Volleyball Club Conditioning -
The 30-Minute Magic Bullet

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Lauren Hinojos began playing organized sports such as volleyball, basketball, and track at Goddard Jr. High as a seventh grader and then specialized in volleyball at the high school level at Midland High. She was Academic All-District and Academic All-State her senior year. As a collegiate athlete she played a defensive specialist at Midland College for two years. During her sophomore year she received the Lady Chap award. Lauren player her final two years at Texas Wesleyan University in Fort Worth where as a senior she received the Daktronics All-American Scholar Athlete award. Currently, she is employed by Robert Brown Sports Performance as a conditioning trainer for volleyball. Throughout her athletic career her offseason activities consisted of plyometric training, weight training, conditioning, agility drills and private lessons.

The first consideration in establishing a club program is the level of athletes and the advisability to start a program. Research has shown that an untrained athlete can show improved performance after two weeks of training three days a week of 60 to 90 minutes. Club teams are in a situation that doesn't allow them the luxury of this volume of training during a typical training week. The norm is 30 minutes two days a week or one hour total as opposed to three to four and a half hours, which is necessary for improved performance in a two week period. Because of this time limitation, improvement in performance in a club setting would take up to six weeks for any significant gains. This is equivalent to about 10 sessions.

The next consideration is that each athlete adapts differently to training. Another factor is that some club teams will condition prior to practice (fresh) while others condition after practice (fatigued). This makes a big difference as to what can be done and at what level of athlete we are dealing with.

With regard to age of the volleyball athletes, again training response is individual. However, as a rule of thumb, starting female club players at about 12 years of age will start to equate to improved performance. It is also a good time to teach these exercises so the athletes can start to appreciate their benefits. Also of note is the type of program you initiate at this early stage. The difference is in the intensity of training, the exercises can be done at all levels. A final note is that these exercises will aid in the prevention of injury.

Time Limitation the Critical Issue

The reason we have settled on 30 minutes of conditioning training in the club environment as magic is that most coaches can live with it. Most practices last two hours, two days a week and giving up one hour to conditioning is asking too much. Therefore, 30 minutes is the norm. Usually practices are done in the late hours of the evening in school gyms and it's normal to have school custodians ready to walk out as soon as practice is over. We've had the lights go out so that we had to shag balls in the dark. With these limitations, the conditioning coach has to select exercises that utilize the entire body to achieve maximum results in the 30-minute timeframe. Another consideration for club players is that these athletes participate in conditioning activities at their school and they play additional sports. We have to design the program so they are doing exercises that are different then what they
are doing at school.

**Pre- and Post-Practice Workout Challenges**

Generally speaking, the athletes who play club ball are hard workers. The pre-practice conditioning workout athletes are usually fresh and ready to go. This gets them through their warm-up and conditioning drills. The results with these athletes are quick and evident. During post-practice conditioning workouts we spend less time on the warm-ups such as the ladders. But when we do warm-ups this tells us the fatigue level of the athletes coming into the workout. As a result we may have to change the workout. We also do this observation in the pre-practice workout as well because the athletes may have had a difficult workout session at school.

**Individualization Considerations**

We try to individualize the workout as much as possible. This is tough to do in a team sport with only 30 minutes available. We start by letting the players know what we are going to do for a particular session. We encourage 100 percent effort as much as possible. In the case of an injured athlete, we have that athlete do a similar workout but with less stress on his/her joints. Thus the workouts are very similar unless there is a specific condition that requires intervention. This is done to help in the rehab process and provides these special needs athletes something they won't get at their school or with other sports.

**Program Considerations**

The following is a sample of the Tuesday/Thursday conditioning routines that the club volleyball girls participate in two days a week. Each team is given 30 minutes to train and within those 30 minutes it is our job to ensure that all the training essentials are incorporated, such as footwork, agility, jump training, cardiovascular endurance, and strength. The coaches have important input as to which exercises we'll do. If the coach is planning a heavy jumping day we adjust and lighten up on the jumping exercise and focus more on close chained exercises like squats and lunges.

**Circuit System**

A sample of a circuit day (which is a majority of training days) would include:

- Warm-up with ladders (working footprint- see samples below)-5 different exercises performed 3 times each
- Followed by hurdles jumping with either both legs (6x) or single leg (3 each leg) (jump and hold, double bounce, etc.).
- Circuits, which are performed at least twice with 30 seconds to 1 minute at each exercise station. The exercises are alternated between high intensity and less intensity to allow for some recovery. Athletes go through each exercise in the circuit one right after then next for four to five minutes and then rest for half the time of the circuit (two to two and a half minutes) and then repeat:
  - jump squats
  - mountain climbers
  - alternating lunges
  - lunge jumps
  - push ups
- Abs are always at the end of every workout. Abs might include anything from planks, toe touches, v-ups, to any variety of different crunches.

**Split System**

On other days we will split up the teams and have them run through agilities and strength training exercises. One team will be doing agilities for 15 minutes and the other team will be strength training for 15 minutes. We then switch so that the strength group does agilities and the agility group does strength work. This system also allows for a change up to add variety but the majority of the time we do circuits. A sample of this type of workout includes:

- Warm-up with ladders.
- Agility drills, such as different types of cone drills (Star drill, M drill, shuffle drills) 6x each.
  - M Drill is done with four cones in a squared circle one in the middle.
    - start in the middle, backpedal to far right cone
    - sprint to top right cone
    - sprint diagonally to the bottom left cone
    - sprint to the top left cone
  - Shuffle Drill is done with four cones in a squared circle one in the middle.
    - shuffle to the middle cone
    - shuffle to an outside cone
    - sprint to the next cone
    - repeat shuffle/sprint sequence around the cones

We do a lot of shuffle/sprint contrast training with our volleyball players.
✓ Star Drill is done one cone in the middle and eight around from the middle
  • do a variety of shuffles, sprints and back pedals around it

The team with the strength exercises will do each exercise for 1 minute and then rotate.
  • Bleacher blasts
    ✓ Bench four to six inches off the ground standing one foot on the ground the other on the bench.
    ✓ Jump explosively and switch legs
  • Sit-up ball throws against the wall
  • Single leg good mornings standing on blue pads or exercise mat

In the 30 minutes it is important to try to train every system in the body used during sport play. To achieve the best results from each athlete, everything we do must be fast and efficient with little or no break time allowed.

Sample ladder Exercises:
1. Quick Skips: Skip forward on balls of feet with one foot in each hole; hands move quickly by the pockets.

2. Side Skips: Skip sideways with quick feet. Hands move by the pockets rhythmically and quickly.

3. Variation of the same pattern- do hops with quick feet.

4. Hop Scotch: Straddle ladder and jump with both feet into next square, then jump out. Continue process down the ladder.

5. Hops Forward: Hop continuously on one foot to midpoint of ladder; switch feet for the rest of the way to end of the ladder.

Net links: Contact Lauren at LaurenH_121@yahoo.com
For tips on learning ladders exercises go to www.performancecondition.com/volleyball for a safe teaching progression.