The Impact of Mindset on Blocking: Better Learning, Performance and Application

Study Results and Conclusions – The Psychology of Blocking
Why study the mindset (psychology) of successful blocking?

Why is it important?

- Better Learning - Given similar physical tools (height, jump, training, and “athleticism”), why are some blockers better than others?

- Better Performance - Do mental aspects (Psychology) of blocking impact blocking effectiveness?

- Better Application - How much does (or can) blocking influence match outcome?
Question: What are the Psychological (Mindset) Influences on Block Skill Development and Performance?

- Maximize the technical and tactical through the mental.
- Peak performance and optimum learning are strongly linked to the mental.
- Coach the psychology (mindset) of the moment!!

   Big play...over time
Fixed
• Belief “...that basic abilities, intelligence, and talent...” is fixed.

Growth
• Belief “...understand that their talents and abilities can be developed through effort, good teaching and persistence.”
Mindset – Fixed vs Growth
Motivation, Learning, and Performance
Dr. Carol Dweck – Stanford University

**Fixed**
- Belief “...that basic abilities, intelligence, and talent...” is fixed.
- Limited “...they have a certain amount, and that’s that.”

**Growth**
- Belief “...understand that their talents and abilities can be developed through effort, good teaching and persistence.
- Not limited “Not yet.”
Mindset – Fixed vs Growth
Motivation, Learning, and Performance
Dr. Carol Dweck – Stanford University

**Fixed**
- Belief “…that basic abilities, intelligence, and talent…” is fixed.
- Limited “…they have a certain amount, and that’s that.”
- Goal “..look smart all the time and never look dumb.”

**Growth**
- Belief “…understand that their talents and abilities can be developed through effort, good teaching and persistence.
- Not limited “Not yet.”
- Goal “…but they believe everyone can get smarter if they work at it.”
Psychology of Blocking Project

Data Collection

Athlete Inventories (IB vs NB)

• Preferred Learning Styles (Barsch LSI)
  - Visual – Seeing and storing images
  - Kinesthetic – Doing and moving
  - Auditory – Hearing and speaking (Verbalizing concepts)
  - Tactile – Touching and feeling

• DiSC Personality
  - Dominance – results-oriented; confidence; accepts challenges
  - Influence – persuasive; enthusiasm; team; dislike being ignored

Steadiness – Cooperative, dependable, calm
Rank Order Comparison

Instinctive Blocker

- Preferred Learning Styles
  1. Visual
  2. Kinesthetic
  3. Tactile
  4. Auditory

- DiSC
  1. Dominance
  2. Steadiness
  3. Conscientiousness
  4. Influence

Non-Instinctive Blocker

- Preferred Learning Styles
  1. Kinesthetic
  2. Visual
  3. Auditory
  4. Tactile

- DiSC
  1. Conscientiousness
  2. Steadiness
  3. Dominance
  4. Influence
Psychology of Blocking Project

Data Collection

Athlete Inventories (IB vs NB) – (n = 10)

• Multiple Intelligences (Literacy.net.org)
  1. Spatial (SI) – three dimensional thought; spatial reasoning
  2. Kinesthetic (KI) – Physical sense of timing; mind-body union
  3. Logical-Mathematic (LMI) – Sequential; deductive; strategic
  4. Interpersonal (IRP) – Understand others feelings and motives
  5. Intrapersonal (IAP) – Understand self; self-motivated
  6. Musical (MI) – discern sounds; related to LMI
## Rank Order Comparison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instinctive Blocker</th>
<th>Non-Instinctive Blocker</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Spatial</td>
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<td>5. Intrapersonal</td>
<td>5. Spatial</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Linguistic</td>
<td>7. Musical</td>
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Psychology of Blocking Project

Data Collection

- Coach Interviews
  - USA (women & men)
  - Collegiate (Div. I & II)
  - High School
  - Canadian University (CIS)
Primary Interview Questions

• Is there such a thing as an instinctive blocker?
• Define successful blocking...
• Do you feel there is a psychology/mentality to successful blocking? If so, how would you describe it?
• How important is blocking to the success of a team? Your team?
• What characteristic should someone possess in order to be a successful blocker?
• What is the most important thing necessary for successful blocking? Next important? Least important?
• What, if any, role does player personality have in blocking. If you were needing to describe a personality of blocking, how would you describe
Common Themes: What some of the top coaches have to say about the “Psychology of Blocking”

- There is such a thing as an “Instinctive” Blocker. Combination of an attitude (aggressive mindset) and “aptitude”.

- Great blocking is a product of the interactions of motor learning (technical), perceptions and response of situation (tactical), and the motivational (Mindset). “Fortunate accumulation” – Speraw

  Emphasis on motivation and learning in practice - Dunning

- Training the psychological aspects of blocking may be as important (or more important) than training the technical and tactical.

  “I’ve never really thought about this... ...but I will now.”

  BSBH and “See Ball; Block Ball”
Common Themes:
What some of the top coaches have to say about the “Psychology of Blocking”

• “Yes there is... Few and far between. They seem to enjoy that aspect of the sport more than any other.”
• “Had players lead the nation in blocking who didn’t seem aggressive off the court.”
• Regarding block training, “…maybe we are training more, and getting less.”
• “…We would make better use of our practice time if we focused more on figuring out how to provide more meaningful motivational feedback. Probably a better return on practice time spent.”

“Statistically, blocking has little to do with winning. It’s the effect on our opponent’s attack that really matters...more tips, roll shots...and what we do with these opportunities...that influences our winning.”
Blocker vs. Hitter: Framing Thoughts

Hitter vs. Blocker – Key Match Moment

• Hitter’s ultimate goal...
  Ball on the opponent’s floor.

• Blockers ultimate goal...
  Ball on the opponent’s floor.

The best hitters:

“Attack” the block;
Have an “attack” attitude
Love to “hit”

The best blockers:

“Attack” the hitter.
Have an “attack” attitude
Love to “block”.

Who wins the hitter vs. blocker battle??

An attacking mindset is trainable...and might be the most important “skill” that equates to winning
Define successful blocking...

- “Stuff ball or score a point.”
- “Taking out what is supposed to be taken...”
- “Control the hitter; Taking away best shot...”
- “Reducing angles; Getting over is more important than getting up...”
- “Avoiding errors; Scoring points as a result of the block.”
- “Anytime it doesn’t cost us a point...”
- “Blocking is about positive touches.”

NOTE: No one made reference to Blocks-per-Set or any statistically-based evaluation as a definition of “successful “ blocking.
Do you feel there is a psychology/mentality to successful blocking? If so, how would you describe it?

Yes – “it’s an attitude, information gathering, decision making, and execution... ...a combination”

- “I believe I can block every ball”
- “...attack the hitter with my block...”
- “…wants to block you. Takes it personally”
- “…me vs you mentality. I will beat you!”
- “Yes...it’s what makes the best...the best.”
- “Yes. The best will sell out on every move...”
How important is blocking to the success of a team? Your team?

- “...level and gender specific”
- “…not about numbers…”
- “...Blocking has an influence. How much? In what ways?”
- “…can impact considerably if done well.”

“Your block influences who wins the match more because of transition opportunities than stuffs.”

“Important to slow down FBSO. Tough serving helps block effectiveness.”
What characteristic should someone possess in order to be a successful blocker?

• “Person who looks for and puts information into action.”
• “Rhythm, timing...Want to get in someone’s way...”
• “Awareness... See what’s happening before it happens...”
• “Competitive...aggressive...requisite physical abilities...”
• “Mentally confident and relentless...”
• “…needs some technical ability...”

Which is most important?
The technical, the tactical, or the mental?
Better Teaching = Teach to the Learner

*Teach the right things in the right ways...*

- How does the athlete best learn?
  - LS, MI, DiSC
  - Mild relationship to blocking

Return on investment...

- What is more important...
  - block aggressiveness/attitude, or block technique?
    - Both are important but...
      - Frustration... Coaches spent most time on training technique.
    - Little emphasis on training the mindsets of successful blocking.
      - Importance; Commitment to the task;
      - Aggressive; Attacking; “Blocking is a violent skill.”
Better Teaching = Teach to the Learner

Teach the right things in the right ways...

- Do you ever train blocking with the players personality in mind? If so, how intentional are you in this aspect of training?
- Differentiated Instruction
- Visual and Kinesthetic are most common; Auditory least common.

“Paralysis from Analysis”
“The more you think, the slower you get”
“Sooner usually means quicker”
Better Teaching -

*Teach the right things in the right ways...*

"It's not my job to make them know everything that I know... It's my job to make them better student-athletes. I need to know what they need to know. I need to know where they are and where they want to go. Getting to the endpoint depends on where the individual is at... The learning process is specific to the individual. I need to know the individual."

- Dave Preston, McMaster University
  Head Men’s Volleyball Coach
Better Performance - Blocking

*Perform the right things in the right ways...*

- “Worst taught skill...Hardest VB skill”
- “Can impact considerably if done well.”
- “Getting over (across) is more important than getting up.”
- “…focus on the most important”
- “Focus on effort rather than smart (Dweck);”
- “…need to be free...less restrictive...makes athlete quicker?″

“We’re spending more time on blocking and getting less results...”
Better Performance

Do you intentionally train the psychology of situations? Who wins...and why?

- Hitter vs. Blocker;
- Server vs. Passer;
- Hitter vs. Digger

- If a common trait of the best blockers is an aggressive, attacking mindset, how can we best teach it?
Application – Teaching an Aggressive “Mindset”

Starting Points:

- How can an “aggressive mindset” be taught?
  - Everyone can learn to be more aggressive.
  - Know your learner – outward personality is not a good indicator; “Attack”;
  - “Protect”
  - Must be emphasized over tactical and technical.
  - Avoid causing “Overthinking” = slow and methodical
  - Free them up - Aggressive block move = “sell out”. Make it safe.

“Systems should never hinder natural strengths.”
Application – Teaching an Aggressive “Mindset”

- Coach must be constant and consistent! “Catch ‘em doing it right.”
- Describe the necessary mindset for the skill. “e.g. ATTACK the hitter”; “TAKE OUT”
- Create a teachable moment – e.g. repeat a block move emphasizing “aggressive” movement with “aggressive” hand penetration. Verbal cue (pre-coach) – “big across”
- Emphasize the importance/build the goal of “INFLUENCE”. Equate Influence = Success
- Motivate/feedback based on “Influence” rather than “Stuffs”. Include blockers in the praise when transition occurs.
Application

• What is the optimum balance of practice time investment between teaching the technical vs. competitive focus/motivation?

• How important is strong blocking? “Blocks per set” compared to “Block Influence”? 
Application

• Block Influence – What is actually happening because of the team’s block?
  - Influence implies psychological impact into the head” of hitters brings:
    1. Avoiding block...Off-speed.
       Transition mindset - “they pay”.
    2. Avoiding block...attack error...OB and net.
    3. Avoiding block = easier to dig.
    4. Reduced number of “Score-able” balls.

• What are ways we can train to take advantage of a strong “block influence”?
  - Strong serving; Transition - off-speed and driven attacks
Block Influence and Winning

- Blocks-per-Set has only a mild impact on winning (GMS), but...
- Transition attack efficiency and kill percentage as a result of “block influence” has a great impact on winning.
  - % hard driven vs. off-speed attempts
  - Off-speed attack efficiency
Block Influence

Def: Influence - The power to have an important effect on someone or something.

Avoids Block
- Scores
- In Play
- Attack Error (net or OB)
- Off speed (after stuff or block-back)

Block Contact
- Stuff for Point
- Touch and Turn for Point
- Touch and Turn for In Play or Error
- Tooled (Opponent Point)
- Block back – Successful Coverage

Block Violations

Kill and Attack Statistics
- (Us) Off speed kill and attack efficiency
- (Them) Hard driven kill and attack efficiency vs. 1,2, or 3 person block
Findings and Conclusions

• The “attitude” of blocking must be taught/developed much more than it currently is.
• Better blocking always includes the mental/mindset. It is more than just better technique (hands, feet, eye-work)
• Attitude (mindset) can and must be taught for blocking to significantly improve.
• Block influence is much more important to winning than Blocks/Set.

Teach to the Learner...
Findings and Conclusions

• There appears to be a mild relationship between a blocking “aptitude” or “instinct” and blocking ability

• “Aptitude” or “Instinct” are more fluid (teachable) than we might think. (Dweck).

• “Attitude” or “mindset” appear to be more important for successful blocking than “Aptitude” or “Instinct”

“Players will do what you train them to do...”
Train the “Mindset”

“Your beliefs become your thoughts,
Your thoughts become your words,
Your words become your actions,
Your actions become your habits,
Your habits become your values,
Your values become your destiny.”

- Gandhi