

A perfect reception!

In beach volleyball, a stable and precise reception is the key to success. Becoming a reception specialist requires to execute the movement sequences with precision and perfection.

It is actually pretty simple to explain: a player who cannot receive the ball exactly where he wants with a certain consistency does not have much potential for success in beach volleyball. Even the best set cannot always correct a flawed reception; even the most powerful attack or the most precise shot cannot help me if my partner must chase my receptions through the entire beach. The situation I describe here with a touch of cynicism does pose some real questions, which I will try to answer in this article:

- What can you improve in the reception?
- What are the key elements for a successful reception?

The quality of the movements is the most important aspect

In my opinion, the most visible and frequent problem in the reception, from a technical point of view, is the lack of consistency in the execu-

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tion of the movements. I often notice that, even with children or youth players, the quality of the reception is judged almost exclusively by the result (ball trajectory). If the ball goes to the right place, the reception is considered as good, whereas if the ball does not go where it is supposed to, the reception is bad.

It is a priori not a big problem. However, if we search deeper and consider that learning the right movement at an early age is the most important factor to be successful later, judging the reception by the result is completely wrong. As a coach, I should concentrate on the quality of execution and, if need be, on correcting the movement. It has been demonstrated that giving priority to the quality of the execution (technique) creates automatism which bring more stability in the long term and therefore improve the performance.

It is unfortunately quite evident that, even at the top level, we see and tolerate too many flaws in the basic technique. A mix of bad technique and unstable execution of the movement does not necessarily have negative consequences for a child or a youth athlete with good coordination because the quality of the service is not

very good yet. But as the level increases, and especially as the serves become more difficult, the flaws in the execution are more and more penalizing.

When working with beginners, paying close attention to the quality of the movement combined with a good perception's training will ensure that, in the long term, only exceptional serves will create problems to the reception.

With a perfect execution, the player will, in the long term, be able to consistently play with precision, even when the opponent's serves become more pressing.

If the execution is flawed, the player will not be able, the long term, to play consistently with precision. The precise receptions will be random, and consistency will further decrease as the opponent's serves become more pressing.

Two reception techniques

In beach volleyball, we concentrate on the following two reception techniques:

1. Frontal underhand reception (see fig. 1)
2. Lateral underhand reception (see fig. 2)

In indoor volleyball we would add a third technique, the frontal overhand reception. However, this option does not exist in beach volleyball due to the rules of the game.

In reality, a reception strategy using two different techniques should be relatively easy to learn. In the following paragraphs, we will describe the potential problems as well as some basic rules which can prove helpful.

A matter of philosophy?

I know that various reception philosophies exist around the world. It seems therefore important to underline that different reception techniques are successfully implemented at the highest level. However, all reception philosophies used at the highest level have one thing in common: from a technical point of view, they do not allow any concession in the execution of the movement; they do not tolerate mixed forms which might be more "comfortable".



Fig.1 Frontal underhand reception



Fig.2 Lateral underhand reception

Photos: Markus Foerster / m-p-press

Reception technique: my recommendations

Arms extended, shoulders forward

The arms must always be extended, the hands exerting traction forward and downward to guarantee a full extension of the elbows.

The shoulders are brought forward. The resulting playing platform works with angles of incidence and rebound.

Ball contact on playing platform

The ball should always be contacted in the area between the wrists and the elbows, i.e. on the forearms. It is not advisable to contact the ball on or below the wrists, but unfortunately this happens often.



Position of the body remains constant in relation to the ball

If the player opened his arms just before impact, the ball should always land on his bellybutton (frontal reception).



Impulsion coming from the legs

There is no impulsion from the shoulders but the movement to accompany or slow down the ball comes from the legs.

A stable playing platform is essential

I would like to concentrate in this article on the key points of the playing platform in the reception.

Avoid unnecessary movements

One of the most frequent mistakes is to make too many unnecessary movements with the arms until the playing platform is set and oriented. Many players start with their arms and especially their elbows, close to the body. In this case, they always have to make two simultaneous movements towards the ball, which wastes time.

On the other hand, players who excel in the reception **directly** create the playing platform by joining their hands “without detour”, i.e. the arms are already extended when the hands are joined. The shoulders are far forward (at least above the knees) and in an active position, as if the player was trying to squeeze his head between his shoulders.

Lateral reception based on an active position

Since the overhead reception is not allowed in beach volleyball, the lateral reception is usually preferred for long balls because it allows moving to the next action faster and without wasting as much energy. In this case as in the frontal position, it is important to take an active position: the shoulders and therefore the playing platform must stay in front of the hips.

It is best to take this position directly during the last opening step of the back leg. Joining the arms behind the center of gravity prevents a good orientation of the playing platform on fast serves and is therefore not effective.

Anticipate (read) the serve

In the reception, I can get a head start by reading the type of serve as well as its direction and the impulsion given by the opponent, which allows me to start my sequence of movements and take my first steps sooner. With the actual level of serves, the receiving player is clearly at a disadvantage if he only reads the ball's trajectory. It is therefore very important to be able to read the opponent's gestures.

Quick and coordinated footwork

Another temporal factor and therefore very important to guarantee a good reception is footwork. A quick and well-coordinated move left or right as well as front and back is essential; it allows the receiver to bring consistency in the angle of his arms and the point of impact on his playing platform. Only a reliable footwork allows the receiver to adopt a good position with a maximum of stability behind the ball or on the side.

In the sand, it is important to try and mostly do frontal receptions. The move – and therefore the footwork – brings the player to the ball, but if the playing platform is flawed, even the best footwork will not guarantee consistency.

The key to success in the reception is a quick and efficient positioning of the playing platform coupled with a quick and well-coordinated footwork to bring the playing platform to the ball.

A good advice

Footwork can also be trained and automated without ball; drills to this effect are easily integrated in a warm-up program for instance.

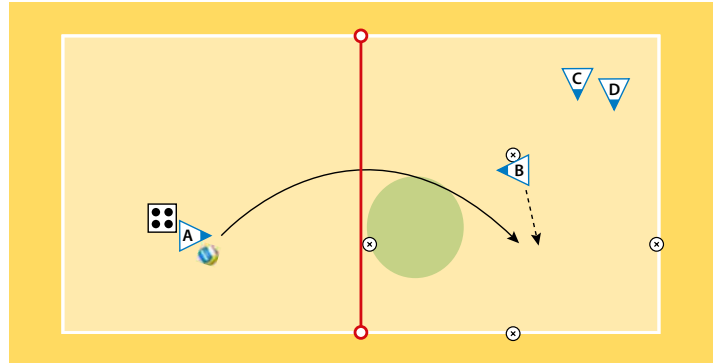
Exercise 1: Footwork

Accents:

- Footwork (move – stabilization – action)
- Position to the ball (theoretical point of impact on the body, point of contact with the ball)
- B always chooses another starting position
- T (or player A) always throws the ball in the same spot → B moves → B receives in the «house»
- Change the receiver after 5-8 balls

Variations:

- T (or A) throws in different ways
- T (or A) serves



Exercise 2: Frontal and lateral reception

Accents:

- Position to the ball
- Variability of the reception

T serves in quick succession on positions 1, 2 and 3, each marked by a cone.

→ A plays 3 different receptions one after the other:

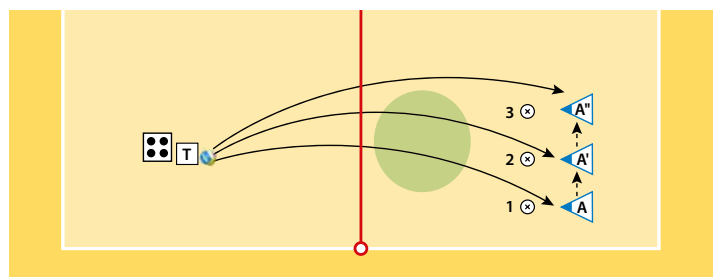
1. Ball straight on the body → frontal reception
2. Ball 1 m to the side → A takes one step to place herself behind the ball → frontal reception
3. Ball 1-2 m to the side → lateral reception, concentrating on the shoulders and the point of contact with the ball

Variations:

- T throws the ball
- T uses different serving techniques (top spin, float)



Photos: Markus Foerster / m-press



Exercise 3: Game 2 against 2 (with 2 ball contacts)

Accent:

Use all the reception techniques in the game

Team A/B plays against team C/D

Special rule:

The game must always be played with two ball contacts so that the reception must also be the set (for instance, A receives → B hits right away → C defends → D hits right away → ...)

Variations:

- Game on half court (= easier)
- Game with another ball (for instance lighter, bigger, softer)

