

Winning shots

Shots are part of any beach volleyball player's repertoire. But only those who keep their opponent guessing about their hitting intention for a long time can regularly score points with their shots.

When looking for information on «shots and beach volleyball», you will find an inventory of the different types of shots: from the standard line shot to the poke shot, from the cut to the roll shot. I would like to concentrate here on the following key points:

- Technical aspects;
- Most frequent errors;
- Suitable training solutions to get around the block and fake the opponent's defense.

Reading well is good, but ...

The quality of the shots is often linked to the hitter's ability to read the game well. This is certainly true at all levels because a shot played directly into the arms of the defender is much easier to control than a powerful hit. However, I believe that the shot's quality depends more on the technical execution and the strategic orientation of the game than people usually think.

The author



Sebastian Beck has been head coach of the Swiss Women's Beach Volleyball National Teams for many years. He first trained the pair Kuhn/Zumkehr, which won the FIVB Open Sanya (CHN) 2009 and the FIVB Grand Slam Rome 2012 before finishing 9th at the London Olympic Games 2012. Since 2013, Sebastian Beck has been in charge of all Swiss Women's National Teams: Goricanec/Hüberli (silver medal at the CEV European Championship 2014 in Cagliari), Heidrich/Zumkehr (winner of the CEV Biel/Bienne Masters 2015) Forrer/Vergé-Dépré (2nd place CEV Biel/Bienne Masters 2014 and 2015) and Betschart/Eiholzer (gold medal at the CEV European Championships U22 2015 and the European Games Baku 2015).



... technique is even more important!

I often ask players how the ability to read the game can be helpful if the contact with the ball during the shot is not done with perfect technique and a clear intention. What happens is: I put myself in the hands of my opponent and my ability to score depends on the quality of his game. But if I want to determine myself as much as possible the efficiency of my own shots, I must

1. give my opponent less time, and
2. increase the precision of my shots.

Give my opponent less time

The more I can accelerate the ball, the less time and therefore options will my opponent have. In other words: the less time my opponent has to defend my shot, the more errors he will make in defense.

Precision through technique

Most shots' trajectory is not directly downwards but, depending on the height of the hit, horizontal or in the beginning even upwards; therefore, the ball needs a strong forward rotation (top spin) to remain inside the court. From a technical point of view, one must pay attention to the following key points:

3. contact the ball with the entire surface of the hand in order to direct the ball with precision;
4. active use of the wrist (see fig. 1): on contact, the hand moves above the ball. A further impulsion is given to the ball by bending the wrist at the end of the movement sequence;
5. the arm is completely extended (no flexion at the elbow) when the ball is contacted. This guarantees the best possible height and control of the ball.

The golden rules of training

As in most sports, the following two golden rules will help you reach your goals in beach volleyball:

1. The correct execution of the movement sequence from a technical standpoint. «Do it right!»
2. The repetition of the movement sequence. «Do it repeatedly!»



Fig. 1 Active use of the wrist

Photo: FIVB

One movement sequence for everything

Whether at the recreational or at the highest level, we often observe a complete change of the arm swing when a player wants to hit a shot: the arm is brought forward above the head early and the ball is played with a little push over the net. Is this really necessary? Would the hitter not have better chances of putting the ball down into his opponent's court by keeping the same arm swing, which consists of bringing the arm back, opening the shoulders and swinging the arm forward close to the head?

I realize that this sequence requires a very good coordination. But in the end, playing the perfect shot only requires to modify slightly the synchronization and to accentuate the motion of the hand and wrist. Is it not easier to learn once and for all one multipurpose gesture, rather than two completely different movements which will become easier and easier to read as the level increases?

In order to give the ball a controlled rotation forward and a good acceleration, the arm must remain extended during the entire swing. It goes without saying that the gesture is not done at the highest speed; otherwise, it would be a power hit.

Warm-up is the perfect opportunity to train this great movement. It is important to take enough time to execute the gesture. The following points should be remembered:

1. Throw the ball high enough: 2-3 m above your head is a good indication;
2. Do not wait underneath the ball but try, at the last moment when you take your last step, to find a good contact position in front of your body because when you jump, you will want to play the ball in a delayed but athletic timing. Try to do the same movement with your feed on the ground;
3. Hit the ball at the highest point, slightly in front of your body, with your arm completely extended.

Game like drill

One of the most popular warm-up games is the stand shot game, which is a normal game without jumping. Try to hit the ball late, arm completely extended with a full swing, and you will improve very fast.

Neutral position to the ball

Another important point – and therefore also a frequent source of error – is the posi-

tion of the player to the ball. I often find that shots are usually considered like some sort of hiding game or “trick contest”. I cannot say that trying to trick your opponent is wrong, but being able to make successful shots depends, in the long run, on the hitter’s ability to find a neutral position to the ball (body – ball – arm position) which:

- guarantees a clean execution from a technical standpoint, and
- gives the hitter the largest possible field of vision (of the court).

So try to accelerate your shots rather than trick your opponent with all kinds of crazy fakes. Good defenders are patient and do not fall for fakes more than once. But they cannot accelerate their footwork at the drop of a hat.

Finally, you should pay attention to the following two points in your approach and impulsion:

1. Try to keep as much as possible the same timing as for the power hit (athletic quality). If you are too early and underneath the ball, you will lose your field of vision and your acceleration. Furthermore, the defender will see very quickly that a power hit is no longer possible and adapt accordingly;
2. Make your approach for a shot as dynamic and athletic as for a power hit. This will keep all attack options open until shortly before the hit, and your opponent will be left guessing for a longer time.

Try to implement these tips in the following drills and train with awareness as well as consistency. If you are perseverant, you will soon be able to defy Reinder Nummerdor in the stand shot game. Good luck!

Difference between cross court shot and cut shot

- The **cross court shot** is played over the block in the long diagonal (because the defender takes the line → s. fig. 2)
- The **cut shot** is played inside the bloc on the short diagonal (when the defender takes the long diagonal → s. fig. 3)

Tips to train the cut shot

1. Put an extra antenna on the inside of the block to force a perfect trajectory of the hit. The cut shot must cross the net very close to the antenna (s. fig. 1 and 2)!
2. Make sure that the ball is not too close to the net on position 2 (right side) for right-handed players. In this case, the hitter needs more room or the cut shot will be very easy to block. Same thing on position 4 (left side) for left-handed players.
3. The cut shot must always be played with the intention to make a point, even if the defender is positioned cross court!
4. It is only at the very last moment, when the ball is being contacted, that the cross court shot becomes a cut shot by strongly accentuating the rotation of the wrist. It is thus almost impossible for the defender to read the cut shot!

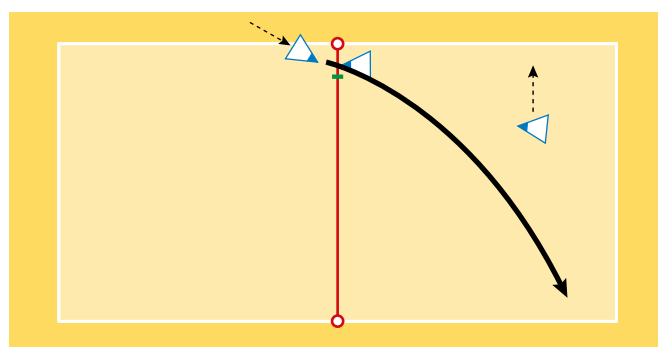


Fig. 2 Cross court shot

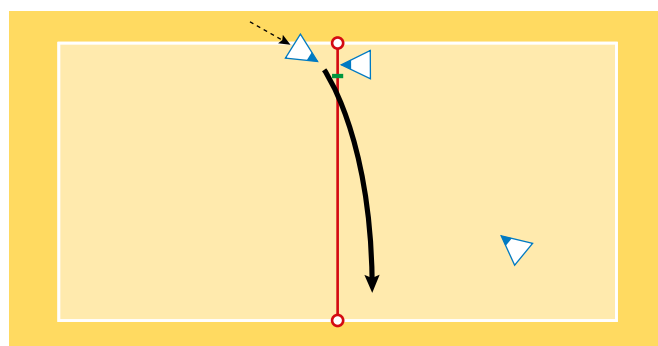


Fig. 3 Cutshot

Approach = completely neutral

Right-hander in position 4:

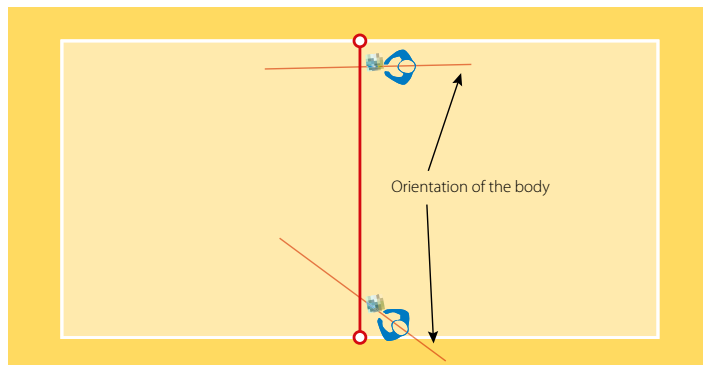
The approach and the orientation of the body are +/- towards the long diagonal.

Right-hander in position 2:

The approach and the orientation of the body are +/- perpendicular to the net. Depending on the typology of the hitter (field of vision, flexibility of the shoulder and ability to control the ball with the wrist), the orientation can sometimes be slightly diagonal (towards position 5-6).

Remark:

For left-handers, the direction of the approach and the position of the body are the opposite (in position 2 like right-handers in 4 and in position 4 like right-handers in 2).



Drill 1: Approach and orientation

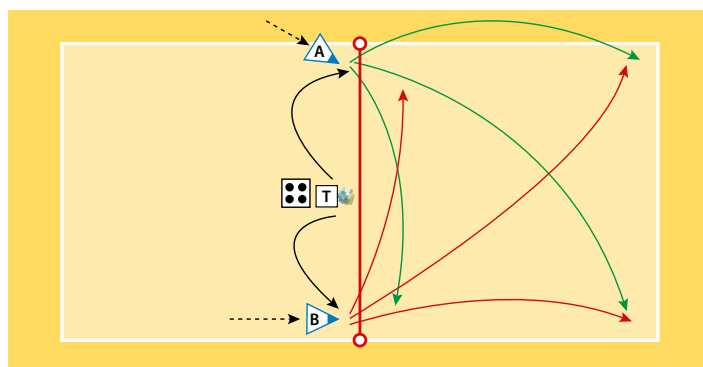
Accent:

Correct neutral approach and orientation of the body.

- T throws the ball alternately on positions 2 and 4 → the hitters A/B make their approach and orient their body is correctly (= neutral position) → shot with their feet on the ground (line shot, cross court shot, cut shot)
- Rotate after 3 shots per hitter

Variation:

Jump and hit (= more difficult)



Drill 2: Hitter against defender

Accent:

Correct neutral approach and orientation of the body.

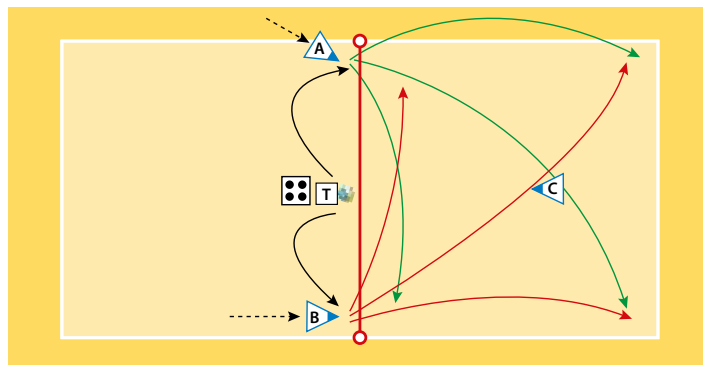
- Same thing as in drill 1, but with C playing defense
- When C can touch the ball → point for C
- Who gets to 5 points first?

Important:

Neutral position → difficult for C to read the hit

Variation:

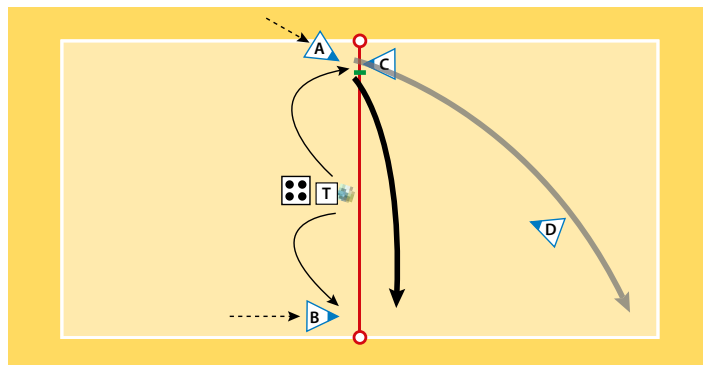
2 players on defense (= more difficult)



Drill 3: Cross court shot and cut shot

Accents:

- Correct neutral approach and orientation of the body.
- Vary the spots where the ball crosses the net.
- T throws a ball on position 4 (or position 2) → A and B hit alternately against blocker C and defender D
- Cross court shot and cut shot are the only hitting options allowed
- Switch teams (hitting/defense) after 10 balls
- Which team scores more points?



Drill 4: Hitting against defense

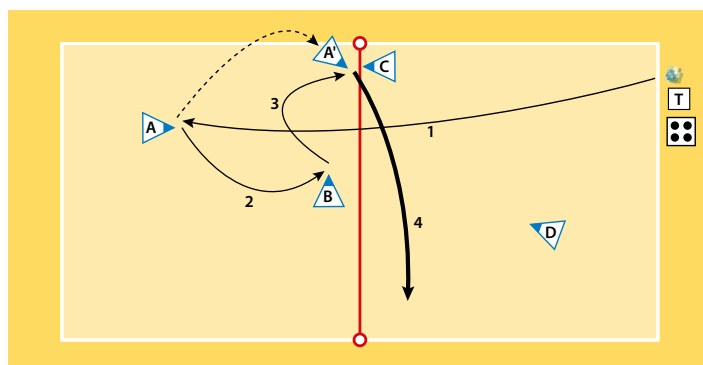
Accent:

Use all shot options in game situation.

- T serves on A → reception on B → B sets → A' attacks with a shot (all options allowed)
- Team B (C/D) defends (bloc long line, defense cross court)

Keeping score (examples):

- Team B touches the ball → point for team B
- Team B can counter-attack → point for team B
- Team B counter-attacks and makes a point on a predetermined target → point for team B
- etc.



Photos: FIVB