



## ***How to Successfully Teach and Train Athletes 10 and Under***

**Ruth N. Nelson**, former player and coach at the collegiate, national and professional levels

After coaching at the collegiate level for over 16 years (Houston; LSU; Iowa), Ruth N. Nelson decided to re-unite with Special Olympics Volleyball as well as focus on training youth 10 and under. She also felt it was important to provide young children and athletes that have intellectual disabilities with the opportunity to learn from someone with her expertise. Finding experienced coaches who wanted to help was nearly impossible since most coaches at this level really didn't want to take the time to train the "little ones."

Nelson soon embarked on a journey to find the best approach in training youth at this developmental stage. She also knew that, at this age, a lower coach/player ratio was needed. Her first task was to find a few players whose parents saw the benefit of having their daughters trained by someone



with Nelson's vast experience. She took on two players: Ebony was 4½ and Julia was 5 years old. They were the first athletes she trained on a regular basis, which consisted of 45 minutes of training 2-3 times a month. However, for the last month prior to their demonstration at the 2003 AVCA National Convention in Dallas, they trained an additional 5 hours. At this point, Ebony and Julia were now 8 and 9 years old, respectively.

In the process of working with Ebony and Julia, Nelson began to get their parents more actively involved in tossing, serving and assisting in drills. In addition, she asked them to spend time at home or in the gym training with their daughters. When 2007 rolled around, she realized that the "future coaches of volleyball" would come from those who

had the most invested and were interested in their kids ... parents. By this time, Nelson had found 4 sets of parents and decided to name the program "Bring Your Own Parent" (BYOP™), a name which truly reflected the importance of the relationship between parent and child and the program.

This brings us to June of 2010, when Nelson began training a 5 year old in 30-minute private sessions, 2-3 times a month, for 1 year. In addition, 6 new families signed up their daughters and themselves for the BYOP™ program, which offered training 1 hour every week for 4 months. She also maintained her weekly private lessons with the 5 year old to ensure her maximum development.

While the program is still in its infancy, there are 6 families that have been involved over the past 11 months. The results are positive and amazing! What paved the way for its



*Technique training on passing and low movement training (left); athlete analyzing with trainer*

success is Nelson being the visionary, teacher, trainer, innovator and motivator that she is.

An overview of the BYOP™ program includes:

- Fundamental volleyball skills training (skills analysis and correction)
- Direct parental involvement and training in the sessions
- Jump rope/elastic jumping and agility circuits
- Use of a variety of training equipment such as tennis balls, footballs and smaller balls
- Actual training of skills through drills while developing life lessons

Working with athletes of this age certainly reminded Nelson about why she selected

coaching as her career. She was in it NOT for the money, but for the love and passion of the sport ... and to help players become the best athletes that they could be. Parents and athletes at this stage of development are very receptive and absorb information like sponges when they realize they can gain knowledge and help their daughters improve in a sport both technically and tactically. At this age, the most important aspect of training (for parents) is their ability to want to learn, to have enthusiasm and energy and to enjoy their daughters and their improvement without setting limitations. The future of volleyball - the athletes and the coaches - is right here and right now with these young athletes and their parents.

What follows are a series of video clips showing the progression of drills that



*Tennis ball training for hand-eye coordination (left); movement with digging a hard-hit ball by trainer (middle); big sister working with little sister during private session*



reinforce skills, the points of emphasis, key words and the interaction of parents and players to yield the positive results.

### **1. BYOP™-Jump Rope**

Jumping rope is a warm-up used for coordination and endurance. It is fun because different routines can be used and it is a great warm-up - and a good activity for home training. Routines include jumping in place, learning front doors and back doors, crossovers and moving on the volleyball court while jumping rope.

### **2. BYOP™-Passing**

Being organized on the court with a routine is much more practical and directive with this age group. Footwork, arm position and body movement for passing is emphasized. Athletes and parents shagging the ball

together displays the importance of the parent-athlete relationship. Parents also utilize key words for repetition and reinforcement of skills and working with all athletes, not just their own daughters.

### **3. BYOP™-Attack**

This segment emphasizes foot position (quarter turn) in straddling the line, body position and hand position on contacting the ball. Parents assist in tossing the ball and then athletes toss own balls and hit. Lastly, parents reinforce correct arm and hand position to ensure athletes are improving their techniques.

### **4. BYOP™-Agility**

At the beginning, you see athletes learning how to support each other through coming together and giving high fives. This is also the 1st time these athletes have been exposed to an agility circuit to reinforce



*Ebony remembers starting at age 4½ and 11 years later a mentor(left); Think Plnk night, signing autographs for each other*



speed, quickness and having FUN at the end training. Note: Nelson, the leader and demonstrator, has her back to the athletes so that they can mirror what is being performed. Different movements include step and click heels, bunny hops, zig-zags, cartwheels and skipping backwards. After the circuit is learned, having a race emphasizes speed, agility and coordination in a less organized, more fun way than in performing the circuit. At the end, athletes celebrate being able to complete this new activity for the first time as parents cheer their accomplishments.

## 5. BYOP™-Key Words

Teaching parents the key words for each of the techniques helps all parents reinforce positive attitudes and effective efforts and assists in training all players. At this point,

Nelson is conveying the key words to elicit or cue the correct body positions. "Spike the ball," "pass the ball" and "set the ball" are followed by athletes' demonstrating the correct skills and body positions. Last, but certainly not least, is the team cheer and reinforcement of what they learned during that hour of practice.

Come join Ruth N. Nelson in her session at the AVCA National Convention and see the BYOP™ program in action! For additional information on Nelson's programs, visit [www.lvclub.org](http://www.lvclub.org).

For more details about Ruth's convention session as well as a complete schedule of activities and educational sessions, visit the AVCA Convention website at [www.avca.org/saconvention2011](http://www.avca.org/saconvention2011). Be sure to check the site frequently for convention updates. ☺

*Photos and video clips are courtesy of Kelly Hisel*



Cecile Reynaud visits BYOP™ program during 2011 USA Volleyball Adult Nationals