



# Volleyball ACE™ Power Tips

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*Official Drill Bulletin of the American Volleyball Coaches Association*

## Short-Zone Serving

*By Tom Pingel, USA Volleyball managing director of High Performance National Programs*

Short-zone serving is an area that many coaches shy away from, mostly because they feel it is a serve that is too easy or is not effective enough for what they want to accomplish during a match. In fact, many coaches believe they should simply let their players stand back and “let it rip” because that type of serve might be a lot more effective. In reality, coaches can use the short-zone serve primarily to try to catch a receiving team off guard if the receivers are out of position.

The short-zone serve can also be used to disrupt an opponent’s offense, especially if you are playing a better team that receives the ball really well. If a team has a big player and that person subs out in the front row, the coach is subbing that player out for a good reason – probably because he cannot pass the ball or play defense very well. Perhaps his ball control skills are not very good.

Hitting a good, consistent short-zone serve right into this player’s lap is a good way to take the opponent out of its offense because it forces that person to receive and, when he is receiving, he may be taking his mind off attacking. Also, if you have a receiver who is receiving deep in the court in a three-person reception pattern, having him move up close to the net to receive can also disrupt the opponent’s offense because it affects the attack approach, angles, etc.

The last thing a short serve can really affect is the amount of time that the setter has to think about the choices on the set. When the pass is traveling from 20 to 25 feet up to the net, the setter has a lot of time to get to the pass and make an educated decision about where to set. If the pass is at the attack line and only travels 8 to 10 feet, the setter does not have as much time to think about where to set and that may ultimately affect his choices.

The down side of short-zone serving in general is, while it gives the receiving team less time to react, it also gives your defense or your blockers less time to react. The blockers have to be aware that the ball is going to be passed to the setter rather quickly and they are going to have less time to see the approach patterns. Also, if the team that is receiving has a front-row setter, the ball is getting to that potential attacker a lot more quickly. Therefore, the defense is going to have less time to get into position.

If one of the servers executes a short-zone serve, do not have that person play left-back defense, simply because he may not have time to serve and travel all the way to the left-back position. If the opponent has a front-row setter, the setter can jump to that position very quickly.



The short-zone serve can be used to disrupt an opponent’s offense, especially if you are playing a better team that receives the ball really well. Photo courtesy of the FIVB.

## Types of Serves

### *The High-Arc Serve*

This serve is very effective. A lot of teams – particularly men's – are using this serve. A team is not going to get a considerable number of aces as a result of using it, but it has a low chance of error and makes it easier to hit targets. Technically speaking, with the high-arc serve, you still want the ball to cross the net somewhere between the top of the antenna and the top of the net. It is not going to be so high that it is going all the way back 15 to 20 feet.

Ideally, you want to have this serve land between the attack line and the net. In order to do that, the ball should be served nice and high so that when it is crossing the net, it is definitely on its way down. The big technical difference on this serve is that instead of the normal toss out in front of the server like he is going to serve in the deep zone, the ball should be tossed slightly back so that the server is contacting the bottom of the ball, not the back of it. A lot of travel time is involved with this serve – plenty of time for a person in the back row to scoot up. Again, you are not looking for aces with this serve. You are looking to take the receiving team out of the reception pattern.

If you have a short-zone serve to middle front, three or four players may converge on the ball and dig everything into the middle. If you are playing against a team that runs a swing offense and your outside hitter is having to come in and receive that ball, it could really affect your defense. Some squads that have the receiving teams very deep almost beg you to short-zone serve because it quickens their offense even more. Knowing that, you may not want to short-zone serve against those opponents.

With the short-zone serve, you have a little less chance of error because if you miss, you definitely want to miss deep. You do not want to miss short because it goes in the net. If it travels a little bit deeper, that is acceptable. The down side is that you are not going to get many aces and it is an easier ball to pass to the target than the quicker serve.

### *The Flat Serve*

The flat serve does not travel nearly as high as the arc serve. It is basically the same type of toss that you would use for a deep zone serve. However, the ball is tossed much more lightly. The idea behind the flat serve is that it is barely going to clear the top of the net and it is going to drop off once it gets past the net.

The advantage of this serve is that it does get to the receiving team a lot quicker and it has a better chance of catching the opponents off guard, especially if they are receiving deep. Because it is moving a little bit quicker and flatter, it is a harder ball to receive and pass right to the target.

When receiving a ball in the back row, a player wants to pass it to the target, but he has a little bit of room for error in depth. He has a 20-foot pass and he can adjust to the speed a little bit. Also, he has more time to see the ball. On a short-zone serve that is really flat and gets to the receiver in a hurry, the receiver almost has to dig it and take some of the speed off of it. Otherwise, he is looking at an over-pass. Again, with this flat serve, the toss is out in front. If the ball is hit too strongly, it goes right back into the heart of the reception.

From a technical standpoint, the toss stays out in front. The server is hitting it left and trying to get it close to the top of the net. The chance for error is high. A flat serve can clip the top of the net, or sail out if it is hit too hard. This type of serve also leaves more room for error on contact. For example, if a player hits it a little bit high on the hand instead of down where he should normally be serving, he could fluff it a little bit. Or if he hits off-center, the serve is not going to have enough speed on it to reach all the way to the net.

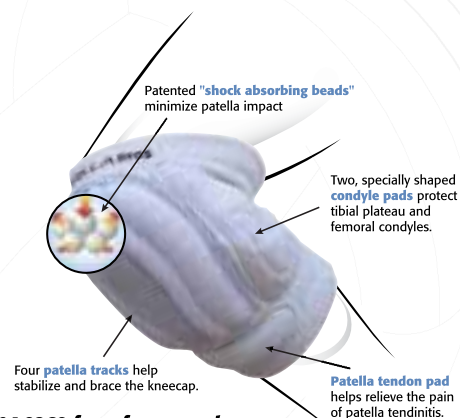
# CALENDAR

April 11-12	<b>2008 Molten Division III Men's Invitational Volleyball Championship</b> Blake Arena, Springfield College, Springfield, Mass.
April 11-13	<b>2008 AVP Crocs Tour</b> Miami, Fla.
April 12	<b>SEC Conference Coaches Beach Volleyball Championships</b> University of Florida, Gainesville
April 19	<b>Big West Collegiate Beach Volleyball Tournament</b> Huntington Beach, Calif.
April 19	<b>Division I Florida Invitational Beach Volleyball Tournament</b> Siesta Key, Fla.
April 20	<b>Collegiate Beach Volleyball Championship, a CBS College Sports Network Event</b> San Diego, Calif.
April 26	<b>Rochester Indoor Beach Volleyball Tournament</b> Rochester, N.Y.
April 18-20	<b>2008 AVP Crocs Tour</b> Dallas, Texas
April 20	<b>2008 Collegiate Beach Volleyball Championship</b> A CBS College Sports Network Event San Diego, Calif.
May 1-3	<b>39th Annual National Collegiate Men's Volleyball Championship</b> Bren Events Center, University of California, Irvine
June 20-July 8	<b>2008 FIVB World League</b>

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On all short-zone serves, zone 2 is probably one of the most difficult to hit because the ball has to travel a bit farther, you have the sideline to contend with, and the serve is going cross-court, which is adding to the distance. If you have a server who is really good at zone 2 serving, the flat serve can probably be the most effective serve in your repertoire, especially if the setter is coming out of that position.

If the setter is releasing out of right back, serving to that position always works well. The most important thing is that the distance from a right-front passer to the setter position is reduced. If the setter is facing where the pass is coming from and the serve goes to the attack line or sideline, the setter, for the most part, is going to have his back to the middle attacker and the outside attacker. The setter is not going to be able to use peripheral vision to see if the middle is coming in on time. Even on a high, arcing serve to zone 2, the receiver has little room for error and the setter is going to be taken out of the reception or out of the flow of the offense at that point.

A serve to zone 4 is pretty – and advantageous – because you are going to bring your receiver up and reduce the approach distance. From a setter's standpoint, it is just like receiving the ball from the back row. The distance is just about the same and he still gets to see his middle attacker coming in.

### **Intermediate-Depth Serve**

The third type of short-zone serve is a combination of the high-arc and flat serves. It is an intermediate serve, where you are looking for more aces, but you are also looking to disrupt the reception pattern. With this serve, the ball is not going to land very close to the net, but you do want to have your front-row players receive the ball.

Utilize this serve if a receiving team is using a service reception “W” or “U”, or against an offense where there is a person playing short. The idea is that you would be serving right at the short-zone receiver's shoulder or head. If he is going to receive the ball, he has to take the ball very high, move back and adjust. If the front-row people are going to step in, it is going to be a situation where they actually have to move fairly quickly behind the ball and they have to play a ball in front. This serve is supposed to create some confusion. If you have a receiving team that does not communicate very well, the front-row person may take a step for the ball because he thinks he has to receive it and the back-row people see that step and stop. It should create some communication problems. This should be a fairly quick ball that barely clears

the top of the net. In instructing your players, tell them to aim for a particular short-zone receiver's shoulders or head. If you have a zone receiver who is used to receiving the ball, he might not be able to get out of the way.

The advantage of this serve is that it has a decreased chance of error. If the serve is hit a little too hard, it is going to continue back to the back-row receivers and you are going to say, “Well, it was not quite as effective a serve as we wanted.” But, you are not going to have an inordinate number of errors. Again, if it is served correctly and you hit your targets, it can be very effective in disrupting reception. Because of the speed, you may also get a few aces off of it.

The down side to this serve is that it must be highly accurate to be effective. If it is not accurate, it becomes just another serve, like a down ball or a free ball that would go right into the heart of the reception. As for technique, the intermediate serve is much like the flat serve. The toss is out in front and the server hits the back of the ball instead of the bottom.

### **Serving Strategies**

From a strategic standpoint, depending on what level you are playing or what kind of team you have, you must adjust your serving patterns. If you are playing a team that is a very strong receiving team, you may not get a large number of aces off of a short-zone serve. By the same token, you are not going to get a considerable number of aces off of a drop zone serve, either. As a coach, you have to decide what is going to be the most effective way for your team to have an advantage in serving. Perhaps it is just a matter of disrupting the offense and bringing all of the players together.


Short-zone serving is a change of pace and teams may not be used to seeing it if they do not use it themselves. Short-zone serving can also help your team's reception. If your team uses a lot of short-zone serves in games, you are going to be serving a lot of them in practice and your reception patterns will therefore be used to reacting to the short-zone serves.

Whether you call your zones from the bench or you talk about what your serving strategies are going to be at the beginning of the game, you should always take time to discuss serving with your team. Many times, coaches will fall into the trap of talking too much about offense and defense and they do not talk about strategies before the game or at time-outs. Make sure you discuss serving, as well as what attacks have been going well or what adjustments need to be made on defense.

The biggest fear from a server's standpoint is the fear of making an error on the short-zone serve. Obviously, the problem has to be taken care of in practice. Try to put your players into game-like situations as much as possible during practice. If you are a coach who calls the zones from the bench, do that in practice. It does not do players any good if you tell them to serve wherever they want or go with their own mix during practice and then you call zones during a game. The players will have to adjust and look over to the sidelines for the serving zones.

Of course, the coach does not necessarily have to call the zones. If two people are back in the serving line, have the second person tell the server what zone to serve to, or have the server tell the partner what zone he is going for. Try to have them even out the serves, using both the deep and short zones. If you simply let your players go back and serve wherever they want to, they are going to serve to the deep zones 75 percent of the time. Then you ultimately have to remind them to use the short zone.

Reprinted from *Coaching Volleyball: Offensive Fundamentals and Techniques* (2004), Kinda S. Lenberg, ed., pp. 15-20. Monterey, CA: Coaches Choice.



The biggest fear from a server's standpoint is the fear of making an error on the short zone serve. Photo courtesy of the FIVB.

# VOLLEYBALL ACE™ DRILLS

## Pressure Serving Drill

Mary Ann Sprague, Principia College

Number of Players: 12

Number of Balls: Steady supply

### Objective:

To provide a focused serving drill that offers competition, pressure and conditioning.

### Directions:

1. Divide into even teams.
2. The goal is to make the other team's passers move toward the boundary lines to pass the ball.
3. Mark off the court so that the middle of the court is "out." (A in the diagram.)
4. The teams begin serving all at once and as long

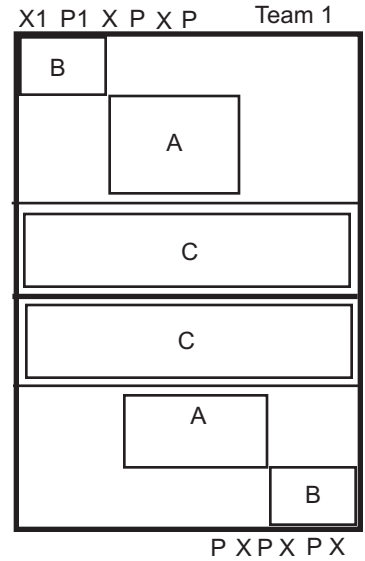
as the serve goes over and does not land in area A, keep switching balls and serving.

5. If a player from Team 1 (X1) serves the ball over and into Team 2's court but the ball lands in area A, she then must choose a person from her team to serve one ball to another desirable location.

6. If this person (P1) successfully serves to area B, then X1 gets to stay in the game. If P1 doesn't serve a successful ball in front of the 3-meter line, then X1 leaves the court and goes to "running practice."

7. P1 stays in the game and works to stay on the court.  
8. If a player from Team 1 serves in the net or out of bounds, then she must choose a person from her team to serve two balls to certain locations (one to Area C and one to Area B).

9. The same rules for serving to Area A apply. The game continues until there is one person left.



## + - 0 Short Serve and Run

From *101 Winning Volleyball Drills From the AVCA* (2000)

Number of Players: 12

Number of Balls: 12

### Objective:

To develop short serving skills and to foster concentration on the skill. The drill gives immediate feedback to the players when the ball is on or inside the 3-meter line. It creates pressure and team focus on the task at hand.

### Directions:

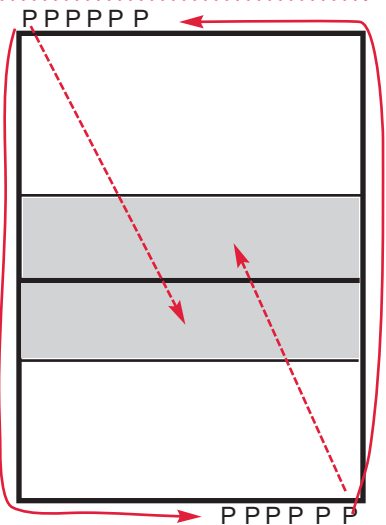
1. Players (P) line up behind opposite end lines to serve. They are attempting to serve on the 3-meter

line or just inside of it.

2. Each player serves the ball and is given a score of +1 for a ball inside the colored area, a zero when the ball is elsewhere on the court, and a -1 for a serving error.

3. The player jogs to the opposite side of the court to repeat the sequence.

4. The goal of each server is to reach +10.



## Beat the Coach

Peggy Martin, Central Missouri State, From *101 Volleyball Drills* (1998)

Number of Players: 1-12

Number of Balls: Steady supply

### Objective:

To help the servers become accustomed to game-like pressure when serving, by including a consequence (e.g., a penalty for an errant serve) and emphasizing accuracy and serve placement.

### Directions:

1. The coach should set up two serving lines of equal numbers of players and give each player a ball.

2. The drill begins with the first player serving a game to 25 points.

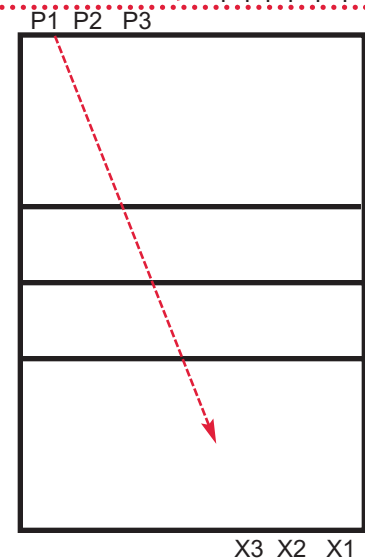
3. For any serve that is an error, the coach gets 2-5 points. Each server must beat the coach before completing the drill.

4. Emphasize concentration. Decide how to score on the basis of the skill level of the servers or the amount of pressure placed on them.

5. Five points for the coach on every missed serve by the server would give the game to the coach after three such misses.

### Variation:

1. Require servers to serve to certain zones of the court in order to score.



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