



SYSTEMATIC OBSERVATION OF COACH FEEDBACK IN ELITE YOUTH VOLLEYBALL

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BACKGROUND

What is the most effective way to coach the game of volleyball to high school aged girls competing in competitive club volleyball? What this study advocates is a balanced approach to coaching the game of volleyball that will be reflected in the kind of feedback coaches give to their players. The traditional model, which values teaching techniques over tactics, has over-prioritized the amount of time spent on technique development apart from its contextual relevance in a game situation. Rovegno (1995) and Maxwell (2003) have argued that the coaching of technique and the coaching of tactics should be inseparable. A finely tuned motor response as an adaptation to a decision made on the court in real time is what the coach seeks and what athletes and spectators would define as a great play. Rovegno brilliantly frames the essential need for more focus upon tactical decision-making skills by stating, "rather than controlling the complexity of performing in a motor activity by controlling the complexity of the coordination and control demands of efficiency, coaches should control complexity by controlling the environmental demands themselves"

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What kind of coach feedback (or combination of coach feedback types) is most effective during a time-out in volleyball to positively affect the setter's performance, as measured by the Game Performance Assessment Instrument (GPAI), in a volleyball match?
2. Is there a difference in the most effective type of coach feedback during time-outs for higher skilled setters versus for lower skilled setters or is it similar for both groups?
3. For both of the above questions, does any combination of the coach feedback independent variables yield significant results regarding optimal coach feedback strategies as they relate to: a) overall game performance of the setter, b) skill performance of the setter, and c) decision-making performance of the setter?

PURPOSE

This study examined the extent to which coach feedback strategies affect player performance in the game of volleyball.

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES (Coach Feedback)

- 1) technical feedback with an internal focus
- 2) technical feedback with an external focus
- 3) tactical feedback with an internal focus ("us"-our team)
- 4) tactical feedback with an external focus ("them"-our opponent)
- 5) use of encouraging remarks versus discouraging remarks

PARTICIPANTS

110 coaches from a population of coaches of over 350 16-18 yr old club volleyball teams were selected for the study.

In addition, performance data was gathered from setters of those teams during tournament play. Setters were evaluated on setter performance for the four rallies before the time-out and the four rallies immediately after the time-out. The GPAI measured setter positioning, decision making, and skill execution.

INSTRUMENTS

Coach Time-Out Observation Instrument (CTOOI) was used during 89 team time-outs to record coach feedback

Game Performance Assessment Instrument (GPAI) evaluated setter performance for the four rallies before the time-out and the four rallies immediately after the time-out. The GPAI measured setter positioning, decision making, and skill execution.

RESULTS

(High-skilled Setters)

Coach time-out feedback that was focused on both technical-internal and on tactical information regarding the opponent was significant ($p = .03$) and increased the overall performance scores of higher skilled setters.

(Low-skilled Setters)

Coach time-out feedback that was focused on encouraging remarks, more than discouraging remarks, significantly improved ($p = .05$) lower skilled setters' decision-making scores on the court.

DISCUSSION

This study has demonstrated that modifications of coach feedback strategies should be made when working with lower skilled setters in a competitive environment. At the same time, this study has also demonstrated that the more in-tune the setter is to tactical cues when she is performing at a higher level, the greater her overall performance is going to be. It is important to be aware of the stage of learning that the athlete is in and to understand the type of constraints that are most detrimental or beneficial to the learner at any given point in time. Coach feedback to volleyball setters during time-outs in a competitive match should take into account when a performance is not going well and should be modified to be more encouraging and less technical or tactical at that point in time when performance is subpar. In the game, a coach becoming frustrated over the disparity in skill between his/her own players and the opponents and expressing that verbally to one's players has a negative effect. In the same instance, the infusion of tactical strategies or technical detail is just as detrimental.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. For the lower skilled setter, most, if not all, feedback should be directed towards encouragement.
2. Coaches of higher skilled setters should focus time-out feedback more on tactical information about the opponent and less on tactical information about their own team.
3. In general, coach feedback during time-outs that focuses tactically on the opponent and technically on internally controlled movements can positively improve overall setter performance from before to after the time-out.