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Developments in Volley Ball

By John Brown, Jr., M.D.
 Secretary of Physical Education National Council of Young Men's Christian Associations

Volley Ball has made a progressive development since its introduction by the Y.M.C.A. in 1895. No other game has spread throughout the world in such a short time. It is equally enjoyed by and beneficial to young and old of both sexes. It requires simple equipment and can be played indoors or out-of-doors, and may therefore be played the whole year round. From the hygienic standpoint it is one of our most healthful pastimes because of the fact that the pace can be varied to suit the participants and there is a wholesome balance between attack and defense, affording an interplay of activity and rest. The absence of bodily contact between opponents minimizes injury, while the fact that the opposing teams are in close proximity and facing each other adds to the sociability and zest of play.

The game may be played primarily as a social activity or may be highly competitive, thus satisfying a wide range of desires from this standpoint. The fact that the court is relatively small and the ball is in constant view, and that spectators may sit close to the playing court, are features that add greatly to the enjoyment from the standpoint of spectators.

In recent years there has been a marked improvement in the technique of what is known as "intensive volley ball" which has proven that the skill and technique of the game may be developed without limits. This accounts for the growing appeal of the game among our most active and athletic types of young men, many of whom now prefer volley ball to any of the other major sports. Volley ball is perhaps the most adaptable of all our sports, in that it may be played under widely varying conditions—on playgrounds, in industrial plants, in open play spaces, in rural communities, and in the gymnasium. The singles and doubles variations of the official game are being played with keen interest in certain sections of the country. In other places, the novelty of the game is being added to by combinations of teams composed entirely of fathers or sons or mothers or daughters. Teams composed of members of one family, including both parents and children, are also adding to the sociability of the game in some communities. Volley ball is without question destined to become one of the most popular, beneficial, universal sports.

The playing court is 60 feet long and 30 feet wide, divided into two squares of 30 feet each by a net similar to a tennis net which is stretched tightly across the court. The top of the net is 8 feet from the ground. The game is played with a round leather ball, inflated with a rubber bladder. It is 26 or 27 inches in circumference and weighs 9 or 10 ounces. It is a little smaller, and less than one-half the weight of a basketball. Six players make a team. Each team plays on its own court with the net separating the two teams. The game is played by batting the ball with the hands back and forth over the net, the object being to prevent the ball from touching the floor within your own court.

A "service" is the putting of the ball in play by the player in the "Right Back" position, by batting it over the net into the opponents' court in any direction with one hand (open or closed) and while in a position with both feet wholly behind the right one-third of the back line of the court.

A "point" is scored when the team receiving fails to return the ball legally to the opponents' court.

"Side Out" is called when the team serving fails to win its point or plays the ball illegally. The ball is "dead" after "point," "side out" or any other decision temporarily suspending play.

A game is won when either team scores a two point lead with fifteen or more points. A match consists of the best two out of three games. After the service, each team may play the ball three times in returning it into the opponents' court, but the same player cannot hit the ball twice in succession.

Reasons for Popularity

The thrill to the spectator is in seeing the ball in constant motion, going back and forth over the net. The thrill in the game to the player is when he "kills" the ball by hitting it over the net so that the opponents cannot prevent it from touching the floor.

It is a notable fact that this game is circling the world in a most remarkable manner. It may surprise you to know that in the championship tournaments in Porto Rico they will have as many as 4000 spectators

out to see a game. In the Far Eastern Olympic Games, in which volley ball is included, they had as many as 40,000 spectators in stadia especially erected for the purpose to witness the volley ball games, even while the other Olympic events were going on. Particularly since the War in Europe volley ball has spread from country to country that prior to the War did not know such a game existed.

It is actually true that in many cases now young fellows of our foremost athletic type who have been basketball fiends now prefer volley ball. I wish you could see our National U. S. Volley Ball Championships in which we have only state winners or runners-up participating. We have an average of about sixteen teams annually. The average age of the winning teams for the last several years has been about twenty-one years. They are athletic types of individuals.

After a closely contested championship match, which may take anywhere from one hour to two hours, I have seen our best trained players, who are in splendid physical condition, quite contented to sit right down on the floor at the conclusion of the game for a few minutes' recuperation. From this it will be seen that when the game is properly played even by our best players, it is quite strenuous.

The reason for the appeal to those who play the intensive game is that it is essentially a team game. In intensive volley ball it is a crime practically for a man to return the ball immediately it has been received over the net from the other side. The system of playing practiced by good teams is that a backline player receives the ball, batting it with two hands, and placing it very carefully in what we call the pass to a forward line player. This second player, however, is not to return the ball over the net, but he in turn from his frontline position is to make what we speak of as the "setup," putting the ball high in the air in a line parallel with but about one foot back from the net in such a position that a third man can make the kill shot. He is facing the man who is making the setup and with a run gets a rise from a jump so that his hand is above the eight foot level at the top of the net, and as the ball comes down in perfect positions for him, he bakes a swinging sweep and strikes the ball forcibly into the clear position in which he intends it to strike the floor. He drives the ball down with tremendous force into the opponent's court, close to the net or well back into the court, depending upon the formation of the opposing team.

Skill in Defense

The next phase of volley ball to be considered is the defense. You will perceive that the other team that has served the ball now is waiting for it to be played back to them in this three-man contact. Contrary to the prevailing opinion it is just as important for a balanced team to have strong defense players as it is for them to have good attack players. Now if you were to study the makeup of our best national championship teams you would find that they are fairly evenly balanced between what we call "spikers" or "killers" and "receivers" or "setup" men.

The spiker or killer is a tall, lithe, supple, athletic type who can get his jump, and who has the reach and can handle himself in the air and drive the ball from a position well over the net down into the opponent's court; but our defense players in the main are shorter men, many of them quite stocky in build. Except in an emergency these men never return a ball over the net.

The best team play consists in the combination that takes place in the passing between the players of the same team before they decide to return the ball back into their opponent's court.

Essential Rules of Play

There is no such thing as a net ball in volley ball. It is good to remember that. If the server hits the net, it is "side out." There is no assist in volley ball in service. The man serving must bat a clean ball into the opponent's court.

When the serving side serves the ball over the net the opposing team has three chances to return the ball; that is, three contacts are allowed. In the Orient they have this exception that if a ball being played by a team goes into the net they permit that side then to have four contacts to return the ball into their opponent's court; they think that speeds up the game. It is important to remember that only the serving side scores. If the opposing team fails to re-

turn the ball the serving side scores a point but if, in the course of the ball being vollied back and forth over the net, the serving side fails to return the ball into its opponent's court, the opponents do not score a point but the serving side is declared "out."

After "side out" the service goes to the other team. For instance, if Team A is serving, Team A scores a point if Team B fails to return the ball. In this sense it is a little different from other games. You always have to know which side has served in order to know whether a point has been scored or whether it is a "side out."

There are a lot of fine points in the game. They are all contained in the rules, and I will not weary you with them. There are rules governing the court and the net. The net should be bound by heavy cord, rope, and a wire cable runs through the top of the net in order that it may be drawn taut.

I should mention the principle of rotation because it is exceedingly important. There are no markings on the floor other than those which I have indicated; however, for purposes of taking positions of players each court is divided into six imaginary areas, three front and three back. When the ball is put into play by the server, each player on each team, with the exception of the server who is in the serving position, must be in his own relative position on the court. This is your right forward, centre forward, left forward. Here is your right back, your centre back, and here your left back.

When this side which is serving loses its service, the ball then goes to the other side for service, and when the service changes all players rotate one position clockwise so that each time the opposing team is put out and the ball comes to your side for service every player moves to the next position, and in the course of the game every man plays every position, and that has speeded up the science of the game and the technique of it in a wonderful way. It prevents a team having a man who plays one position, and one position only. It makes them all play all positions. It makes for a more balanced and keener competition than on the old basis where they took their fixed positions.

This is the intensive game I am speaking of. After the ball is put into play, these players move around as they wish, depending upon the play, but no player in the course of the game is ever allowed to interchange his relative position with another player.

Another thing that is quite important in this connection is this, a backline player cannot come to the net and make a kill shot under any circumstances. If because of the nature of the play it is necessary for the backline man to run forward to recover the ball and get it over the net he may do that. He may come up and play the ball over the net, but not by making what we call a kill shot. You see the reason for that again is to maintain the principle which underlies the practice of rotation, namely, that every man shall play his own relative position on the floor. But for this prohibition, a player in the back line position who is a good spiker could come forward and assume a strategic position at the net as soon as the ball is served and remain in this position until his teammates set the ball up for him for a kill shot. According to this principle of rotation every player becomes a server in his proper turn.

Perhaps the most difficult point to administer, certainly to those who are not familiar with the game, is the matter of holding or scooping the ball. A player may use any part of his body above the hips in playing the ball. This means that he may hit the ball with his head, shoulders, elbows or chest, but usually the ball is hit with the hands. Ordinarily, the ball is played by striking it with the open hands simultaneously. A simultaneous double contact is not allowed.

ed in the sense that the ball cannot be hit by both the head and the hands or the hands and the chest at the same time.

Although we urge strict adherence to the official rules of the game, certain modifications may be made to suit special conditions. These modifications include placing the net at a lower level; using a larger or a lighter ball; permitting a second service; allowing an assist on the service; permitting an unlimited number of contacts in playing the ball; increasing the number of players; eliminating the principle of rotation, etc., etc.

All that I have discussed relates to the official rules of the game as played by men and boys as these rules are revised annually by the United States Volley Ball Association. While in a general way the game for women and girls is very similar, the actual playing rules are specially adapted to meet the requirements of women and girls; these rules are adopted and administered by the Volley Ball Committee of the Women's Athletic Section of the American Physical Education Association.

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