

STARTING A JUNIOR OLYMPIC (JO) PROGRAM

Starting a Junior Olympic volleyball program can be both a rewarding and frustrating experience. The sources of the rewards are rather apparent: the opportunity to work with young people; the opportunity to see those young people grow and develop; the excitement of athletic competition; and the joy of a job well done.

The frustration, on the other hand, can mostly be avoided by careful pre-season planning which must then be carried through the entire year. The majority of the frustrations arise not out of the players or the coaches, but the administrative details.

Once you have decided to start a program, you must keep in mind three initial hurdles:

Where will you practice? The number of courts you will need will depend upon the number of teams operating in your program. Most coaches want at least one court per team. In addition, you will have to consider the number of hours you plan to practice. Practice times vary in the North Country Region from one evening per week to four or more times per week during the school year.

Sites for practices are probably limited only by the gym space available in your community. The site must have properly sized and lined volleyball court and safe equipment. Places to begin looking include the local YMCA or YWCA, schools, churches and recreational centers.

Who will coach? The selection of the coach(s) is one of the most critical decisions you will make in initiating a Junior Olympic program. Coaches form the basis for the entire program. With quality coaches, you will have a quality program. The coach, if possible, should have some experience in either coaching, or at least playing volleyball. All coaches should be willing to learn! The coach should also understand the basics of first aid, because injuries do occur.

In searching for coaches, the most obvious place to start is with parents. However, parents frequently do not make the best coaches and conflicts can arise. Other places to look are at local colleges, both in terms of college coaches and players. High school coaches may also be available, although you and they need to be aware of any High School League rules limiting the activities of high school coaches. Adult players from your area may also provide you with a good source of coaches.

Once you have selected the potential coaches, encourage them to improve their coaching skills. The basic coach's clinic, called IMPACT, is required of all JO coaches as soon as they are able to attend (preferably during their first year of coaching). Information about clinics sponsored by the Region, High School Leagues and area colleges are published regularly on our web page at www.ncrusav.org. The

Region encourages all coaches to attend as many clinics as possible to improve their coaching knowledge and abilities!

How much will it cost? One frequently made mistake is that the Junior Olympic program is not treated as a business. Whether we like it or not, we are running a small business when we set up a Junior Olympic program. Bills have to get paid. The players have to either pay money or participate in fundraising activities. Separate checking accounts and closely detailed accounting should be kept. Programs should be incorporated to avoid possible tax problems.

In terms of the costs of the program, the cost per player varies greatly from program to program depending upon the length of the season, the locations of competition, the amenities you offer the players and the amount of equipment you have to buy.

Basic Expenses. There are three items that are certain to result in cost to the program.

- a. Each team must have *similar* uniforms, both shirts and shorts. When ordering uniforms, be sure to comply with the USAV uniform requirements, including the size and location of numbers on the front and back of jerseys. Numbers on the front of the shirt must be at least 4 inches high and at least 6 inches on the back all numbers both front and back need to be centered. Numbers must be contrasting colors to the shirt. Legal numbers are 1-99.
- b. Your team will have to be registered with the North Country Region USAV. The cost of this registration is established at the beginning of each year.
- c. All tournaments have entry fees, which are listed on the tournament schedule, which is available on the web at www.ncrusav.org. The fees range from \$55 - \$80 for half-day events, \$85 - \$100 for full day events and \$175 - \$850 for multiple day events.

Other Possible Expenses. Additional items may add expenses to your program:

- a. You may choose to pay your coaches.
- b. The practice gym may cost you money. If the facility you are using will charge you, this has to be included in your initial budget.
- c. You may need to purchase some equipment such as a first aid kit, volleyballs and volleyball bags.
- d. Transportation may begin to cost money, depending on where you are going and how often you travel. Parents will usually provide transportation at no charge if they come to watch their children play. However, if you are going long distances, travel costs can add up quickly.

e. Extra Player Benefits. These can be fairly expensive but give a separate identity to your program.

You may want to include benefits to the players such as warm-ups, volleyball publications, kneepads or shoes.

Fundraising ideas. As explained above, there are expenses involved with running a junior program.

Here are a few ideas to help you get started. You can be as creative as you want.

a. Charge regular monthly dues

b. Have a fund raiser (car wash, pancake breakfast, spaghetti dinner, sell coupon books, candy, etc.)

c. Find a company to sponsor the team or several smaller merchants to contribute to the program. If you incorporate and apply for a non-profit organization status (these have fees associated with doing them), the donor's contributions may be tax deductible.

d. If you have access to a nice facility (gym) with a good net system, the Region is always looking for good facilities to rent for adult and junior tournaments (call the Region office if you're interested).

e. Offer to have concessions at some of the tournaments (soda, sloppy joes, popcorn, candy, etc.). Call the Region office for more information.

f. Ask if your team can be the site directors for a tournament (call Region office)

g. Host a tournament. If you need assistance please contact the Region office.

Selecting the team

Tryouts. Once you have found your practice site, selected your coaches and established a preliminary budget, you are ready to get started. If your team will be composed of players from your local high school or community, you may not want to have tryouts. However, if you are hand selecting players from various schools and communities, you may need to have tryouts. The tryouts should be set on at least one day, and possibly two. Notices can be posted in the area schools and mailed to area coaches and players (labels are available through the Region office for a small fee). Local recreational centers and "Y" facilities may also allow you to post notices. The local media may provide some form of free advertisement for your tryouts. Tryout information will also be posted on the web page at www.ncrusav.org.

Once you have the date and location, be prepared. Before you even set foot in the gym, know what evaluation tests you will have the players perform; what equipment you will need; how many "helpers" you will need; and how many "evaluators" you will use. You should also have some idea of the type of player you want in your program because you will probably have more players at tryouts than you can accommodate in your program.

In addition, plan for parents. Many will almost certainly be there. They will have questions about the costs and the commitment their child is making. Be prepared to answer those questions. It is a good idea to have a rough season schedule already prepared to hand out together with a rough preliminary budget. The better organized the tryout; the better your program will look to those who are thinking of getting involved.

Additional steps. Once you have selected your team, you have at least two more steps:

- a. First, how are you going to get the parents involved? Some junior programs have formal parent organizations or have parents involved in the organization on a Board of Directors basis. Others have very limited direct parent involvement. Some form of parent organization seems to provide a way to avoid the conflicts, which will inevitably arise.
- b. Second, once all of this is accomplished, you can begin the registration process by contacting Ken Miller at the Region office at: 952-831-9150 or 800-657-6967 ext. 2 or e-mail at ken@ncrusav.org. You must be registered with North Country Region one week prior to playing.

Choosing where to play. The region has three basic types of tournaments, all of which are listed on the web page at www.ncrusav.org under the Junior Tournament Schedule.

- a. Power League and playdate formats are generally half-day events with no playoffs.
- b. Regular one-day tournaments, which generally consist of pool play, followed by playoffs.
- c. Multiple day events (such as the Presidents' Day Festival) which generally consist of two to four days of pool play and playoffs.

By starting a Junior Olympic volleyball program, you have started down a long and rewarding path. This Region will provide as much support and assistance as you need. Good luck, and have fun.

For additional information and assistance with registration or forming your program please contact Ken Miller at the Region office at 952-831-9150 or 800-657-6967 ext. 2, e-mail at ken@ncrusav.org.

Remember to read the **Coaches Code of Ethics, Coaches Responsibilities, Club Responsibilities** and North Country Region policies. All North Country Region policies are available on our web page at www.ncrusav.org.