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Girls Indoor VOLLEYBALL TIPS

*How to Gain Confidence
on the Volleyball Court*



APRIL CHAPPLE



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*How to Gain Confidence
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APRIL CHAPPLE

INTRODUCTION

Staying off the bench, improving your volleyball technique, increasing your court time, and becoming a valuable member of your volleyball team are goals that high school, club, and college volleyball players like you have. Dozens of questions a month come from players like you, wanting to improve their volleyball playing abilities. Use this booklet as a guide to becoming a smart and confident volleyball player, solving some of your most pressing concerns. These tips come from playing and coaching international elite professional indoor and beach volleyball for 30+ years, including coaching coaches as the regular “Five Quick Tips” columnist in the American Volleyball Coaches Association’s *Coaching Volleyball* magazine. This booklet lets me talk directly to you, my favorite people—the volleyball girls and young women playing the sport.

—April Chapple



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PEPPER

1 Concentrate on improving your ball control skills during pepper warm-up. What you do in pre-game warm-up prepares you for game performance. Practice in pepper how you want to play in the game.

2 Work on proper setting and serve receive skill, form, and technique when performing pepper during pre-game warm-up. Every opportunity to play pepper is another opportunity to improve your basic setting and serve receive skills. Take advantage of it.

3 Use pepper warm-up to practice perfect free ball passing form. Focus on keeping your partner from moving more than one step in any direction to pass the ball back to you.

4 Practice keeping your elbow high during your pepper hitting arm swing. Every opportunity to practice your arm swing makes you a hitter that reaches high for every set.

5 Imagine clearing the net height even when you pepper. This helps you contact the ball at its highest height.

6 Raise your elbow, keeping it above the level of your ear while you control the ball speed to your partner. Hitting the ball low in pepper means there’s a good chance you’ll hit the ball low in hitting warm-ups and continue hitting the ball low in a game.

7 Set goals with your pepper partner. Identify how many pass-set-hit combinations you both can do repeatedly while controlling the ball.

8 Challenge each other to improve. You improve when pushing yourselves beyond your comfort zone, learning to do things that initially might make you uncomfortable.

9 Be down in your defensive position, ready to move in any direction just before your partner hits the ball. Your goal is to be in this low stance before the ball gets to you, not as it is getting to you.

10 React quickly. Then dig a controlled high ball back to your partner without making her move more than one step in any direction.

11 Push yourself. This motivates you and your partner to increase the court area you both can defensively cover as your ball control improves.

12 Use the pepper drill to increase your focus and concentrate during warm-ups. Ignore pre-existing pre-game distractions like a small court, warming up in a small space, balls flying around the court in your pepper zone, or team benches.

13 Commit to hitting harder at your partner as your ball control skills improve during pepper warm-up. By hitting harder, you and your partner increase your reactions and ability to dig hard spikes. It also reduces your fear of digging hard hit balls.

14 Pepper with a guy with good ball control skills. Playing with a male or someone better or stronger than you makes you a better, stronger, faster player.



SERVE RECEIVE

15 Keep your feet shoulder-width apart with your legs slightly bent. Having your right foot 2-3 inches in front of the left lets you move quickly in any direction. Do the opposite if you're a lefty.

16 Present your platform by wrapping your left hand around your right fist, thumbs pointing straight down to the ground. This positions your elbows and arms in a straight platform.

17 Contact the ball on your forearms. Check that your thumbs are always pointing to the ground, maintaining the straight platform needed to pass the ball.

18 Keep your elbows straight while in serve receive. Straight elbows maintain a wider platform, giving you maximum control of the ball.

19 Press both wrists together when passing, without breaking them apart no matter how hard or easy the serve. Make ball contact above the wrists and below the elbows. Contacting the ball on your wrists won't allow you to control the ball.

20 Keep both arms together when passing the ball. Keeping them together instead of breaking them apart and passing with one arm helps guide the ball better to the target.

21 Square your shoulders to the target. Face your body to the net and angle your platform towards the target before contacting the ball. This eliminates adjusting your arms once making contact with the ball.

22 Remember your goal is to keep from swinging your arms during serve receive. Most serves in high school, club or college are fast enough so very little additional arm movement is needed for the ball to reach the target.

23 Finish your pass with your serve receive platform below your shoulders not above your head. This allows you to control the ball when keeping your arms and shoulders within your body range.

24 Move your feet first to position yourself behind the ball. Get your body behind the ball instead of reaching with your arms. If you've heard your coach say "pass with your feet first," that means to let your feet not your arms be first in guiding you in serve receive.

25 Run with your arms apart to get in position. You'll move faster. You want to be stopped *before* you pass the ball to avoid running and bumping simultaneously. You are not controlling the ball when you run and bump together, and it usually goes right back over the net.

26 Present your platform *after* you've stopped running. Your feet need to be in a balanced position first.

27 Focus on the ball in the opposing server's hand, not on the server's face. It's the ball you need to pass. Focus on it as soon as the server gets it in her hands to serve.

28 Keep your eyes on the ball as it comes across the net. Taking your eyes off the ball as it travels over the middle of the court increases the chances of getting aced. You may also be unable to make minor adjustments to your feet to accurately pass the ball to your target.

29 Anticipate where you need to be. Get there *BEFORE* you start passing the ball. By focusing early on the ball while it's in the server's hands you get an early indication on whether she is going to serve short, cross court, or down the line.

30 Keep your eyes on the ball. Visually track it as it leaves the server's hand, crosses the net, and all the way into your platform. Many passers get distracted, taking their eyes off the

ball or tracking it once it crosses the net, which is late. Focusing on the ball early lets you anticipate necessary minor adjustments in your platform or with your feet.

31 Square your shoulders to the target before contacting the ball. You won't have any more arm adjusting once you make contact with the ball.

32 Shift your body weight from your back (left) foot to your front (right) foot when contacting the ball. Lefties do the opposite.

33 Pass with both feet on the volleyball court floor rather than doing the "jump-bump." You can make small adjustments with your feet on the ground which you can't do with your feet in the air.

34 Maintain good passing technique especially with the easy serves. You've taught your body the proper serve receive positioning and will automatically react with the correct technique no matter how hard or fast the serve is.

35 Work on foot speed and agility drills. You'll be able to get behind each ball quickly with your feet first by increasing your short distance speed, giving yourself plenty of time to present your platform and make the perfect pass.



SERVE

36 Place your right foot behind your left so your right foot is perpendicular to your left and both feet are four (4) to five (5) inches apart. Make this a comfortable, balanced stance so you do not feel like falling over.

37 Point your left foot in the exact direction you want to serve. Point your left foot, hips, and upper body straight ahead if you want to serve down the line. Turn your left foot, hips, and upper body facing cross court if serving there.

38 Face your target. Show everyone in the gym where you intend to serve for the floater serve. Pointing to one spot and serving another rarely “fakes out” the serve receive. You will always be off-balance, increasing your chances of serving out.

39 Place your front foot, hips, shoulders, and tossed ball in the direction you plan to serve. You can create more force and velocity when all your energy is going in one direction (which is ball speed in this case) than when different body parts are going in different directions.

40 Put all your body weight on your back foot. Serving requires only a small amount of lower body movement.

41 Shift your body weight from your back foot to the front foot once you've tossed the ball. Although this movement doesn't seem like much, when it's combined with your arm swing, it's enough to give the ball the momentum needed to get over the net.

42 Toss the ball with an open-palmed left hand two (2) feet above your head and one (1) foot in front of your front foot. This magical combination of “two feet up and one foot in front” keeps your body balanced so you

only have to transfer weight from your back foot to your front foot, quicken your arm swing, and make solid contact with the ball's middle panels.

43 Keep your elbow high, above your ear, when serving. This increases the chances of getting the ball over the nine-foot net when you pull or draw your arm back to float serve.

44 Toss the ball the same way every time you serve. Create a ritual you perform each time you serve so you don't rush your serve. That could be bouncing the ball three times in a row, then taking a breath, and pointing your foot in the direction you want to serve before serving. Work it out so you do the same thing every time, whatever it is.

45 Remember this is the only time that you completely control the game. Maintain control by taking your time and being completely aware of everything you plan to do before you serve the ball.

46 Watch where you make contact on the ball in practice. You can focus on making good contact with the ball once you've lined up your body and faced where you want to serve.

47 Decide mentally that you are going to begin the play by attacking with your serve. Have the same mentality with your serve that you have with your spike unless your coach instructs you to serve short to the front row.

48 Serve 50 to 100 balls before and after practice. Set a goal and aim for each of the six positions on the opposing court. Meet your goal before serving to the next position.

49 Mix up your serving practice by doing laps or sprints between serves. You often go back to serve in a game when you are out of breath. Get used to recreating game-type situations so you are used to stressful situations when serving in a game.

50 Practice your toss at home without your arm swing. The toss is the one element of

the serve that can allow many young players to become point-making machines when they correct.

51 Do at least 50 to 100 reps a day three times a week until the ball goes up the same height. Aim for two feet in the air, coming down in the same spot twelve inches in front of your front foot every time.

52 Practice your arm swing at home, in the mirror. Do 50 to 100 reps every other day three times a week until you automatically pull your elbow back, keeping it high above your ear.

53 Visualize yourself serving a tough serve that lands in the court to the specific position you choose. This is a great way of conducting your serving practice outside the gym.

54 Envision yourself scoring an ace serve over and over again. Play it in your mind. This mental exercise helps you automatically perform your tough serving action.



SPIKING

55 Adopt a fearless attitude about hitting. Great hitters have confidence in their ability to hit against any block.

56 Become a tenacious tiger about hitting against a two-person block. Remember you have options making you effective against a two-person block.

57 Believe you can determine a solution to beating or hitting past any block. You must know and convince yourself you have the advantage as a hitter.

58 Exploit the holes in the block. Look for holes between the middle blocker and the outside blocker in front of you. Aim your spike fearlessly right for that “seam.”

59 Aim for the seam when the middle blocker and outside blocker do not go up and block together. The seam is between the outside blocker’s hands and the middle blocker’s hands, that space they’re supposed to close when they block.

60 Ask your back row players, between plays, to tell you whether the middle blocker is late closing the block. They are perfectly positioned to help you see what is going on in the front row.

61 Use your back row players to help when you are in the front row. Ask them to tell what they see is open and what the other team is or is not doing.

62 Wipe the ball off the block. “Use” the block instead of always trying to hit past it. You can learn to wipe the ball off the hands of the outside block no matter how tall you are. This helps you become a point-making machine.

63 Spike the ball aiming for the outside arm of the outside blocker in front of you.

Imagine the arm closest to the antenna has a bull's eye with your name on it, for you to aim at as a target.

64 Hit the ball hard so it comes back off her arm and outside the side line. Hitting like this keeps the defense from covering the ball, makes points, creates sideouts, keeps you in the game, and makes you a confident player with reliable hitting options against a tall block.

65 Practice “wiping the block” with a coach. The coach stands on a table or chair with a flat wooden board a couple of inches above the volleyball net. You purposefully practice hitting that board, aiming for the board like you are going to hit down the line.

66 Aim straight ahead with your spiking arm “follow through,” finishing with your spiking arm coming down across your body. The ball comes back over your outside shoulder to the outside of the volleyball court.

67 Practice “wiping the block” at home with a ball against your garage. Without jumping, practice your arm swing hitting the ball into a square you've marked off in chalk to a spot about three to four feet above your forehead.

68 Aim and hit standing four feet away from the spot. Your goal is for the ball to bounce back to the left side outside of your body. It goes to the right side if you are left handed.

69 Mix up your shots, especially in long rallies. This keeps the block guessing and off balanced about what you are going to do and how you are going to attack next.

70 Watch where the opposing team sets up in defense when you are in the back row on defense. Plan and think ahead so you already know where the open spots are on the opposing team's court when you get to the front row.

71 Learn to “own” the middle of the opposing team's court. Make this the place where you practice putting hundreds of roll shots and off speed shots in practice.

72 Practice your roll shots that go over the block to the middle of the court. This spot is often out of the defense's reach. Make points by aiming for the middle of the court with off speed or roll shots and you could see plenty of playing time.

73 Hit to the deep corners of the opposing court. In long rallies the defensive players on the other side usually start creeping up in the court towards the ten foot line, leaving lots of area in the back row wide open.

74 Remember Zones 1 and 6 are usually wide open in long rallies so just aim and hit high and long to the back corners to score a point or sideout. You can be any height to hit high and deep.

75 Learn to hit high, contacting the ball at its highest height. You may have to tell your setter to set you a bit further off the net to stay behind the ball and see the court and the block while hitting deep and long.

76 Hit a lot of “high, long, and deep” hitting reps so your body and arms learn and memorize what strength and ball speed it takes to get the ball to fall in these deep corners. Playing doubles, triples, and four against four in practice is a good time to do this.

77 Hit the imperfect set, not just the perfect set. Learn to hit those balls that the opposing team and everybody in the gym thinks you are going to “free ball” over. That means the ball that is above the height of the net but a little outside or a little inside or a little off the net.

78 Attack high free balls over to the opposing team and reduce the amount of easy balls you give them. Be aggressive. Think about attacking the ball first when it is high enough to make a decent approach.



TIPPING

79 Soft tip into the block on purpose. Practice aiming the tip into the opposing blockers' wrists or upper forearms so the ball will bounce off high and back into your court if you get a trap set. Your teammates who are covering you will have a chance to replay the ball.

80 Save broken plays by having the courage to aim the ball for the block. Increase your skill at this play and you will learn a trick that elite players use to give themselves another opportunity to attack the ball.

81 Use the tip to use the block. Use the tip to score a point or sideout if you are an outside hitter who gets a set close to the net. Aim the ball at the block's outside or external arm and wipe the ball off the block's forearm.

82 Be the last player to touch the ball in a joust. When two players contact the ball at the same time over the net, the second one to touch the ball almost always wins. The second player has the advantage of going up and pushing over while the first player comes down, losing momentum on her way.

83 Wait as long as possible before putting your hands on the ball and pushing it over into the opposing court. You can very often save a tip gone bad and win the joust.

84 Tip deep. Confirm with your teammates that the opposing team is playing man-up defense with a player responsible for picking up the tips, playing right behind the block. You now know you have deep court open spaces you can tip to. In practice, learn to tip high over the block to the deep corners of the court.

85 Tip on a good set. Be unpredictable by mixing up your shots. Tip the balls everyone expects you to hit and hit the imperfect ones that are a little off the net. Be smart and use com-

mon sense. Leave those balls that are below the net height or too low to hit.

86 Tip to the middle of the court instead of right behind the block. The middle of the court is the sweet spot on almost everybody's court. It's where points are often made because no one is covering that area. The middle of the court is almost always open especially when you feel you don't have any hitting options.



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