Responsibility

Obviously the setter has a lot to think about and execute. So what does this mean to the attackers on the court?

Attackers must fulfill their responsibility to:

- Terminate any ball within the “kill zone”.
- Know your plays and attack patterns cold.
- Know your rotations. Never make the setter have to direct you into your proper service reception spot, unless the setter or coach has made an adjustment mid-set.
- Make eye contact with your setter while in service reception. Don’t make the setter work to “get your attention” between points. They may be calling a specific play or attack pattern, and they have other attackers to communicate with as well.
- Exude confidence to your setter that you are ready to terminate the ball.
- Get in position for your approach, whether out of serve receive, or in transition.
- Be ready to receive every set from any court location.



Pre-Match Preparation

Does a NFL quarterback warm up the same way as his receivers? Of course not. **Warm up like a setter.** Too many setters simply fall in line with the team, and spend time warming up their hitting shoulders, and playing pepper. While pepper may be a great pre-game warm-up, the setter must ensure their specific routine matches the movements demanded in the game.

Physical Preparation – Tune your Instruments!

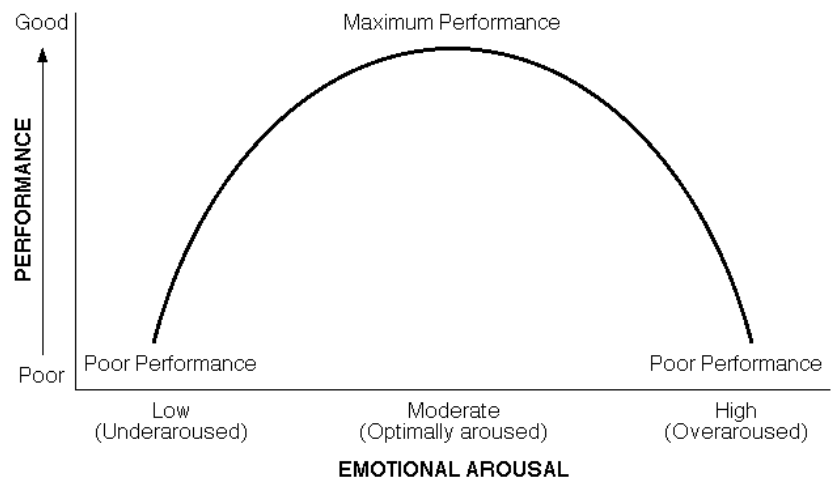
Your hands are your instruments, and it is your responsibility to prepare them accordingly. Spend twice as much time on warming up your hands and getting into a setting rhythm. This could be setting against a wall rapidly until your hands and fingers are full of blood and warm. Doing narrow push-ups for the triceps/extensors used in setting. Setters should ideally warmup together. Work with the other setter on various tempo sets, setting from both your feet and jump setting.

Perform quick footwork patterns – do some direction changes, cross-overs, side-to side movements to ensure you are ready to MOVE!

Mental Preparation

Are you a player that needs high emotional arousal before a match, or are you better off staying more relaxed and composed.

Setters should **spend some quiet time** reflecting and visualizing the match. Picture the flow of the game, and go over the rotations in your mind. This may include finding a quiet space by yourself 30-40 minutes before the match. This may also include talking to your coach(s) about match strategy.



“Know Your Court”

Know the court you are playing on - home or away. Great setters have great court awareness. Before a match, ensure you have jogged around the perimeter of the court a few times. Take note of: how far the benches are from the sideline (i.e. how much room you have to retrieve errant passes), how the lights in the gym are oriented. Are there any beams that run parallel or perpendicular to the net for orientation? Are there any obstructions on the ceiling? How tight is the net? Setters have to rescue balls out of the net frequently – and you should know how the ball will react on hard and soft balls hit into the net. Does it come off high or low, fast or slow?

Mentors & Modelling

Almost everyone you ask will say they have some role model in their life. A role model is something that is very hard to define, and who your role model is will depend as much on you as it does on the person you admire. Many student athletes tend to look up to people within the sports world. They inspire us to work hard and give us the drive to push boundaries to succeed in sport and life.

If you stop and consider who most influences you now, and why, you'll no doubt agree that the people you admire now are giving you your most important life lessons. Of course we need to pick our role models carefully. No one is perfect, and often what you see is just a glimpse of the whole person. However, you can emulate or admire certain traits or characteristics of a person or athlete without resorting to "hero worship". Who do you most admire? A teacher, a world leader, a neighbor, a parent, a coach, a fellow student, an Olympian?

Modelling the actions of the best setters is a powerful way to learn. Use video to watch the greatest setters in action. **Study their movements, mannerisms, and leadership skills.** Use photos, and watch models in person.

Taped Fingers

One of my inspirations as a young high school volleyball player was the Japanese Setter Katsutoshi Nekoda. Our coach had us watch film of the Japanese team over and over again to study their complex offense. I kept my eyes fixated on Nekoda. I even started taping my fingers to emulate him – something I have done throughout my entire volleyball life.

Nekoda retired in 1980, and died of stomach cancer in 1983. In 2001, the Federation Internationale de Volleyball (FIVB) announced the male and female volleyball players of the century. Here are the final lists, and the eventual winners.

Women's Final List

Regla Torres, Cuba (1992-00) - Winner
 Lang Ping, China (1981-84)
 Inna Ryskal, USSR (1964-76)
 Fernanda Venturini, Brazil (1986-96)

Men's Final List

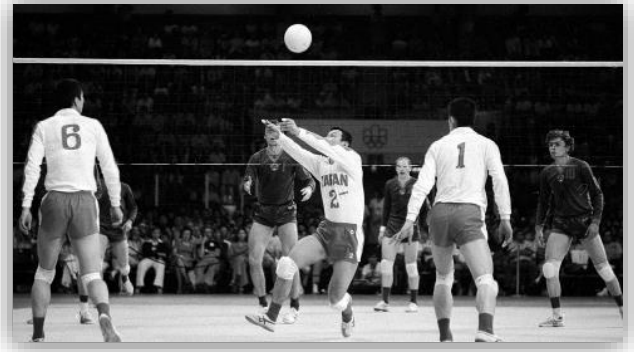
Charles 'Karch' Kiraly, USA — Co-winner
 Lorenzo Bernardi, Italy — Co-winner
 Hugo Conte, Argentina (1982-00)
 Renan Dalzotto, Brazil (1982-88)
Katsutoshi Nekoda, Japan (1964-77)
 Josef Musil, Czech Republic (1952-1968)
 Konstantin Reva, USSR (1949-56)
 Tomas Wojtowicz, Poland (1974-76)

The Untold Story of How Japan Changed Volleyball

By Giulio Gasparin. Published: 16 May 2014

The tragic events of Munich 1972 will never be forgotten and for many people it will be hard to look back at these Games and think of something else, but it was the year Japan forever changed volleyball.

After taking bronze in 1964 and silver in 1968, Japan finally won the gold for men's event in 1972, but in order to defeat the physically stronger teams of Eastern Europe, Japan had to come up with a true revolution.



The core of this revolution is to be found in one of the greatest setters this sport has ever witnessed: Katsutoshi Nekoda.

His accuracy and speed in the setting, both unseen before his debut with the Nipponese team, gave him the name of “Nakoda calculator of Japan.”

The Japanese team realized that if they wanted to stand a chance against the Soviet giants and their colleagues of German Democratic Republic and Bulgaria, they needed to find a way to spike with no blockers or one at most.

At a time when the best teams in the world were relying on their players' height and power, setters were asked to set high and clean balls mostly to zone two and four - the two “sides” of the net in the front line. It was then the duty of the hitters to strike over the other team's block or deceive it with a dump. Their game was linear, quite monotonous but extremely effective. Team Japan knew that they were inferior in this kind of game, so they had to mix things up, and this they did.

In their offence, the setter, Nekoda, was the key to the system. He had a very deceptive release of the ball with his back to the net varying positions of his hands. The tall blockers from GDR, in the final, could not read his intentions and often were caught out of position, allowing the Japanese hitters to attack free of any block. Moreover, the Nipponese team was playing with two quick hitters, contrary to the usual one and that allowed them to speed up their game. The introduction of feints and pipes attacks from the second line contributed in the making of the greatest revolution in the game of volleyball, which was not inducted by a rule change.

In the final there was little the East German team could do after the successful first set. In the second set, the complexity of Japanese schemes completely annihilated the Germans who won only two points.

Nekoda and Japanese best hitter, Seiji Oko, led the Nipponese team to the first Olympic gold of their history and, most of all, gave the first push towards the modern, fast and creative game of volleyball. Ever since, all over the world, teams started to study Japanese technique and schemes, and nowadays there is no club that is not playing this kind of volley that more than 40 years ago they invented.

Setters Must Carry the Ball . . . Literally

We can learn a lot from basketball players. Rarely do you see an aspiring hoopster without a ball. **You simply must own a volleyball and carry it with you.** Set against every wall you can find. Set onto the roof at home, and anticipate where it will drop. Set to yourself 100 times before falling asleep on your bed. Seek out partners to play pepper with in the park. The more you touch the ball – the more it becomes part of you.

My first volleyball coach gave me a ball to keep on the first day of practice. He knew I needed to handle it constantly. I have two of my favorites, from 30 years ago, in my office today. My Voit basketball affectionately named “Old Smoothie” after I had worn off the rubber coating and the threads started to protrude. I dribbled this basketball to school every morning. The other is a well-worn volleyball named “Kaizen” (constant improvement) that has seen hundreds of hours of pepper in parks and on beaches all over Canada and the US. Both are now too crusty and fragile to use any longer, but carry fond memories for me.



Find a ball, name it, and take it everywhere. “Wilson!”



Conclusion

Since you control more of the game than anyone else, you will be getting more attention from the coaches and must work harder. There is no key to success like correct technique practiced over and over again. Setting an offense is a joint project with your coach, who will help you with the technique and tactics, as well as with your attackers who are awaiting your sets.

While not covered in this session, it is my belief that the setter must be the best conditioned and most well-rounded athlete on the team. First and foremost in terms of quickness and athleticism. Setters should strive to finish first in all drills involving speed and quickness. Outside of all of the physical and mental challenges of setting, you also must be accomplished in the other basics of the game, including serving, passing, digging, blocking and so on.

Teams rarely exceed the abilities of their setters. It is an extremely challenging position to master . . . which is why we love it.