



VolleyTots National Tour Blog **by Reggie Cajayon, Texas Advantage Volleyball**

My alarm clock went off and I was quickly reminded of how little sleep I was going to get the night before. It was 4:00 a.m., and needed to be at DFW airport by 5:30 a.m. Ugh. Dallas to Atlanta, then Atlanta to Milwaukee - could there have been a more roundabout way to the "Cheesehead State?" At least the light at the end of the tunnel was introducing more kids to the VolleyTots program, and what's more fun than working with 4-9 year olds and having them run and jump and shuffle and skip and play some volleyball and other sports. It just shows you what kids are capable of if you just give them the opportunity to try?

We met up with Jenny Hahn from Milwaukee Sting and the Badger Region who was filling up Molten V70s & V140s with air, while we loaded up our 15-passenger van with all of the equipment we had shipped from Dallas - all 700 pounds of it! Surprisingly, it all fit according to John's vision - including our luggage - and off we went towards the facility.

After a quick bite at Fazoli's, we followed Jenny to the facility and set up three courts side by side by side, with the obstacle course running nearly the full length along the baselines. We unloaded the bases, poles and nets, volleyballs, bean bags, foam balls, floor markers, speed ladder, mini hurdles, tumbling mats, four-wheel carts, hockey sticks, and whiffle balls, and soon after 6:00 p.m., we were off and running...

All in all, 31 players and 30 coaches - even some from Chicago, Indiana and Ohio - participated in the introductory program. Our staff consisted of John Sample (owner and director of Texas Advantage Volleyball), Barbara Cowin (Advantage Sports Center executive assistant), Denise Warren (coach, Texas Advantage Volleyball), Steve Yates (TCA Corporate), and yours truly.

After a dynamic warm-up, we introduced them to the various elements of the obstacle course via demonstration, then released the hounds and let 'em at it. It was evident that these kids were mostly coaches kids and gym rats by the way they tore through it. But they loved the variety and the challenge, and each athlete would have several more passes through the obstacle course throughout the 90-minute training session.

The skills of passing, arm swing, transition footwork, and approach were taught using a small sample of the drills designed to work with kids of this age. Because I was a little rushed with a slightly late start, I did not take the time to separate the kids by age, but things went fairly smooth regardless.

A couple of highlights and noteworthy events:

- Adam went from being unhappy at the very beginning and not wanting to participate in the cart races, to being one of the loudest on his court while calling mine and hustling through the obstacle course with abandon and confidence.
- While first working on attacking arm swing, Kathryn started off hitting the ball high in the air or far out of bounds. With just a little bit of feedback and encouragement, she was quickly reaching high and snapping the ball down into the court.
- Clara had never done a forward somersault or a backward somersault before. By the end of the session, Clara was doing both with proficiency and enthusiasm.
- Kids love to huddle, putting their arms around each other as a team should, and it makes it easy for coaches to get and maintain their attention.
- Coach Steve from TCA is a newbie to the VolleyTots program, and despite reviewing the plan beforehand, was surprised at how quickly things moved along and, admittedly, worried about falling behind the schedule. But just as quickly, he couldn't help but get caught up in the energy of the kids,



and before long was not only adapting seamlessly to the needs of his players, but also found himself ending the night with more enthusiasm than he started with. Simply put, it's contagious.

- During a drill aimed at teaching the players to catch a passed ball and quickly toss it to a teammate (simulating a set), six-year old Jonathan had patiently followed instructions his first few times through the drill. Then, without notice, he turned towards one of his hitters, readied his hands, and set a perfect ball to the antenna, demonstrating a skill he had obviously developed prior to this evening, but helped emphasize what young children can do when given the opportunity.

At the conclusion of the session, many of the kids quickly found their way back to the obstacle course to run through it over and over again until parents had to literally grab them and take them home.

We were able to break down and pack up all our equipment in no more than 15 minutes and were on our way to grab a late bite at a nearby German restaurant. Finally, we checked into our hotel and were in our rooms by 10:30 p.m. eager to get some rest before beginning our road trip to Cincinnati at 7:00 a.m. the next morning.

Each of us would like to thank Jenny Hahn, the Badger Region, Milwaukee Sting and all of the people who helped us that evening. Your hospitality and efforts were greatly appreciated.

We would also like to thank JVDA for believing in and supporting our efforts and Molten for assisting with the First Touch Ball.