



Finland's Secrets: How Finland Develops Players from Grassroots to National Team

Nikolas Buser, 14.6.2025

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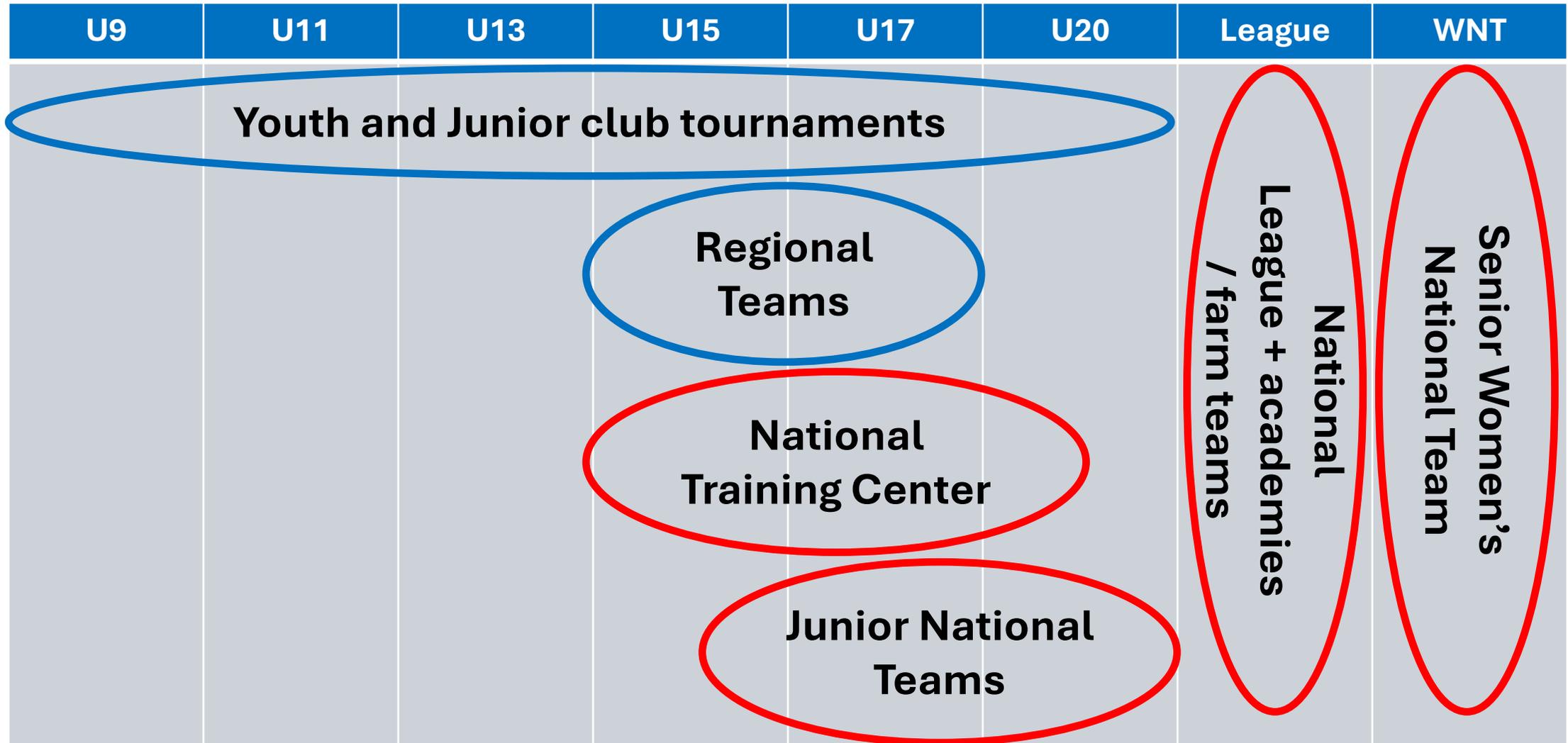
Intro Nikolas Buser

- 2020-2023 HC FIN Youth + Junior WNTs (U16-U20)
HC FIN National Training Center
- 2023-2024 HC FIN Senior Women's National Team
- 2024-now HC LP Kangasala (FIN Mestaruusliiga)

Volleyball in Finland

- Ca. 11'000 licensed players of which ca. 6000 are juniors
- Divided into 5 regions (North, West, East, South, South-West)
- Junior age groups:
 - U9, U11, U13, U15, U17, U20
 - Tournaments every 3 weeks for each age group (nationally from U15 on)
 - Many players play in multiple teams and age groups
 - Many play in adult leagues from the age of 15 or 16 on already
- Culture: start early, play a lot!

Volleyball in Finland



National Training Center



Finland
Kuortane
OLYMPIC TRAINING CENTER

- Located at Kuortane Olympic Training Center from 2011-2025, at Tampere before that
- Full-time training program and school
- Some years 2 age groups
 - U18-U20
 - Full participation in N1
 - One game vs each team in Mestaruusliiga
 - U15-U17
 - Full participation in N2
- Some years only one age group
 - U16-U19
 - Full participation in N1 (22-24 games + Playoffs)
 - One game vs each team in Mestaruusliiga (10 games)
- Best youth players of each age group get recruited



National Training Center

- Explicit goal to develop players towards international level
- Everyday life is organized volleyball and school
 - Ca. 20h/week
 - Up to 40 weeks/year
- 3 things we can train as human beings:

Craft	Body	Mind
Volleyball coaches	S&C coaches Physios Nutritionist	Sport Psychologist
Volleyball practices + games Video sessions (team/individ.)	Strength training (P)rehab Nutrition courses	Regular team sessions Voluntary group courses 1-on-1 sessions for everybody

National Training Center – weekly schedule

	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
7.30							
8.00	school	school	school	school	school		
8.30							
9.00		09.00-11.30		09.00-11.30			
9.30							
10.00					10.00-11.30		
10.30							
11.00							
11.30							
12.00		school		school	school		
12.30							
13.00							
13.30							
14.00			14.00-16.30				
14.30							
15.00							
15.30							
16.00	16.00-18.30	16.00-18.30		16.00-18.30	16.00-18.30		
16.30							
17.00							
17.30							
18.00							
18.30							

Results of this path

- 2004-08 born (now 17-21 years old):
 - 27 total involved in NTC from 2020-2023
 - 25 now playing in Mestaruusliiga or abroad (US college)
 - 9 are or have been on a WNT longlist
 - 5 are or have been invited to WNT camps
 - 2-4 are or have been on WNT rosters

New system (since 2025)

- Abandoned the National Training Center model
- New: 4 Regional Training Centers
 - Helsinki
 - Salo
 - Tampere
 - Kuopio
- RTC Coaches are also coaching the Youth and Junior NTs

Youth and Junior National Team programs

- Main goals:
 - Get to know as many players as possible from a particular age group
 - Keep as many as possible somehow involved in NT activities
 - Extra camp for younger year of the age group
 - Train them to improve their volleyball skills
 - Give them things to take home to their clubs and train
 - Participate in age group EuroVolley

Youth and Junior National Team programs

- U16-U17, U18, U20
- Scouting at Alue-SMs
- Screening camps, training camps, selection/preparation camps
 - Multiple times during the year
 - Involvement of coaches from all areas as assistants
- Participation in age group NEVZA
- Participation in age group CEV qualifiers

U16-U17

- Scouting at Alue-SMs U15/U17
- Screening camps
 - Measure height, reach, jump & reach
 - Check physical condition very broadly (ROM, basic strength levels)
 - Introduction of all fundamentals and their technical keys
 - Play a lot of small sided games
- Training camps
 - Measure height, reach, jump & reach
 - Some input for physical training
 - Training of all fundamentals
 - Small sided games
 - Intro 6v6 systems
- Selection/preparation camps
 - Measure height, reach, jump & reach
 - More input for physical training
 - More technical training
 - 6v6
 - Scrimmages/friendly matches
- Competitions

	camp days	competition days	activity	player group	age group NT	days/age group	days/year	total days
Aug								
Sept			Alue-SM U15 --> scouting	ca. 120				
Oct								
Nov								
Dec								
Jan	4		screening camp 1	20-30		4	4	4
Feb	4		screening camp 2	20-30		8	8	8
Mar	4		screening camp 3	20-30		12	12	12
Apr								
May	4		training camp	top 25-30		16	16	16
Jun	10		extra camp (with church)	top 16 (older)		26	26	26
Jul								
Aug								
Sept			Alue-SMs U15/U17 --> scouting	ca. 120				
Oct	4		selection + preparation camp	top 16-20			30	30
	1	3	NEVZA U17	top 12	U16	34	34	34
Nov					-			
Dec	4		selection + preparation camp	top 16-20	U17	38	38	38
Dec/Jan	2	3	Q1 U17 (NEVZA/MEVZA)	top 12-14		43	43	43
Jan								
Feb	4		challenger camp	#15-35		47	4	47
	4		challenger camp (younger year)	top 20 younger year		51	8	51
Mar	4		selection + preparation camp	top 16-20		55	12	55
Apr	2	3	CEV Q2 U17	top 14		60	17	60
May								
Jun	10		extra camp (with church)	top 16* (younger)		70	27	70
	8		selection + preparation camps	top 16-20		78	35	78
Jul	4		preparation camp	top 16		82	39	82
		10	CEV EuroVolley U17	top 14		92	49	92

U18

- Most players are already in the NTC or in other N1 academies
- Scouting at Alue-SM U17
- Selection/preparation camps
 - Measure height, reach, jump & reach
 - Input for physical training
 - Technical training
 - 6v6
 - Scrimmages/friendly matches
- Challenger camps
 - Check on development of players lower on the depth chart
 - Screening for and training players of the younger year in each age group
- Competitions

	camp days	competition days	activity	player group	age group NT	days/age group	days/year	total days
Sept			Alue-SM U17 --> scouting	ca. 120				
Oct	1	3	NEVZA U17	top 12		4	53	96
Nov								
Dec	4		selection + preparation camp	top 16-20		8	57	100
Dec/Jan	2	3	Q1 U18 (NEVZA/MEVZA)	top 12-14		13	62	105
Jan								
Feb	4		challenger camp	#15-35	U18	17	4	109
	4		challenger camp (younger year)	top 20 younger year		21	8	113
Mar	4		selection + preparation camp	top 16-20		25	12	117
Apr	2	3	CEV Q2 U18	top 14		30	17	122
May								
Jun	12		selection + preparation camps	top 16-20	42	29	134	
Jul		10	CEV EuroVolley U18	top 14	52	39	144	

U20

- Most (if not all) players are already on Mestaruusliiga teams
 - not all players will be available for camps or even competitions
 - limited number of activities
- Selection camps
- Competitions

	camp days	competition days	activity	player group	age group NT	days/age group	days/year	total days	
Sept									
Oct	1	3	NEVZA U19	top 12	U20	4	43	148	
Nov									
Dec									
Jan									
Feb									
Mar									
Apr									
May									
Jun									
Jul									
Aug									
Sept									
Oct	1	3	NEVZA U19	top 12			8	4	152
Nov									
Dec	2	3	Q1 U20 (NEVZA/MEVZA)	top 12-14			13	9	157
Jan									
Feb									
Mar	4		selection + preparation camp	top 16-20		17	4	161	
Apr	2	3	CEV Q2 U20	top 14		22	9	166	
May									
Jun	10		selection + preparation camp	top 16-18		32	19	176	
Jul	10		preparation camp	top 14-16		42	29	186	
Aug		10	CEV EuroVolley U20	top 14		52	39	196	

4-day camp schedule (example)

	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
8.30							
9.00		09.00-11.30	09.00-11.00	09.00-11.30			
9.30							
10.00							
10.30							
11.00							
11.30							
12.00							
12.30							
13.00		remote school	remote school				
13.30		or	or				
14.00		courses	courses				
14.30							
15.00							
15.30							
16.00							
16.30			16.30-18.30				
17.00							
17.30							
18.00	18.00-20.00	18.00-20.00					
18.30							
19.00							
19.30							
20.00							

Results of this path

- 2004/05 born (now 19-21 years old):
 - Now playing in Mestaruusliiga or abroad (US college):
 - 14 of the players involved from U17 on (2019/20)
 - 8 more of the players involved from U19 on (2021/22)
 - Now on the Women's National Team
 - 4 on the camp roster
 - 3 on the longlist
- 2006/07 born (now 17-19 years old):
 - Now playing in Mestaruusliiga:
 - 20 of the players involved from U17 on (2021/22)
 - Now on the Women's National Team
 - 2 on the camp roster
 - 3 on the longlist

WNT – 2023-2025

Setters	Liberos	Middles	Opposites	Outside Hitters
Kaisa Alanko	Sanna Häkkinen	Roosa Laakkonen	Piia Korhonen	Ada Aronen
Emmi Jalonen	Netta Laaksonen	Netta Rekola	Yasmine Madsen	Suvi Kokkonen
Sofia Lehto	Laura Penttilä	Daniela Öhman	Saana Lindgren	Emilia Kääntä
Liina Rätty	Veera Help	Taija Tikka	Neea-Maria Joki	Iida Pöllänen
		Bettina Yli-Sissala		Heini Ahtola
		Ella Autere		Viivi Pyhäjärvi
		Laura Laukkanen		Jessica Kosonen
		Ella Peltomaa		Nea Subotic

WNT – 2023-2025 (attended NTC: 15/28)

Setters	Liberos	Middles	Opposites	Outside Hitters
Kaisa Alanko	Sanna Häkkinen	Roosa Laakkonen	Piia Korhonen	Ada Aronen
Emmi Jalonen	Netta Laaksonen	Netta Rekola	Yasmine Madsen	Suvi Kokkonen
Sofia Lehto	Laura Penttilä	Daniela Öhman	Saana Lindgren	Emilia Kääntä
Liina Rätty	Veera Help	Taija Tikka	Neea-Maria Joki	Iida Pöllänen
		Bettina Yli-Sissala		Heini Ahtola
		Ella Autere		Viivi Pyhäjärvi
		Laura Laukkanen		Jessica Kosonen
		Ella Peltomaa		Nea Subotic
3 / 4	1 / 4	4 / 8	3 / 4	4 / 8

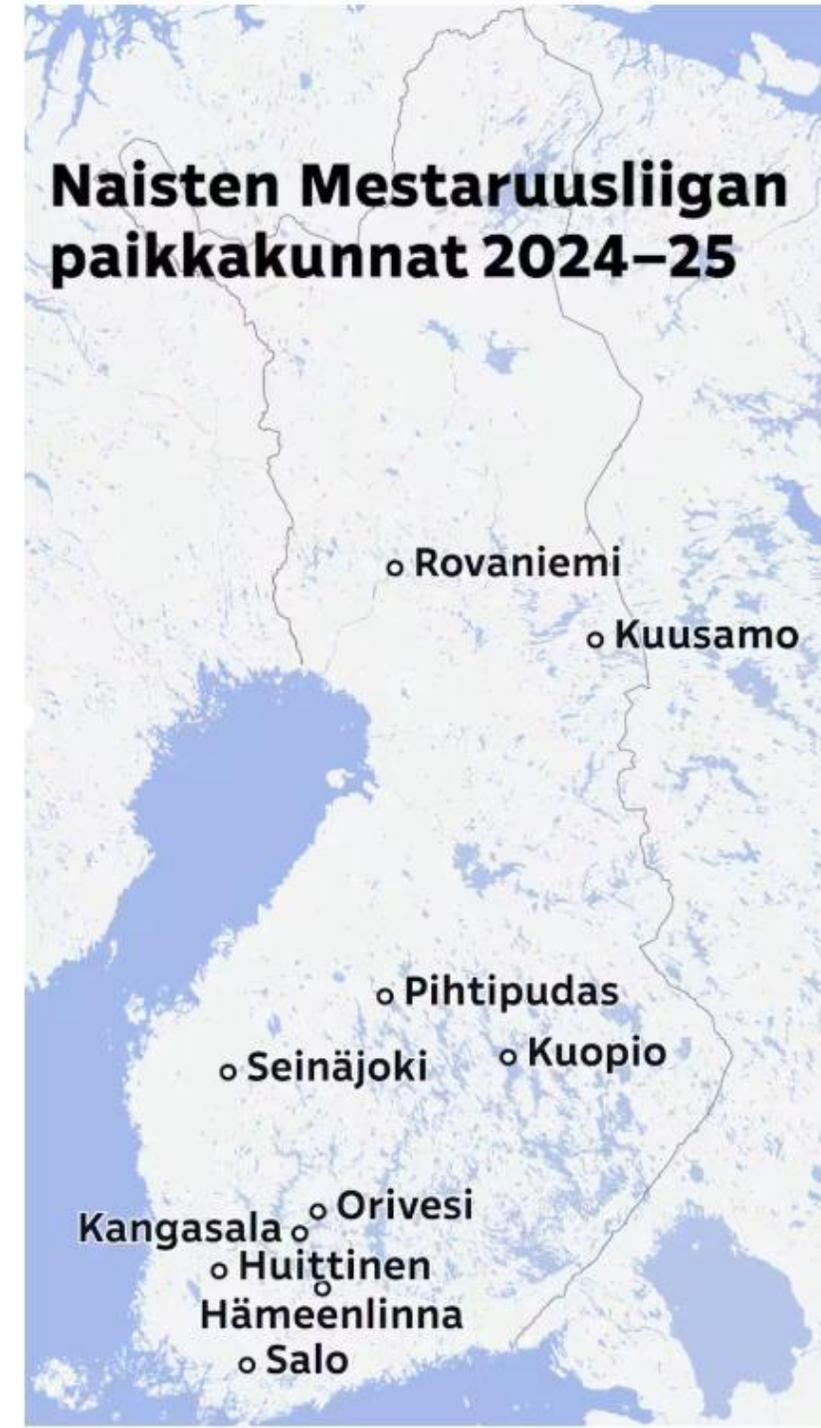
WNT – 2023-2025 (playing abroad: 17/28)

Setters	Liberos	Middles	Opposites	Outside Hitters
Kaisa Alanko	Sanna Häkkinen	Roosa Laakkonen	Piia Korhonen	Ada Aronen
Emmi Jalonen	Netta Laaksonen	Netta Rekola	Yasmine Madsen	Suvi Kokkonen
Sofia Lehto	Laura Penttilä	Daniela Öhman	Saana Lindgren	Emilia Kääntä
Liina Rätty	Veera Help	Taija Tikka	Neea-Maria Joki	Iida Pöllänen
		Bettina Yli-Sissala		Heini Ahtola
		Ella Autere		Viivi Pyhäjärvi
		Laura Laukkanen		Jessica Kosonen
		Ella Peltomaa		Nea Subotic
3 / 4	0 / 4	6 / 8	4 / 4	4 / 8

Mestaruusliiga

Team	Academy	Partner team
Puijo Wolley	Kuopio RTC	Own N1 team
LP Kangasala	Tampere RTC (N1) *	Lempo-Volley (N1)
Hämeenlinna	Helsinki RTC (N1)	PuMa Volley (N1)
Pölkky Kuusamo	-	-
LP Viesti	Own academy / Salo RTC (N1)	-
Arctic Volley	Own academy (N2)	-
LP-Vampula	Own academy (N1)	-
OrPo	Own academy (N2)	-
LiigaPloki	Own academy (N2)	-
JymyVolley	Own academy (N1)	-

Naisten Mestaruusliigan paikkakunnat 2024–25



Mestaruusliiga

- Tendency: teams are getting younger every year.
- 2022/23
 - 93 Finns
 - 50 born in 2001 or later (= 21yo any younger) = 54%
- 2023/24
 - 97 Finns
 - 57 born in 2002 or later (= 21yo and younger) = 59%
- 2024/25
 - 105 Finns
 - 66 born in 2003 or later (= 21yo and younger) = 63%
- ...

Encouraging players to go abroad

Year	Finnish players abroad
2021/22	9
2022/23	14
2023/24	13
2024/25	27
2025/26	?

How we practice(d) volleyball

- Principles of Motor Learning
 - Transfer
 - Specificity vs generality
 - Whole vs part
 - Random vs blocked practice
- Increasing players' opportunities to respond
 - Skill warm-up
 - Tutoring
 - Small groups, multiple courts

Transfer

- How much of what you do in practice shows up in games?
 - “There has been a great deal of research conducted concerning transfer from **one variation of a task to another variation of the same task** [...] One is forced to the conclusion that the amount of motor transfer is quite small.” (Schmidt, 1975)
- If your practices have a greater percentage of transfer to actual game play each day than your opponents, it won't be long until your team is much better than theirs.
- More transfer = more effective practice = faster skill development
→ how can we increase the amount of transfer happening?

Specificity

- Abilities are specific to the task or activity
 - Perception-action coupling
 - Reacting to appropriate stimuli
Examples:
 - Defender reading a live hitter vs a hitter on a box or on the floor
 - Setter reading a receiver vs a coach's toss
 - Receiver reading a live server vs a serving machine
 - “[...] information and movement are tightly coupled and as a result specificity of training is required in order to get meaningful learning effects.” (Savelsbergh, Van Der Kamp, 2000)
- More appropriate stimuli + more specific practice → more transfer

Whole vs part

- Practicing the whole skill vs only a part of a skill
 - Examples:
 - Whole spike (including approach, jump, swing, landing) vs jump arm swing
 - Whole spike vs hitting a stationary ball
 - “In 30 whole-part studies reviewed, not one favored teaching methods that used the part or progressive part methods of instruction. In the majority of studies, some variation of the whole method was associated with superior learning.” (Nixon & Locke, 1973)
- More “whole training” → more transfer

Random vs Blocked practice

- Blocked = same skill, same action, many times in a row
 - Pros: more reps at a certain skill, better for performance in the moment
 - Cons: almost never occurs like that in a game, less retention
- Random = multiple skills in “random” order
 - Pro: very game-like, more retention
 - Con: much lower number of reps

Random vs Blocked practice

- “Blocked practice is better for retention (i.e., for learning) only for beginners. The findings seem to suggest that Blocked practice is effective until the learner can “just (barely) do it” and that Random practice is always more beneficial thereafter.” (Schmidt)
- “Imagine a tennis player who misses a volley at the net. The play will go on until sometime later a similar situation emerges unexpectedly with a similar problem for the player. Contrast this type of learning with a session with a tennis coach. The coach would set up situations where the player would stand at the net and be ready to execute the volley. With mastery of the easy volleys, the coach can increase the difficulty of the shots and eventually embed volley shots into the rallies. It’s easy to see that a few hours of this type of training would improve the player’s volley more than 10s or 100s of hours of regular tennis play.” (K. Anders Ericsson)

Summary – quality of reps

- “Anything less than a game situation, unless very well planned, has the possibility of introducing artificial situations and complete transfer to the game situation might not occur. When drills are developed, the teacher should carefully consider the way the skills are performed in a game to determine that the drills are as close to the game as possible.” (Marteniuk, 1976)

Opportunities to respond

- The number of times a player practices a skill (at an appropriate level of difficulty) is the best predictor of their improvement. So coaches should do everything they can to make sure that the number of practice trials, or the number of opportunities to respond, is maximized.
- Skill warm-up
 - Include skill work in warm-up routines
- Tutoring
 - 1-3 players working on a specific skill. Fewer players = more reps.
- Small groups, multiple courts
- Use court-time for volleyball (e.g. warm-up in hallway)

Questions?

Thank you!