

Player Assessment – Susie

Strengths – Athleticism, Attitude, Jump and Reach

Weaknesses – Ball-Handling, Transition, Positioning, Serving

Overview: Susie only just started playing volleyball this academic year. She's been a very quick study, thanks in part to a real eagerness to learn and improve. She's got a great attitude both in terms of being very positive and receptive, but also with a bit of competitive fire mixed in. Naturally, however, her inexperience means she lacks things like positional awareness and the general movement patterns more experienced players have ingrained - though she's been a lot more flexible in where she's been able to play than is true of most. It also means she is lacking in the more basic skills of the game. Her serving is erratic because she hasn't yet developed a fully consistent toss. Her passing and digging are problematic in part because she tends to get happy feet before playing the ball and usually has her toes pointed outward, limiting her ability to react to balls not hit right at her. What Susie can do quite well for someone with her limited experience is hit the ball quite well. She isn't shy or tentative about it and makes good use of her reach.

Path to Improvement: Things like court awareness and positioning will come primarily from game experience with corrective indications along the way. The use of match video to point out position and transition faults will accelerate the process for Susie, and she will be helped along the way by the more senior players on the court with her. Visual observation will be the only way to keep tabs on development in this area.

Improvement in serving is a matter of keeping Susie focused on giving herself a good toss. Once this is accomplished she's got the potential to develop a very good serve given her general level of arm speed and high reach. This focused work on her toss has to be internally driven, though with the occasional coaching reminder. Since a more consistent toss will result in higher levels of accuracy, Susie's progress can be measured in how efficiently she hits targets in directed serving drills, and in a more generalized sense in rising serve rating stats (0-4, 0-5 scale) throughout the season.

The major area of coach-led work is Susie's passing and defending mechanics. She needs specific attention given to her posture and footwork. This will have to come from lots of reps with considerable feedback and direction. The use of video wouldn't hurt either. A key metric for progress could be serve receive passing statistics scored on a 0-3 scale taken on a regular basis throughout the season. Improved footwork and posture should see improvements in that metric over time. For digging, keeping track of the ratio of dug balls to dig opportunities, and even a dig accuracy score similar to the one used for serve receive should help track improvements made in that area.

Player Assessment – Jane

Strengths – Good general skill set and experience, reach

Weaknesses – Passing and defence, gets tentative in attack

Overview: Jane has quite a bit of playing experience, though is only in her first year at the university. She can attack from either right or left and has good hands from some prior setting experience. That plus her size as a blocker has seen her primarily play OPP. Her general skills are solid, but she isn't as strong on the passing and defensive side of the ball as she could be. Part of the issue is being too high. Aside from problems dealing with lower balls, it also causes a bad platform angle resulting in overpasses. Jane can hit just about any type of set and from all over the court with consistent attack mechanics. She needs to be less tentative and afraid of making hitting errors, however, as it results in her not being as powerful an attacker as she could be. She could do with a more explosive approach as well.

Path to Improvement: It is possible that part of Jane's issue with being too high so often on defence and passing is that she may have insufficient leg strength to consistently hold a lower position. Stronger legs would also help to make Jane's hitting approach more explosive, and obviously offer other benefits. Leg strength is easily testable in the weight room, why general explosiveness can be assessed through things like jump testing. Jane should be encouraged to go on a weight training regimen with testing done perhaps monthly to gauge progress.

In terms of Jane's serve reception and defensive issues, platform angle is the major problem. She needs to develop a flatter general platform to eliminate overpasses. That will take lots of coaching feedback and working with her individually to give her the instinctive feeling of where her arms need to be positioned. Video will be useful. A key metric for progress could be serve receive passing statistics scored on a 0-3 scale taken on a regular basis throughout the season. A better platform angle should see improvements in that metric over time. For digging, keeping track of a dig accuracy score similar to the one used for serve receive should help track improvements made in that area.

It would also help Jane to become more comfortable going to the floor. She is the type of player who tends to go to her knees and slide rather than sprawl, extend, or dive for low balls. Jane is going to have to learn floor defence techniques to improve her effective defensive range.

On the hitting side, Jane has generally good mechanics, but rarely hits the ball with as much power as one would think she's capable. Part of that is a function of needing a more explosive approach, which ties in with leg strength above, and with sometimes needing to get a better transition. Importantly, though, Jane has a tendency to be tentative in fear of making mistakes. The result is she doesn't get as many kills as she should be able to get. The key to dealing with this is probably to get her focused on scoring points. This can be accomplished by assessing her on a metric like Kill %. This would be a better choice than Hitting Efficiency, at least initially, because the latter has errors factored in and we don't want Jane worried about that. Jane can be given a series of Kill % goals to be her developmental targets – starting with something a bit above her current average and progressively moving toward a reasonable objective (perhaps 35%-40%).

10-Week Team Programme

Current Situation

It's the beginning of the season with try-outs just completed and the team selected. The team is competing in a combination of BUCS, Student Cup and SWVA regional league play. BUCS is the main focus with the objective of retaining our position in the Southern Premier League. SWVA involvement is primarily intended to provide additional playing time and experience, especially to non-starters. I am using the 2013-14 schedule as a framework for the timing of fixtures, etc.

Team Assessment

As a collective, the team is good on defence and in sustaining rallies. Serving is also a strength. The team is not as strong in the attack, as it does not get kills at a very high rate. Similarly, the team records very few stuff blocks, though does get good touches at times. Serve receive is tolerable, but could be better. Hitting and blocking will likely need improvement to be competitive in the Premier League, with serve reception improvement something that would help the offense.

Training/Competition Schedule

Week 1 (commencing 30/9)

Training Monday (1.5 hours) and Wednesday (2 hours)

Week 2 (commencing 7/10)

Training Monday (1.5 hours) and Wednesday (2 hours)

Week 3 (commencing 14/10)

Training Monday (1.5 hours) and Wednesday (2 hours)
SWVA matches Sunday

Week 4 (commencing 21/10)

Training Monday (1.5 hours) and Wednesday (2 hours)

Week 5 (commencing 28/10)

Training Monday (1.5 hours)
BUCS match Wednesday
SWVA matches Sunday

Week 6 (commencing 4/11)

Training Monday (1.5 hours) and Wednesday (2 hours)
BUCS match Sunday
SWVA matches Sunday (second team)

Week 7 (commencing 11/11)

Training Monday (1.5 hours)
BUCS match Wednesday
Student Cup Saturday

Week 8 (commencing 18/11)

Training Monday (1.5 hours)
BUCS match Wednesday
SWVA matches Sunday

Week 9 (commencing 25/11)

Training Monday (1.5 hours) and Wednesday (2 hours)
BUC matches Saturday

Week 10 (commencing 2/12)

Training Monday (1.5 hours), joint with men's team

Goals for the Programme

There are three primary objectives for the programme. They are:

1. Improve serve reception as a platform for a more consistent attack
2. Speed up the offense by making the middle quick attack a regular fixture
3. Increase the Kill % of the pin hitters through more aggressive swings and incorporation of more tips, etc. in their repertoire.

Of course sustaining and/or improving the team's strengths in defence and serving are important, as is improving the block. The advantage of developing and improving on serve reception and the attack, however, is that it will put pressure on our own defence to improve apace, thereby providing a dual training effect.

Phases

There are three primary phases to the programme.

Pre-Competition Phase: This will be Weeks 1 through 4. The primary objective of this phase will be to solidify offensive and defensive systems and identify likely player roles for the Competitive Phase. Much of this will be done in training, but the first pair of SWVA matches in Week 3 will allow an assessment in a competition context as well.

Developmentally, the focus will be on improving serve receive passing, increasing hitter aggressiveness, and establishing the foundations of a quick offense. Serve reception statistics can be kept throughout to provide an objective measure of progress, likewise with Kill %s to judge progress on the hitting front. Comparative video analysis can be used to observe the progress of the middle-setter quick attack connection.

During this phase time can be dedicated to individual skill development on a personalized basis – for example, having Monday sessions be fundamental skill focused while Wednesdays are more team and tactics oriented. The limited amount of training time (3.5 hours /week) does constrain how much one-on-one coaching can be done, especially at the expense of more team oriented work, but there are opportunities to provide individual feedback and guidance along the way.

It is important during this phase that a positive gym mentality be established and that players are not afraid to make mistakes. This will be critically important in developing more aggressive hitters and building a faster middle attack, as both invariably will result in more errors.

Competitive Phase: This will be Weeks 5 through 9. Scouting information on the opposition is of generally limited availability at this point in the season and we will mainly just be in the first leg of the double round-robin of BUCS league play, so will not have seen any of our opposition previous. This limits opportunities to develop specific match strategies. As a result, the focus remains on work toward the general training programme objectives, while making adjustments to priorities as necessary based on the feedback derived from matches played.

At this point we should be working on making the quick attack a regular feature of the offense in competition, not just training situations. Individual skill training takes a back seat during this phase as there is less training time available due to the Wednesday fixtures on the schedule cutting training those weeks to just one session (and only 1.5 hours). That puts the onus on more team-oriented and tactical work. By now, however, little focus on systems of play should be required, providing the opportunity to keep serve reception and hitting as leading training priorities.

The three sets of SWVA matches during this phase will not only provide non-starters a chance to play, but all players an opportunity to experiment in a low pressure environment. This should be of most help in the attacking phase, allowing hitters to develop their aggressiveness, and middles and setters to work on their connection without major concern about outcomes.

Wind-Down Phase: This will be Week 10, the last week of the academic term. This is a fun week, featuring a joint session with the men's team and the club's end-of-term dinner, allowing the team to relax after five straight weeks with meaningful play in three competitions. It is also a time for player and coach feedback with an eye toward resumption of the season in the second term.