

Top 5 Tips to make a BIG difference with your Serve Receive

The serve receive is the key to running your team's offense. Here are 5 tips that will make a BIG difference in your volleyball passing performance.

1) Keep a straight platform, by keeping elbows straight.

One of the biggest mistakes players make when passing is bending their elbows to pass the ball. If you review the photos of elite players, both indoor volleyball and sand volleyball players when they serve receive you will notice that their "platforms" aka the inside of their forearms that they present... are so straight as a board you could use their arms as a flat table to eat on.

Bent elbows means less ball accuracy while straight arms gives more ball control and accuracy to guide the ball to the "setter" target.

2) Track the ball visually all the way into your arms.

There are a lot of things to look at when the server has the ball just before the ref blows the whistle. There can be a lot of things to be distracted by if you don't learn to concentrate and narrow your focus. What do you focus on? Once the server takes the volleyball in their hands and positions themselves to indicate where and how they are going to serve and then they start bouncing it in anticipation of serving it...at this point most elite athletes I know focus 125% ONLY on the ball in the server's hands. From this point on your eyes and mind should see and focus on nothing but the ball ALL THE way INTO your arms.

Track the ball all the way into your arms visually ...so that you can see your straight platform.

3) Don't break your arms apart.

No matter how hard or easy the serve...keep your arms together when you pass; fight to maintain good passing technique. I'm guilty of committing this error when I know it's an easy pass or free ball. You have to fight the temptation of breaking your arms together especially when you are passing on the move. That's why it's important to pass with your feet first, get stopped then use the correct technique. Don't be lazy just because it seems like an easy pass to make.

4) Pass with both feet on the volleyball court floor.

Don't jump bump. Very easy reasoning...when you are in the air you have much less to no control of your body and/or the ball but if your feet remain on the ground you can make small adjustments (maybe an extra step forward or backward if needed) to control the outcome of the serve receive 99% better.

5) Pass with your feet (first) not with your arms.

This sounds a little tricky to understand but what this means is that you need to get into the habit of getting to the ball first by getting your feet behind the ball, first, no matter where it is. There is a drill that really illustrates how this should look. A player starts in the left back serve receive position...another one can be in the right back position as well. A coach from mid court on the other side of the net will serve a ball anywhere to the left side of the court. The left side passer has to keep her/his arms behind his back at all times and run to get his/her feet to the ball in time to allow the ball to take ONE bounce through her legs.

To make the drill more challenging the server backs up to make full court serves. Short serves are really interesting as one passer has to cover the entire half of her court getting to each served ball with her arms behind her back.

Try this drill with a teammate or suggest it to your coach. As a team drill after the first person goes on the left then the server serves to the right alternating players as they run behind the last person in line to try again. This is a very effective foot speed drill which I've had both American and Italian Pro team coaches run in my practices.

Aside from this drill if you are having a hard time getting your feet to the ball to serve receive accurately ...then here's an extra tip...work on your foot speed and agility drills. This is why your warm ups have (should have) a lot of short sprints forward and backward and agility foot work drills at the beginning of every practice...precisely for this reason so you can increase your reactive speed towards serve receive and defensive balls. Work on foot speed and foot work so that you can get to the ball fast and then pass the ball.