

Between the Lines

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MGVCA Newsletter

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Coach Gibson attracts record clinic attendance

Wellesley College played host for the second consecutive year as one-hundred high school coaches from across the state attended the MGVCA annual clinic. And for the first time in recent memory, a coach from another part of the country (the Midwest) served as the head clinician.

Travelling is certainly nothing new for the University of Michigan-Dearborn's Mike Gibson, who has spent the past nineteen seasons as the coach of the NAIA Wolves. Last season his squad played 37 of its 49 matches away from home, so a trip to Wellesley College wasn't that unusual.

High school coaches from Monument Mountain (where you can walk to New York State) to Nauset (on the outer Cape) gathered again in the Keohane Center's multipurpose gym shortly after 8:15 to the smell of coffee and Breugger's bagels.

By 9 o'clock the bleachers were already full as President Rob Slavin, along with officers Tom Turco, David Moore and Tammy Webber, greeted the record turnout. Among the attendees were numerous junior varsity and freshman coaches, as well as local boys' volleyball coaches and private school mentors.

The affable Gibson, who has addressed countless coaching groups throughout the midwest over the past two decades, started appropriately with a segment entitled "Volleyball 101." Gathering his notes from a presentation he had once made in 1987, he noted how little the primary elements of the game have changed over the past fifteen years. In this primer, he walked the coaches through some of the basic vocabulary and fundamental skills of the game.

Always integrating an anecdote into his teaching, Gibson soon had a group of area high school players on the court as he developed various elements of passing. The focal points of his presentation were footwork and efficiency of movement. Numerous simple yet effective drills were highlighted with key verbal cues.

After a brief mid-morning break, Coach Gibson took us through the essentials of setting. A strong proponent of mental training, he noted how important this part of the game is in developing a top-flight setter. His advice here was simple: you need to put in extra time with your setters beyond the normal practice framework.

Coaches (and players) mingled while eating the pizza provided by Nick's, a local Route 135 establishment. A brief meeting to discuss developments in the rules debate (see page four) followed. The focus on NCAA rules, as Rob Slavin noted, was to move the game of volleyball forward.

The afternoon sessions presented numerous up-tempo drills to improve attacking and defense. In both areas, Gibson prefers an aggressive style. The drills, including the Pursuit Drill (his personal favorite), provide numerous ball contacts in a very short period of time. Both his Butterfly serve-receive and X-Files reveal constant movement integrated with multiple quality contacts.

Unable to cover all of the scheduled material on the court, Gibson highlighted many of the key points in his handout package. Most interesting among these was a "flow chart" method of scoring a match. The primary focus here was to get as much valuable feedback information on a simple graph as a match is unfolding.

For novice coaches and veterans, U-Mich-Dearborn's Mike Gibson provided valuable technical knowledge and key approaches to the mental part of this sport.

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The MIAA Board of Directors will meet on Tuesday, April 23, 2002 with the Volleyball Rules Sub-committee at the Franklin office to determine the rules to be implemented for next season. Any relevant information regarding this important issue is available at the MGVCA web site: www.mgvca.org

News Updates

Directory Info

The Coaches Directory, currently in its third printing, is a work which is under constant revision. The data is updated as each coach joins (or rejoins) the organization. We now are about 85-90% up to date, but this process is often tedious and painstaking.

MGVCA coaches can help this ongoing process by submitting league directories to our office as soon as possible. In addition, if you know of any individual changes, please let us know.

The information in the Directory is provided for coaches only. The names are not provided to any outside agencies for any reason.

This work can serve as an important resource and networking tool among coaches only if the data is kept as current and accurate as possible.

Website Revisted

The newly designed MGVCA web site is now up and running. With its own domain name (www.mgvca.org), the site officially went on-line in mid-January.

Much of the credit goes to Al Mord (Wachusett) who lent his computer expertise to this project. Al will continue to maintain the site for the association through the current calendar year.

The current MGVCA Home Page allows all coaches to directly e-mail the MGVCA or any of its officers. Other sections of the site include the Hall of Fame, Video Library, Breaking News, Clinic Information, Registration and Related Sites.

Coaches may e-mail concerns or questions at any time to the association (mgvca@aol.com). We can certainly add information regarding coaching vacancies or open dates to the site if that is a need which the membership wants.

Any coach with summer camp information is encouraged to submit that to our office so that we can update our summer camp link on the site.

Mental Training the key to team synergy

Jeff Janssen, the latest in a long line of psychologists to dominate the sports landscape in recent years, has built a solid reputation among a number of highly successful collegiate programs. The keynote speaker at this year's AVCA Convention in San Diego (December '01), Janssen represents Peak Performance, an Arizona based consulting firm which deals exclusively with mental training and team building.

His own biography points out that he works with coaches and athletes "who want to develop the team chemistry and mental toughness necessary to take their teams to a championship level." Based on the teams he has worked with (in sports ranging from volleyball to water polo), there is reason to believe that his techniques work.

His latest book, *The Seven Secrets of Successful Coaches*, is a must read for any coach wishing to elevate the level of mental toughness necessary to succeed. Janssen leans on the wisdom of coaches from a myriad of sports to highlight his points: Mike Krzyzewski (Duke, men's basketball); Mary Wise (Florida, women's volleyball); Pat Summitt (Tennessee, women's basketball); and Mike Gillespie (USC, baseball).

The credibility of the coach is at the heart of Janssen's text. Once that premise is firmly established, the author spins off into the areas of communicating with athletes, building confidence and commitment, handling difficult players, and disciplining and motivating players of all abilities. His analysis of what buttons to push and when to push them is especially worthwhile for any high school coach.

Janssen's earlier work, *Championship Team Building*, evokes many of these same themes. His Seven C's (Common goal, Commitment, Complementary Roles, Clear Communication, Constructive Conflict, Cohesion and Credible Coaching) provide the framework for this 1999 work. "It's not rocket science," notes the author, "just a matter of getting back to basic concepts of what 'team' means."

There is actually an evaluation form present in the early chapters which rates your team's strengths and weaknesses. You can use this tool as a means of improving the team's discipline and responsibility, two key components of commitment. Specific team-building challenges are provided at the end of each chapter to put the lessons into practice.

Both books are highly structured and loaded with relevant quotations from the most successful coaches in college and professional sports. The end of each chapter provides a synopsis which highlights the key elements. Although chapters can be read as individual topics, they are presented as a series of building blocks which center around the coach.

To supplement these works, the author has published two "workbooks" which contain practical team building exercises, drills and activities. These may be reproduced to use with your teams throughout the season. Most of the activities are those that have worked with the championship caliber coaches and programs which serve as the models throughout his works.

Janssen's basic ideas are also presented in video form (*Winning the Mental Game: How You Can Develop the Motivation, Confidence & Focus of Champions*). All these works can be purchased through his web site (www.jffjanssen.com) or through Peak Performance in Tuscan, Arizona. If you'd like to preview any of these, contact the MGVCA.

Building Blocks of a Championship Team

"Losing makes me a better coach," said John Cook (Nebraska) in his opening remarks during his "Building a Championship Team" seminar at the USA Coaches National Clinic (Las Vegas, February 14-16).

Cook, of course, has hardly tasted losing in the past two seasons as the Husker head coach. In fact, his 62-2 record in that time frame, including a National Championship in 2000, at first makes his comment seem a bit absurd.

But, like most of us, Cook recalls the two losses much more vividly than those many wins. He admits that he is almost "obsessed" with his team's loss in this year's National Semifinal against Stanford and has already started putting the building blocks in place for a National Championship run next season.

The threefold focus of this continuing process: Communication, Goal Setting and Trust. Trust, Cook emphasizes, is the cornerstone. "There are six people playing in a 900 square foot area, so you have to trust those around you in order to succeed." It is something he works on with his team every day at practice.

When that sometimes elusive quality of trust is in place, there is a shared vision of respect, responsibility, fairness and caring among the members of the team. These elements, in turn, develop character and leadership.

The same is true in the business world, notes Cook, who encourages all coaches to visit the Warren Bennis website to see how all successful groups/organizations grow and prosper.

Goals are one concrete way to measure trust on a team. When individual goals are made known to the entire team, the members of the team hold their fellow teammates accountable to those goals throughout the season.

Cook's individual and team goals are posted in the locker room (they range from physical to personal, from academic to psychological), and the coach talks to his players daily about these goals.

This kind of communication, which then extends from player to player, is at the core of developing a championship team. Without it, cliques, negativity, poor decision making and fear begin to "infect" the team. The fear actually plays out on the court in terms of lack of focus, lost confidence and unforced errors.

"When two fundamentally sound teams square off," says Cook, "fear is often the determining factor." He notes his own team's loss to Stanford and Long Beach State's follow-up loss to the Cardinal (NCAA Finals) as prime examples of "the fear factor."

This fear, the ultimate lack of trust, is even more prevalent at the high school and club level. When it occurs at this

level, according to Cook, student-athletes are "uncoachable."

So how does he try to eliminate this in the practice gym? "First, I try to run a practice in which all my players get as many quality touches as possible. My teams only scrimmage about 2% of the time (practice lasts 2:15 a day). Scrimmage situations simply don't allow enough individual contacts by the highest number of players. When you're running a sideout with your left side as the primary option, your middle could go 10-12 minutes without an attack."

Second, his practices are highly organized (written out and posted daily). "In this way, we're all on the same page. My players want to know what the expectations (short term goals) are for that particular day. If you don't have assistant coaches to run stations, drills must be creative and efficient to get in the repetitions needed to build confidence."

Finally, Cook is only concerned about where "my team's points" are coming from. This allows him to break down practice for his team based on their specific needs to win a match.

For example, in a 30 point rally scoring game about 12-14 of his team's points come on transition (as opposed to 3-4 on serve, and 4-5 on block), so his time allotment in practice is broken down accordingly.

Ten Tips from the Nation's Top College Coaches

Here is a random list of ideas that some of the finest coaches in the country (Mary Wise, Andy Banachowski, Bob Bertucci, John Cook and Russ Rose) noted specifically for high school coaches at the recent USA Coaches Clinic .

1. Develop drills that actively involve all of your players.
2. Coach serve location. This is key for teams that have problems serving or that lack focus.
3. Use boxes. You can get many more quality touches especially with armswing, blocking and covering.
4. Name and explain all drills early in the season. This saves time as the season wears on.
5. Ball handling is the key to winning high school volleyball. You can not practice ball-handling skills enough.
6. Use "the wall" as an assistant coach. Reps...Reps...Reps...
7. Serving is a major offensive weapon at the high school level. Spend time working on it every day.
8. Have a written plan for every practice. Post it and let your players see it.
9. Videotape practice. Many players are "visual learners."
10. Develop skills - strategy will take care of itself.

The final word regarding rules

At a climactic moment in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, an exhausted Jack Nicholson is asked by the asylum inmates if he's "giving up" as he tries to lift the impossibly heavy control panel. The tired, yet determined Nicholson simply says, "No, not giving up ... Just warming up ... **warming up!**"

And that's where we, as high school volleyball coaches, stand after more than two years of rigorous debate regarding the rules which will govern our sport in the future

Despite a unanimous vote of confidence from the MIAA sport-specific Volleyball Committee, the verdict is still out. It will be up to this state association's Board of Directors to determine the future direction of high school volleyball.

Nick Zacchilli (Milford) will present a position paper along with the findings of a subcommittee when the Board meets on April 23. The two sets of rules under consideration (National Federation and NCAA) are worlds apart philosophically and technically.

The MGVCA has aligned itself with the NCAA Rules because they offer a clean transition from the NAGWS Rules that we're accustomed to from the past. Our basic argument: if it ain't broke, don't fix it.

We further believe that National Federation Rules offer little vision in terms of the way the game is currently played at all levels around the world. NFHS Rules, on the whole, are outdated, restrictive and punitive.

Federation's argument is simple: we write high school rules for high school student-athletes. The MIAA has used this premise to place a Federation "umbrella" over most of the sports which it oversees.

Currently, football and volleyball are under the MIAA's "rules" microscope. Like football, volleyball is played under Federation rules in 48 out of 50 states. The football coaches in our state are also fighting an uphill battle to retain NCAA Rules for its sport.

Regardless of the final outcome, we hope that the final decision is in the best interests of the girls who play high school volleyball.

Volleyball Committee favors NCAA Rules

The long awaited rules debate took a dramatic turn at the MIAA Volleyball Committee meeting on Wednesday, January 12. An unprecedented turnout of administrators, coaches and officials passionately took sides in the National Federation vs. NCAA Rules debate.

While coaches and officials argued the case for adopting NCAA Rules, the MIAA (represented primarily by its President John Grondin from Bourne) steadfastly maintained its position of integrating Federation Rules into the sport of high school volleyball in Massachusetts. The MIAA's position, in large part, is based on the argument that 48 states currently use Federation Rules for volleyball.

The MGVCA stood its ground by stating that adoption of NCAA Rules would actually be a continuation of the now obsolete NAGWS Rules. In fact, the current framework for the NCAA Rules is almost totally in line with the NAGWS Rules used during the 2001 season. Moreover, NCAA Rules are more in line with the rules of the other governing volleyball bodies (USA, FIVB and AAU).

A stop gap measure to adopt Federation Rules with 14 modifications went down to defeat (2-10) in Committee. The follow-up vote to adopt NCAA Rules carried unanimously, 12-0. That, however, is not the end of this particular battle.

A subcommittee must now present its case to the MIAA Board of Directors on April 23. That group (Nick Zacchilli, Tom Burns, Pat Cawley, Judy Kennedy and Rob Slavin) will address the MIAA brass with its findings. It is worth noting that the MIAA is looking to establish Federation Rules in other sports as well, including football and baseball. The Board voted in January to continue its investigation of Federation Rules in other sports as well.

The role of the subcommittee will be to present its rationale for adopting NCAA Rules to the Board. Part of this presentation will include a rule-by-rule explanation of the differences (currently 45-50) between Federation and NCAA Rules. Of course, it is hoped that the unanimous vote by the MIAA Volleyball Committee will carry some weight in the overall presentation to the Board.

In a related matter, the National Federation, which meets annually in January to amend its rules for the year, voted not to adopt rally scoring for the 2002 season. The NCAA, which met in February, has adopted the use of the libero player (with 12 substitutions) for the fall season. Rally scoring, net serve and single toss (on serve) are already currently in place in the NCAA women's game.

The MIAA Volleyball Committee did amend a rule concerning participation for an athlete in a volleyball match. By a 5-4 vote, the committee went back to a previous Blue Book ruling which says that a player may participate in no more than three total games (either JV or varsity) in the course of a match. This clarifies wording which was dropped from that document in 2000.

In the case of a limited number of players on a team, both coaches may agree to waive this rule. If this is the case, however, it is suggested that the varsity match be played first as it is the "official" match (for records, league standings, etc.). It is the responsibility of all coaches to monitor and implement this rule which takes place at the start of the 2002 boys' season (this spring).