

# USA VOLLEYBALL'S ATHLETE HANDBOOK: Building competence and confidence for Sustained Competitive Excellence

Welcome to the exciting world of volleyball and to this sample of the **Athlete Competency Handbook**, a publication developed by USA Volleyball's leadership which includes the USA Coaching Accreditation Program Cadre and Staff, the Sports Medicine and Performance Commission, and the American Volleyball Coaches Association.

USA Volleyball (USAV) strives to have as many people play and enjoy the sport of volleyball as possible while reaching a level of personal excellence. This **Athlete Competency Handbook** has been prepared to help you achieve that goal.

To bring you this information, USAV has worked with many dedicated experts who coach, play, Manage, and study athletic performance. This handbook will tell you what you need to know, what you need to practice and what you should be able to do in competition as you journey through the [athlete pipeline](#). Everyone is different in many ways, including individual talent. Even people with the same volleyball background will not be identical.

In this on-line sample, USA Volleyball will give you a sneak peek at our **Athlete Competency Handbook**. You will be exposed to specific skills/guidelines that will help you in becoming the best volleyball player you can be. Each phase indicates a range of years and experience that are approximated. Many of you will advance more quickly!

## HELPFUL TIPS:

- This information applies to both female and male athletes who play volleyball indoors and outdoors.
- The athlete competencies in this handbook are divided into four domains within each of the six developmental phases. These include **Athlete Skills, Physical Development Skills, Personal, Social and Team Skills**, and **Game Skills**. At every stage of your development, coaches will help you to improve your skills in each domain.
- The physical development competencies are based on age and maturation while all other competencies are based on your playing and volleyball experience.
- Two other resources are in development - a handbook for parents/guardians and one for coaches that will strongly support your improvement as you progress through each phase of training and competitive play.

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## **Phase I: Initial Entry (no volleyball experience)**

In the beginning stages, you are going to learn the basic skills, terminology, and rules of the game and how to use those skills in competition. Many of you will be experiencing organized, competitive volleyball for the first time and may be playing in your elementary school, YWCA, YMCA, Boys & Girls Club, church youth leagues, or local recreational leagues.

The following represents an example of the skill competencies you will need to accomplish in this phase:

### **Passing**

- How to watch and follow a ball and move to it quickly.
- How to get into a medium high body ready position.
- How to meet the ball with a balanced “base” and arms held together like a “platform”.

At this stage of your **Physical Development** (8 to 10 years of age) you should learn to control and move your body in a balanced position quickly and efficiently. You should also learn how to perform simple strength and flexibility exercises to begin conditioning your body for volleyball.

During this phase of your development as a volleyball player you will also need to learn and practice the remaining basic skills including those of movement, attacking, setting, serving, blocking and digging. You should also receive training in the area of **Game Play Skills** as well as in the **Personal, Social, and Team Skills** you will need to advance to the next level.

After you master the skills outlined in this phase, you will be ready to move on to **Phase II: Developing**.

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## **Phase II: Developing** ***(3-6 years of volleyball experience)***

Congratulations on your advancement to this level! You are no longer a beginner and are ready to move on to more advanced skills and a more complete understanding of the game of volleyball. Many of you may be practicing and playing in 12 and under as well as 14 and under age divisions, Girl and Boy Scouts, elementary, middle or junior high school levels of competition.

The following represents an example of the skill competencies you will learn in this phase in your development:

### **Hitting/Spiking**

- How to use proper footwork in a full, running approach with a big back and forward armswing for a higher jump and more power.
- How to hit different attack shots (cross-court, line, tip).
- How to adjust the footwork and timing of your approach to fit different positions in an offensive system.

During this phase of your **Physical Development** (11 to 13 years of age) you will work on conditioning your body for the demands of volleyball and to avoid injury. You should also work to improve your vertical jump and your spiking power. It is also important for you to develop the ability to hit effectively from different body positions during game play situations.

Now that you have the basics of the fundamental skills behind you, you will be ready to learn more advanced techniques in all of the other skill areas as well: passing, setting, serving, blocking and digging. You will begin to understand and use more complex **Game Skills** and strategies in competitive situations. You should also work to improve your **Personal, Social and Team** cooperation skills as well.

When you have adequately accomplished these skills, you will be ready to move on to the next level in your development - **Phase III: Emerging**.

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### **Phase III: Emerging (6-9 years of volleyball experience)**

If you are a player at this level, you have already learned the six fundamental skills and the fundamentals of team play. Now is the time to polish those skills further and to add some complimentary skills and abilities that will help you become a more competitive player. Many of you 16 and under, middle school and junior/senior high school students may be practicing and competing at this level.

The following is an example of one skill competency you will be working to achieve during this stage in your development as a volleyball player:

#### **Setting**

- How to jump-set and get the proper timing between your set and the hitter.
- How to set a hittable ball consistently to all positions.
- How to set using the forearm pass.
- How to set from an off balance position and from off the net.

In this phase of your **Physical Development** (14 to 16 years of age) you will learn how to recover quickly to a balanced ready position to be prepared for the next on court action. You will also learn how to train on a year round basis with resistance, plyometrics, and stretching programs to improve your conditioning level and avoid injuries.

In addition to refining your skills in setting, you will also increase your abilities to perform the skills of passing, attacking, serving, blocking, and digging. You will also increase understanding, performance and use of **Game Play Skills**, strategies, goal setting and active support of teammates in game situations. You will learn more about important topics such as psychological and mental skills, cooperation and leadership, court vision and awareness and time management.

Once you have refined all your volleyball skills in this phase, you will be prepared to move on to the next level - **Phase IV: Competitive.**

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## **Phase IV: Competitive (9-12 years of volleyball experience)**

You have been practicing and playing volleyball for a number of years now and you are ready to become an advanced player. Many of you will be entering college now. Many of you may be training and competing in 18 and under age group competition, as well as high school or possibly the Youth National Team.

Following is an example of a skill competency you will be working on during this phase of your development:

### **Serving**

- How to jump serve to specific zones.
- How to serve jump floaters.
- How to serve hard from a deep serving position.

At this stage (17 to 19 years of age) your **Physical Development** should include more advanced explosive weight training, advanced plyometric drills and advanced speed and agility training for foot and arm quickness. You should also include volleyball specific mobility training in a year round conditioning program.

In order for you to advance through this phase to the next level, you will need to consistently and effectively perform each of the other skills of passing, attacking, setting, blocking, and digging. You will also need to master the game skills of playing within your strengths and weaknesses to achieve consistently positive results. You must also train yourself to perform each of the skills automatically on the court in **Game Play** situations.

In your **Personal, Social and Team** development you should take ownership of your own conditioning levels, learn to maintain a positive attitude and contribute your maximum effort whether conditioning, practicing or competing. During this time, you may also be thinking about and planning for your post-interscholastic athletic and career goals. You should make yourself aware of the college recruiting process and the regulations that apply for each Junior or Community College, NAIA or NCAA Division or level in which you are interested.

Having mastered the skills necessary at this level, you are now ready to progress to **Phase V: High Performance**.

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## **Phase V: High Performance (12-15 years of volleyball training and competing)**

At this stage in your development, you have probably been playing volleyball for 12 or more years and the basic skills of the sport have become automatic. You are at ease with the more complex aspects of the game and you are well experienced in highly competitive competition. During this phase, you may be training as a part of the Junior National Team, the World University Games team or part of a national caliber collegiate program.

The following is an example of the type of competencies you will be working to achieve in this stage:

### **Match Skills**

- How to perform at a consistently high level from one competition to the next.
- How to attain a broadened understanding of the game.
- How to not only minimize your weaknesses and maximize your strengths, but quickly recognize them in your opponents and use them to your team's advantage.

Your **Physical Development** skills and abilities in this phase (20 to 24 years of age) should include maximum plyometric, strength and power resistance training for high level conditioning. You should also include training for maximum quickness, speed, and agility through resisted and assisted movement drills. Your focus should be on avoiding the potential for injury through use of a thorough stretching and conditioning program, as well as on utilizing proper nutrition and ethical methods to aid in recovery from the demands of intense physical training and conditioning.

In order to accomplish your playing goals at this level and move on, you must also develop advanced skills in passing, attacking, setting, serving, blocking, and digging. Your **Personal, Social and Team** skills should include a focus on competition with yourself to become the best player you can be, learning and adapting socially appropriate behavior, deepening your commitment to volleyball. It is also important for you to develop self-reliance and self-determination, display excellent sports behavior and to accept your responsibility as a role model for younger athletes, both on and off the court.

Now that you have accomplished your goals at this stage of your development as a volleyball player, you are ready to advance to the highest levels of training and competition -- **Phase VI: World Class / International.**

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## **Phase VI: World Class/International (15+ years of volleyball training and competing)**

You are now among that limited number of athletes from which our national team will be selected for international competitions, including the World Championships and the Olympic Games. During this phase, you may be training and competing on the A2 Team, in Professional Leagues and/or possibly the National Team. For you, the highest standards of performance and success at the world class level are the only goals.

In this final phase of your development, you will continue to refine your skills in all competency areas. Following is an example:

### **Blocking**

- How to always contact the ball on opponent's side of the net.
- How to read an opponent's offense and critically evaluate it with respect to blocking schemes and tactics.
- How to read and commit block according to each situation(s).

Your **Physical Development** goal at this stage (25 years and older) should be to achieve and maintain maximum strength, power, quickness and endurance levels, while maximizing recovery abilities and avoiding over-use injuries.

For your goals as a player at this level to become reality, you must also continue to learn and perform competently in the other skill areas of passing, attacking, setting, serving, and digging. By now your **Match Skills** should include the abilities to use advanced cognitive, technical and tactical skills and strategies to win, and to maintain excellent performance under great pressure. You must also continue to develop and use an extensive repertoire of volleyball skills, and to refine your role on your team.

In the **Personal, Social, and Team** skill area you should begin contributing to the game outside of your on-court performance, become a positive influence and leader on your team, and an ambassador for the sport.

Once you have achieved competence in these skills, you will be capable of competing and winning at the highest levels, perhaps even in the Pan American Games, the World Championships or even the ultimate -- the Olympic Games.

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**Attack** - The offensive action of hitting the ball, also called spike.

**Audible Offense** - To verbally call for a type of set or play pattern.

**Back Set** - A set made when the setter's back is toward the hitter.

**Better the ball** - Improvement of the ball position between teammates.

**Block** - A defensive play above the net by one or more players, which attempts to intercept or channel a spiked ball.

**Commit Block** - Commitment to block a pre-determined hitter.

**Competency** - Capability to perform a skill at a standard set by the coach.

**Cross-Court** - A spike from antenna area of court in which the ball is directed diagonally toward the far sideline of the opponent's court.

**Dig** - Passing a spiked or topspin hit ball.

**Floater** - A serve with no spin that travels in a difficult to predict path.

**Forearm Pass** - Arms from the elbows to the wrists joined to form a platform to contact the ball with an underhand motion.

**Handbook** - A written reference to guide your actions to becoming a better player. Keep it "handy!"

**High Seam** - To intentionally attack the ball between the hands of two blockers.

**Hit** - To jump and spike a ball with an overhand, forceful shot; also attack or spike.

**Line Shot** - A ball spiked along an opponent's sideline, closest to the hitter, and outside the block.

**Misdirected Shot** - An attack of the ball in a direction different from the body alignment.

**Mobility** - Being able to produce volleyball-specific movements in a variety of positions.

**Overhead Pass** - A pass with both hands open above the forehead, and directed by the fingers.

**Overhand Serve** - Serving the ball and contacting it with the hand above and in front of the shoulder.

**Pass** - The first of three offensive side contacts which can be overhead or forearm.

**Penetration** -

1. The setter moving into the passing target area from the back row.
2. The blocker's ability to reach over the net into the opponent's court.

**Plyometrics** - A physical development training method for developing explosive power and reaction.

**Reading** - Watching the opponent's movements to determine how to best defend the court or prepare to attack.

**Roll Shot - Attack** of the ball by imparting topspin with an arc to place in an area of the court or to go over the block.

**Serve** - Initial contact between a ball and player to begin play.

**Set** - A pass that is positioned for a hitter for a spike or tip.

**Setter** - The second passer whose job it is to give a hittable overhead pass to a spiker.

**Skyball Serve** - To contact under the ball to create a high vertical flight path into opponent's court.

**Spike** - To jump and hit the ball with maximum force toward the opponent's floor, also called attack.

**Stuff** - To block an attacked ball to the floor/ground, gaining a point or side out.

**Sustained Competitive Excellence** - Competencies acquired to allow an individual and team to pursue winning championships and medals over a long period.

**Target** - A desired area of the court or a specific player toward which the ball is directed.

**Tip** - An attack in which the ball is contacted with the fingertips with enough force to direct the ball over the blockers out-stretched hands.

**Transition** - Adjusting from one phase of the game to another, i.e. offense to defense.

**Tempo** - Directing the ball at different heights and speeds to assist the hitter in defeating the block.

**Topsin** - Contact that imparts a bottom over top rotation on the ball which makes it drop quickly to the floor.

**Tooling** - Attack options which intentionally make use of the blocker's hands.

**Underhand Serve** - To contact the ball with the hand below the shoulder to initiate play.

**Zones** - Designated areas of the court and/or net.

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## **USA Coaching Accreditation Program**

For a Bibliography and selected coaching articles authored by USA CAP accredited coaches and Cadre members, visit the USAV [Publications](#) site.

## **Books**

- The Complete Guide to Volleyball Conditioning. To order, call [Volleyball Informational Products](#) 1-800-275-8782.
- Athlete Competency Handbook, 10-pack. To order, call USA Volleyball, 719-637-8300.

## **Periodicals**

- Performance Conditioning for Volleyball - 12 pages, seven issues per year. To subscribe see Internet site or call 402/489-9984.
- Coaching Volleyball Journal - to subscribe contact AVCA at 719/576-7777 ext. 102.
- The Coach (FIVB) Technical Magazine - to subscribe contact VIP at 1-800-275-8782.
- Hot Sand, Jon Stevenson, Windmill Press, 1989.
- A Guide to Volleyball Basics, Jim Paglia, 1993.

## **Videos**

- USA Volleyball Guide to Athlete Conditioning Video featuring USA women's national team members. To order, call [Volleyball Informational Products](#) 1-800-275-8782.
- Volleyball Skills, Kills and Drills Video Series. To order, call 1-888-828-4330 or visit [http:// www.immweb.com/vbvideo.htm](http://www.immweb.com/vbvideo.htm).
- Do It Better Beach Volleyball, ESPN video.
- Beach Volleyball, Get Involved, FIVB. To order contact [VIP](#) at 1-800-275-8782.

## **Internet sites**

[www.usavolleyball.org](http://www.usavolleyball.org)

[www.avca.org/cap](http://www.avca.org/cap)

[www.volleyball.org/cbva](http://www.volleyball.org/cbva)

[www.performancecondition.com/volleyball](http://www.performancecondition.com/volleyball)

[www.avca.org](http://www.avca.org)

[www.fivb.ch](http://www.fivb.ch)

[www.olympic-usa.org](http://www.olympic-usa.org)

## **Volley Van Information**

For information on the Volley Van program or scheduled stops in your area, visit the USAV on line at [www.volleyball.org/usav/volleyvan](http://www.volleyball.org/usav/volleyvan), or email at [vaninfo@usav.org](mailto:vaninfo@usav.org).

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