

Practice Mindset vs. Game-Time Mindset... Get in the Zone!



In sports there are two mindsets that are crucial to an athlete's development and performance. During practice, we really stress the importance of proper technique and mechanics for each skill. This is the time when it's crucial to use your "learning mind" so you can absorb what we're teaching, analyze your performance and make changes when necessary to achieve a desired outcome. This is the time when you should be ultra aware of your body movements and critical of your execution, especially when breaking a bad habit or modifying a technique.

However when game time comes, you need to switch gears to a different frame of mind in order to achieve optimal performance. The "performance mind" is not over-critical and does not analyze every movement, as this can be a hindrance to your performance. When you hear of an athlete being "in the zone", they are clear-headed and relaxed...not over-thinking. The "performance mind" is free of tension and self-criticism, and instead allows you to let go, relying on the fact that practice time is over and it's time to react using what you already know.

*The harder you train in practice in the right frame of mind, the better peace-of-mind you should be able to achieve during game time because you know you have done everything in your power to prepare for that moment.

KEEP YOUR EYES ON THE BALL!

BLOCKING:

Common Mistake: Closing your eyes or flinching while trying to block.

Tip: Eye sequence is Passer... Ball... Setter... Ball... Hitter
Open your eyes and watch the ball. Unless you are blocking with your head over the net (which none of you are...yet), the ball won't hit you in the face, so there is no need to flinch.

SERVING:

Common Mistake: Looking at a space in the air where you hope your toss will be.
Common Mistake: Looking at the area or player where you are trying to serve (looking past the ball).

Tip: Watch the ball the whole time (from the set up, during the toss and at contact). Find a small spot on the ball, a letter from the brand name, a seam in the ball...

PASSING:

Common Mistake: Losing site of the ball after it drops below head level or into body bubble.

□ **Tip: See the ball all the way into your platform. See the hair on your arms move. Finish with your eyes on your platform. Freeze for 2 seconds after you pass and evaluate your finish position.**

CONFUSION:

Common Mistake: Looking at your teammate when the ball is between you and another player.

□ **Tip: Keep watching the ball and use your verbal skills and peripheral vision to decide who takes the ball. As soon as you take your eyes off the ball to look at your teammate, it's hard to find the ball again with your eyes and the ball drops. Make sure that you proclaim your area that you will be passing...i.e. I have seam.**

HITTING & PREPARING TO HIT:

Common Mistake: Looking at the ground or the spot you are running to during transition or while making a move on defense. This is a problem especially when trying to get off the net or outside to hit.

□ **Tip: Watch the ball over your shoulder (but still get to that spot as fast as you can). Use your peripheral vision and court sense to know where you are.**

Common Mistake: Looking at the setter while preparing to hit and waiting for the ball to cross into your line of site (especially a problem for Middles). Many players will even watch the passer make the pass, but then turn their head and look straight at the setter.

□ **Tip: Watch the ball all the way, from the pass, through the air and into the setter's hands. If you are a Middle, use your peripheral vision and communication skills to know where your setter is when running a quick play so a collision doesn't take place.**

Common Mistake: Looking up at a space in the air where you hope the set will be, then waiting for the ball to cross into your line of site.

□ **Tip: Watch the setter set the ball and watch the ball through the air all the way through contact.**