

Tactics Against the Slow Middle Attack

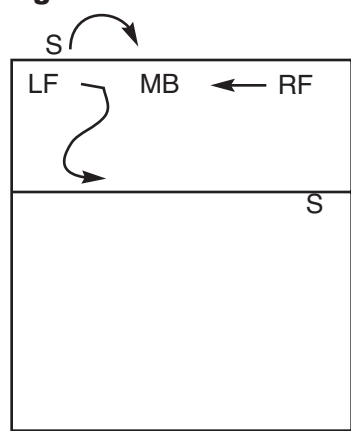
By Tim Davison, Eastmont High School, Wenatchee, Wash.

At many levels of play, the high middle set (2 set or 53) is still the primary middle attack set used. Even with teams using a “quicker” game, the middle is often used for a “quick-and-a-half” set, which floats about 3 feet above the net, waiting for the hitter to arrive and swing at it. Both of these sets are easily blocked (a double-block is one choice). This article discusses block positioning and responsibilities, and transition from defense to offense.

Basic Blocking Responsibilities

The blocking formation in Figure 1 is known as a “bunch” formation. The left-front blocker (LF) is approximately 8 feet in from the left antenna. The middle blocker (MB) is slightly to the left of center court, toward the opponent’s primary setting area. The right-front blocker (RF) is 8 to 10 feet in from the right sideline. The right-front blocker is usually a converted middle blocker.

Figure 1



When selecting the player for this position, look for size and blocking experience, plus the basic ability to secondary set the ball high out to the left side. If the right-side player is your setter (S), many more set options become available.

The left-front blocker is the main communicator, calling out information to the other players on the court, including

front- or back-row setter, number of hitters, their jersey numbers, and their court positions (e.g., split hitters, strong right or left, stack). If the opponent’s setter is front-row, the left-front blocker has “dump responsibility” and will stay in front of the setter watching for clues.

The middle blocker identifies the opponent’s middle hitter and watches for cues on movement. The player is also cognizant of the pass and will begin to “cheat” outside on a bad pass—one that virtually eliminates a quick or middle attack. On a good pass, the middle blocker concentrates on

the middle attacker and any movement toward the middle attack area by the opponent’s hitters.

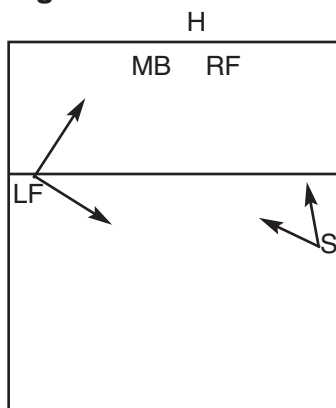
The right-front blocker stays home until a decision is made on the options off the pass. If the pass is to the setting area, she takes one short slide step toward the middle, attempting to pick up the approach route of the middle attacker while waiting for the setter’s decision. If the pass forces a high outside set, she finds the outside attacker and moves to the right to intercept the approach.

Blocking the Slow Middle

Many coaches choose to block the slow middle attack left side and middle, but for transition purposes, it is recommended to double-block with the middle blocker and right-side blocker, even if the right-side blocker is the setter. As mentioned previously, the right-side blocker (who is not the primary setter) should be big and have blocking experience. A big double block in the middle will force the opponent’s hitter to examine other options than just swinging away all the time. The middle blocker is the primary blocker, with the right-front player as the assist blocker.

You can ask the double-block to do several things, depending on the personnel involved or the type of hitter you are blocking. You can form a “cup” block and try to roof the hitter—especially if the hitter hits to a variety of angles (see Figure 2). You can also area or “channel” block,

Figure 2



whereby you will take away one area and force the hitter to go to an area where your back-court players will be stationed. Or, when your “short” setter is assist blocking, you may soft block and work the attack up into the air and transition off the pass.

Many coaches have asked if it is worth the gamble on the setter’s hands to block her in the middle. I have yet to lose a setter’s fingers blocking right side

in because a right-handed middle hitter has a somewhat difficult time cutting the ball with power back across her

body. I have, however, lost setters' fingers on the outside against hitters who turn the ball hard down the line. Depending on the size and aggressiveness of your primary setter, you can make the decision of "stuff" or "soft" blocking techniques.

Transition With Setter in the Back Row

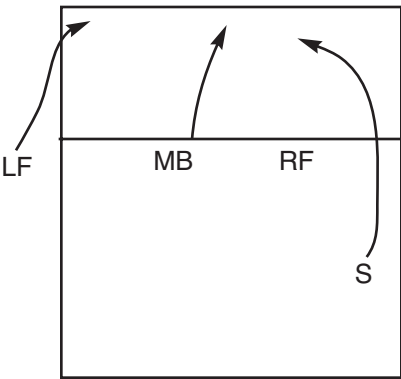
The following play description is for a 5-1 offense with a quick attacker on every pass possible. If the attack is played by anyone other than the setter (positioned in the right back), the setter releases one or two steps up the sideline and moves in at the attack line to the setting area. The right-front (assist) blocker opens left and drop steps or slide steps straight back to the attack line (see Figure 3).

The middle (primary) blocker opens right, finds the ball, and crosses over to somewhere near the attack line, ready to explode to the setter for a quick attack on the good pass. Do not allow your middle attacker to slide along the net to the left. She must get off the net to give the setter an angle to see her. The left-side power hitter has dropped off the net to a position near, but not on, the left sideline and approximately 10 to 12 feet off

the net. The hitter turns and faces the court and digger and, when satisfied the "shank" responsibilities are over, back slide steps to the outside hitting position.

Reviewing Figure 3, you will see that you can run a variety of sets from this formation. The right-front player can run a back quick, a slide quick, a back 2 set or an X2 set. The middle attacker can run a regular quick, the short shoot, the flare (tight or wide), a high middle 2 set, or a high back 2 off the right front's quick (reverse "X"). The outside hit-

Figure 3



- April 17-18** 2009 Molten Division III Men's Invitational Volleyball Championship
Ramapo College, Nahwah, N.J.
- May 7-9** 40th Annual National Collegiate Men's Volleyball Championship
Smith Fieldhouse, Brigham Young University
Provo, Utah
- May 23-30** USA Volleyball Adult Open Championships
Minneapolis Convention Center, Minneapolis, Minn.
- June 26-July 4** Eighth Annual Women's Pan American Cup (U.S. Women's National Team)
University of Miami and Florida International University
- June 26-July 5** USA Junior Olympic Girls' Volleyball Championships
Miami Beach Convention Center, Miami, Fla.
- June 27-30** 2009 JVDA National Championships
Kentucky Exposition Center, Louisville, Ky.
- July 1-8** USA Junior Olympic Boys' Volleyball Championships
Georgia World Congress Center, Atlanta, Ga.
- July 22-26** USA Volleyball High Performance Championships
Ft. Lauderdale/Broward County Convention Center
- Dec. 16-20** AVCA Annual Convention, Tampa, Fla.

The right-side blocker should be big and have blocking experience.
Photo courtesy of FIVB

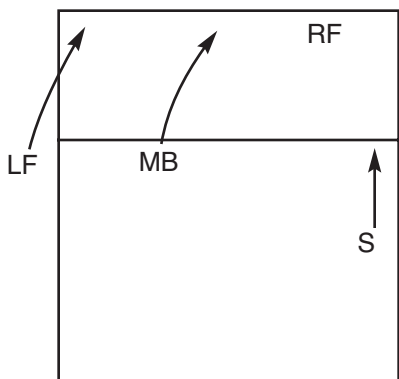


ter is the setter's safety set, or you can give her whatever set she is capable of hitting. If the setter (RB) handles the first ball, she simply passes the ball to the right-side blocker (naturally opening to the left) and the RF can set high outside or high into the middle.

Transition With Setter in the Front Row

When the setter is in the front row, the transition is quite simple (see Figure 4). You simply eliminate the right front. The setter opens left and slide steps to the setting area, which is usually 3 feet away. The middle and outside attackers follow the same footwork patterns as they do when the setter is in the back row. The right-back player now becomes a back-row attacker.

Figure 4



usually 3 feet away. The middle and outside attackers follow the same footwork patterns as they do when the setter is in the back row. The right-back player now becomes a back-row attacker.

Note that in a left-side blocking scheme, your outlet hitter (the left-front player) is much further away from the approach area. Also note the setter is off the net and

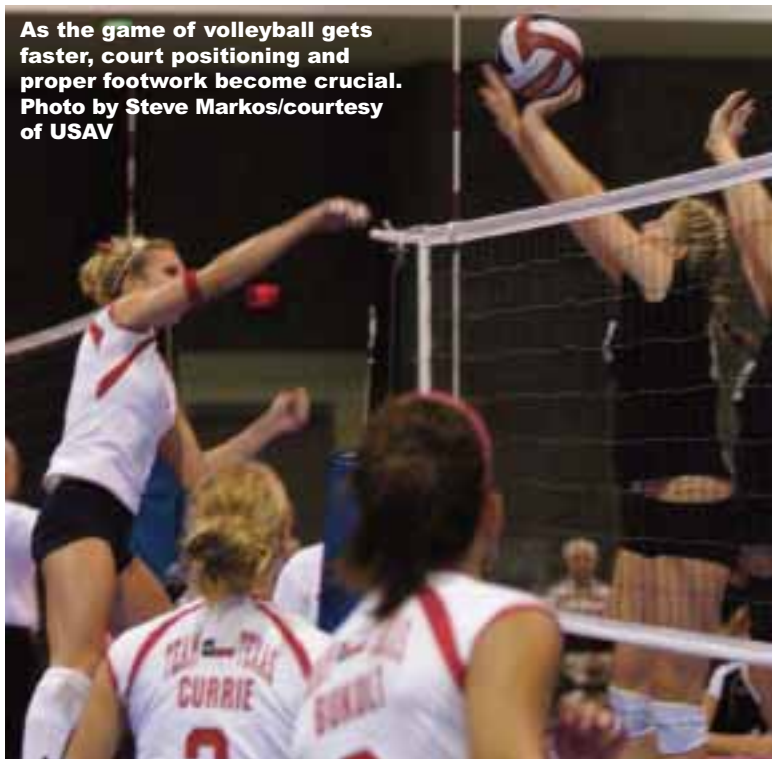
more susceptible to handling the first ball on a tip.

Where is the secondary setter? Deep in the court when the setter is in front row. When the setter is back row and you're blocking left-side-in, the right-front player drops off the net, forcing the setter deeper back and further still from the setting area.

Summary

As the game of volleyball gets faster, as well as bigger,

As the game of volleyball gets faster, court positioning and proper footwork become crucial. Photo by Steve Markos/courtesy of USAV



step-saving, proper footwork, and court positioning become more important. Having players chasing after balls or running helter-skelter generally leads to poor percentage play. Having your setter in a position to play the pass more easily and to play it with more time and less effort will save many points over a season.

Reprinted from Coaching Volleyball: Defensive Fundamentals and Techniques (2004), pp. 72-76. Monterey, CA: Coaches Choice.

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Block and Attack in Transition

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

Number of Players: 8
Number of Balls: Steady supply

Objective:

To prepare players for the block and transition aspect of the game. It is an excellent drill to work on the transition attack, blocking position and movement, and it improves conditioning.

Directions:

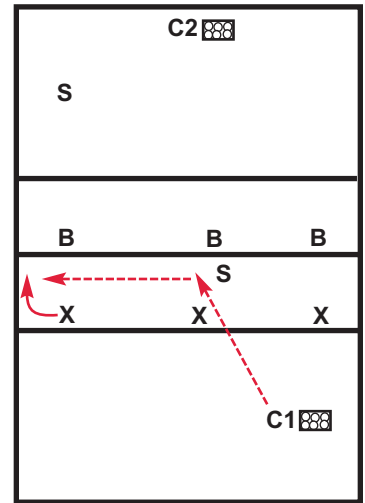
1. Set up three attackers (X) and a setter (S) on each side of the net. Have a coach (C1, C2) on each side with a cart of balls.

2. C1 tosses to the setter, who sets up an attack. The three front-row players on the opposite side are at the net ready to block.

3. If the ball is spiked and goes by the block, C2 on the blocker's side immediately tosses to the setter and the blockers quickly transition to attack readiness. The three original attackers become blockers.

4. If the ball is blocked, the setter on the attacker's side receives another toss and the same team attacks again.

5. The drill is continuous and can be paced for the level of the players by slowing down or speeding up the time between tosses by the coaches.



Blast the Seam

Mary Wise, University of Florida
(From *Volleyball Drills for Champions*, 1999)

Number of Players: 7
Number of Balls: 20

Objective:

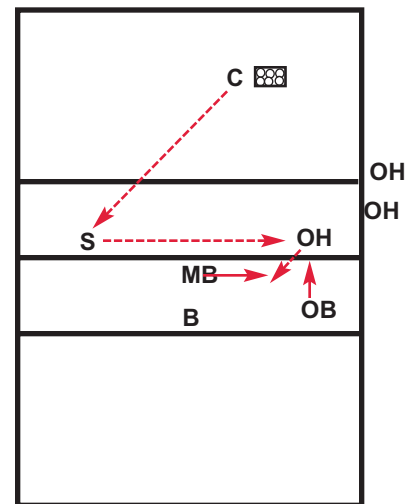
To work on two-player blocking versus a live hitter. This is a good drill for blocking repetition with controlled setting and hitting.

Directions:

1. Hitters (OH) are instructed to attack the seam of the block (between the middle [MB] and outside blocker [OB]). With hitters instructed only to attack seam, blockers can concentrate on blocking an area rather than reaching and trying to stuff.

2. Any block that stuffs the ball or controls the ball in play should count as a point.

3. Blockers stay for five points then rotate. A -1 is earned for a net violation.



Block and Attack Combination

By Joel Dearing, Springfield College
(From *Volleyball Fundamentals*, 2003)

Number of Players: 5
Number of Balls: Steady supply

Objective:

To practice footwork for transitioning from blocking to attacking.

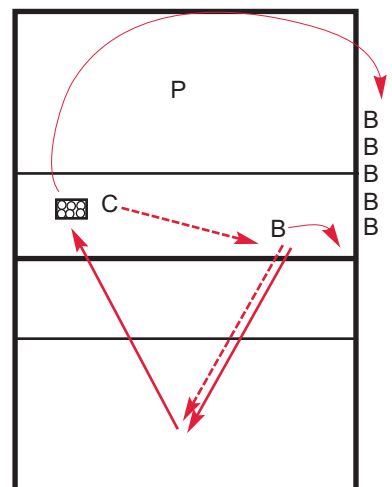
Directions:

1. Six players (B) form a line near court zone 4.
2. The first player gets into a ready blocking position.
3. A coach (C) is positioned near zone 2 and signals "block" to begin the drill.
4. The blocker executes a block and runs to the attack

line as the coach prepares to toss the ball to simulate a 14 set.

5. The blocker approaches and attacks the ball, runs to retrieve it, and places it in the basket before returning to the end of the line.

6. The drill continues until each player has had 10 attempts.



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