



PRACTICAL GUIDE

Volleyball Tryout Planning Guide

Build a more active, organized, and defensible volleyball tryout without wasting court time or relying on memory.

Design the logic of your tryout before you pick drills, print sheets, or announce results.

INSIDE

- decision-first planning
- active evaluation principles
- worked tryout example
- simple tracking framework
- Toolkit next step

How to Use This Guide

Use this as a planning primer before you assemble the operating materials.

It helps you clarify what information you need, which activities create that information, and how to preserve useful observations before memory fades. It will not make roster decisions automatic, but it should make the process clearer and easier to defend.

What this guide will help you do

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| ☐ Identify the decisions your tryout must support. | ☐ Simplify evaluation tracking. |
| ☐ Choose activities that create useful evidence. | ☐ Prepare for common tryout problems. |
| ☐ Keep players active instead of standing in lines. | ☐ Plan communication before results need to be delivered. |

This guide is for coaches who

- have tryouts coming soon
- need a clearer structure
- want more active evaluation
- need better notes and staff alignment
- want a defensible process without overcomplicating it

This guide is not

- a complete printable tryout packet
- a full set of drill/game cards
- a replacement for school, club, or governing-body policy
- a guarantee of perfect selection decisions

RELATIONSHIP Guide vs. Toolkit

This guide helps you design the logic of the tryout. The Volleyball Tryout Toolkit gives you the printable operating materials: plan templates, check-in and evaluation sheets, drill/game cards, large-number setups, communication templates, and a build sheet.

Start With Decisions, Not Drills

The first question is not "What drills should we run?" The first question is "What do we need to know by the end of the tryout?"

Tryout design improves when each activity has a job. Some activities create broad evidence. Some create direct comparison. Some answer role-specific questions. If you do not know the decision an activity supports, it probably does not belong in the plan.

Five decisions to clarify before tryouts

- ☐ Which players are clearly selectable for this team or level?
- ☐ Which players are clearly not ready for this selected group?
- ☐ Which players are close enough to need another look?
- ☐ Which position or role needs could change the decision?
- ☐ Which behaviors matter: communication, competitiveness, coachability, response to error?

COACH DECISION Define the selection evidence

Before choosing activities, define what would make a player clearly selectable, clearly not ready, or still undecided.

Player category	What it means	Next action
Clear yes	Repeated evidence supports selection.	Confirm role/level and document short rationale.
Clear no	Current fit is not there for this team or level.	Follow policy and communicate clearly.
Bubble	Decision depends on role, comparison, or missing evidence.	Create a direct comparison or targeted look.

A Tryout Flow That Usually Works

Move from broad observation to game-like evidence to targeted checks and staff review.

Phase	Why it matters	What coaches watch
Check-in / numbers	Creates administrative control and consistent tracking.	Visible numbers, group assignment, missing info.
Warm-up / ball-control entry	Starts observation and creates a broad volleyball look.	Focus, movement, control, communication.
Serve/pass look	Surfaces high-value roster information.	Serve pressure, passer composure, seams.
Small-sided games	Creates more game-like contacts per player.	Reading, competing, adapting, decision-making.
Targeted checks	Fills specific information gaps.	Role questions, position fit, second-look players.
Staff review	Preserves information while fresh.	Clear yes, clear no, bubble, next action.

EXAMPLE Worked example: 24 players, 2 courts, 2 coaches, 2 hours

Main decisions: clear yes, clear no, bubble, and role questions.

Early: small-sided games for broad evidence.

Middle: serve/pass plus game-like comparison.

Late: targeted checks for bubble players.

Finish: 10-minute staff review.

The Toolkit turns this logic into ready-to-use 90-minute, 2-hour, 3-hour, 2-day, and 3-day plan templates. This guide stays at the planning level so you can decide what your tryout must accomplish.

Use Game-Like Activity Earlier

Small-sided and cooperative games usually provide more useful information than long lines of isolated reps.

Coaches often delay game-like play until the end of tryouts. That can be a mistake. Game-like activity reveals reading, communication, recovery after mistakes, competitiveness, and the ability to solve volleyball problems with teammates.

Cooperative goals

Use X in a Row or Points per Sequence when the group needs controlled pressure. These formats reward process quality and communication, not just rally wins.

Small-sided games

Use Winners, Speedball, or Player Winners when you need game reading, repeated contacts, and competitive comparison. Smaller teams create more touches per player.

Full-team play

Use 6v6 later when you need to see role fit, system awareness, or bubble players in comparable roles. Do not use it early if most players will stand around.

Movement across groups

Move players after repeated observation, not one good or bad play. The goal is useful comparison, not premature sorting.

COMMON MISTAKE Too much isolated skill work early

It can look organized, but it often produces less useful information than active, game-like play.

TRY THIS A simple comparison method

- Run two or more small-sided courts.
- Every 8–10 minutes, move players up or down only after repeated evidence.
- Keep labels neutral so players are not told they are in a "cut" group.

Skill Checks Should Answer Specific Questions

Use isolated checks to resolve uncertainty. Do not let them dominate the tryout.

Serving, passing, setting, attacking, and position-specific checks can help. The mistake is adding them because they are familiar rather than because they answer a decision question. Keep skill checks short, active, and connected to roster decisions.

Decision question	Useful activity choice	What to record
Can this player pass serve under pressure?	Two-sided serve/pass or targeted serve receive.	Quality marks, composure, seam responsibility.
Can this player create serving value?	Target serving or serving pressure game.	In/pressure, location intent, response to miss.
Can this setter function with different pass quality?	Fixed-setter pepper, transition game, 6v6 segment.	Footwork, location, choices, leadership.
Can this attacker score or keep pressure?	Cooperative cross-court hitting, Winners, 6v6 wash.	Range, control, transition, error pattern.
Does this player defend and communicate?	Small-sided games and game-context play.	Reading, pursuit, useful talk, recovery.

COACH DECISION Name the question first

Use a skill check when it answers a decision question. Do not add it just because it is a familiar drill.

SHORTCUT Printable version shortcut

The Volleyball Tryout Toolkit includes the plan templates, evaluation sheets, drill/game cards, large-number setups, and communication templates that match this guide.

Keep Evaluation Simple Enough to Use

The best evaluation system is the one coaches can actually use while still watching volleyball.

Evaluation sheets are memory aids. They should help coaches notice repeated patterns, preserve key observations, and compare close players. Evaluation marks should support the decisions you defined before tryouts, not create a separate scoring exercise.

Mark	Meaning	Use when
+	Clear strength	The player shows a repeatable strength for the level.
neutral	Current fit / acceptable	The player is within the expected range.
-	Concern	The skill or behavior may limit team fit.
?	Need another look	The context was unclear or evidence is incomplete.

COMMON MISTAKE False precision

A player is not a "2.7 passer" because of one tryout. Track enough to support decisions, then get your eyes back on the court.

Useful shorthand notes

- + Serve receive composure
- - Late defensive read
- ? Compare directly with #14
- Possible DS / serving sub value

Practical evaluation checklist

- ☐ Mark clear strengths and clear concerns.
- ☐ Use ? for players who need another look.
- ☐ Record short factual notes, not essays.
- ☐ Compare close players directly when possible.
Separate current ability from role value and future upside.
- ☐ Document enough to explain the process if asked.

Plan for Messiness Before It Happens

Tryouts rarely run exactly as planned. Good coaches simplify while preserving activity, observation, and communication.

Problem	Best adjustment	What to protect
More players than expected	Smaller groups, timed rounds, half-court activities, less scoring detail.	Activity and safety.
Fewer balls than planned	One-ball-per-group activities like 3-person pepper or X in a Row.	Contacts without long lines.
Assistant missing	Cut stations. Run one observable activity at a time with lighter tracking.	Coach attention.
Levels wildly uneven	Start mixed briefly, then regroup quietly by current level.	Playable contacts.
Time running short	Cut duplicates and long isolated checks. Preserve staff review.	Decision quality.
Bubble decisions unclear	State the exact decision question and create a direct comparison if possible.	Evidence over debate.

FALLBACK PRINCIPLE Minimum viable tryout

If time is short, protect three things: active contacts, direct comparison, and staff review. Everything else is secondary.

COACHING NOTE Simplify first

When the tryout gets messy, the best adjustment is usually the one that keeps players active and gives coaches something real to observe.

Communication Is Part of the Tryout

Do not wait until emotions are high to decide how results will be delivered.

Selection decisions are only one part of the process. How results are communicated can either reinforce trust in the process or create avoidable confusion. Plan the communication mechanics before tryouts start, then check the relevant school, club, or governing-body policy before sending anything.

Before tryouts, decide

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|---|---|
| ☐ When results will be communicated. | ☐ What school or club policy must be followed. |
| ☐ How callbacks or cuts will be handled. | ☐ Whether individual feedback will be offered. |
| ☐ Who delivers the message. | ☐ Where follow-up questions should go. |
| ☐ What language will be used. | ☐ Where the final roster or callback list will appear. |

COMMON MISTAKE Do not improvise the hard message

If you prepare the communication plan before tryouts, you are less likely to make inconsistent promises, over-explain close decisions, or create unnecessary policy problems.

The Toolkit includes communication templates for pre-tryout information, player expectations, callbacks, made-the-team messages, did-not-make-the-team messages, alternate/waitlist language, parent/guardian notes, and post-tryout team-meeting talking points.

Pre-Tryout Planning Checklist

Use this page to convert the guide into your actual process before players arrive.

Before players arrive

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|--|---|
| ☐ Define the key selection decisions. | ☐ Prepare visible group labels. |
| ☐ Confirm gym time, courts, balls, and staff. | ☐ Plan how players will rotate. |
| ☐ Decide how players will be numbered. | ☐ Identify when staff will review notes. |
| ☐ Choose the main activity flow. | ☐ Prepare communication timing and method. |
| ☐ Decide what coaches will track. | ☐ Check policy requirements. |
| ☐ Assign coach/helper roles. | ☐ Decide what to do if numbers are larger than expected. |

TRY THIS Three things to write down

1) What must we know by the end? 2) Which activities create that evidence? 3) How will we communicate decisions after the tryout?

Staff review mini-checklist

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ List clear yes players. | ☐ Identify bubble players. |
| ☐ List clear no players. | ☐ State the decision question for each bubble player.
Assign one next action: select, release, callback, direct |
| ☐ Circle disagreements. | ☐ comparison, or policy check. |

NEXT STEP

Need the actual tryout materials?

This guide helps you plan the logic. The Volleyball Tryout Toolkit gives you the ready-to-use downloadable PDF materials: plan templates, printable sheets, drill/game cards, large-number setups, communication templates, and a build sheet.

Use it when you need to run tryouts soon and do not want to build every form, plan, and message from scratch.

Inside the Toolkit:

- 1-day, 2-day, and 3-day plan templates
- printable check-in and evaluation sheets
- drill and game cards for active tryouts
- large-number setups for limited courts and staff
- communication templates
- a build sheet for your actual plan

**Get the Volleyball Tryout Toolkit**

<https://payhip.com/b/UA8p4>

Final coaching note

A better tryout is not about more drills. It is about clearer structure, more useful contacts, better comparison, and calmer decisions.