

Teaching Progression and the “Fine Points” For Contact In The Underhand Pass (Service Reception and Defense)

Step 1: Catch & Throw

- Players can be in pairs or if working individually then the coach can control the drill. If in pairs the coach/coaches can sneak in and replace the ‘tossing’ player to offer suggestions for correction and feedback. Stay 1 minute and then move on to another pair.
- Put the player on their knees and then emphasize:
 - Draw ‘eyes’ on their thumbs
 - Look at contact point of the hands – suggestions
 - Contact point for the ball on the arms – can use tape
 - ‘Knees in front of toes and shoulders in front of knees’ – concept
 - Purpose of defense is to intercept the ball in front of the defender
 - This means that the defender moves at an angle towards the ball
- Throw easy balls from a high angle to the defender, keep the ball in front and between the legs (if in pairs players must **learn** how to ‘toss’ the ball)
 - The defenders palms should be facing upward arms bent at the elbows
- Toss the ball to the defender and have them catch the ball by trapping it against their stomach
 - They then roll the ball to the hands and then throw towards the tosser
 - Repeat
- Look for the back being bent forward and then teach the concept of “pushing” to the tosser (means low trajectory), not trying to ‘lift’ the ball.
 - Check the hand position and contact point on the arms - offer advice and feedback.
 - Add – shoulders – over & relaxed – think of elephant swing its trunk
 - Add final look at their head/chin & eyes – very NB fundamental.
 - When the catch the ball their chin should start to go down so they ‘look’ at the ball with their eyes
 - When they throw the ball back the eyes should follow the toss, more than a movement of the chin/head

Step 2: Rebound and “Push” to Target - Use of Shoulders When Ball is Outside of Body

- Same principle as in Step 1 (catch the ball, athletes on their knees) when ball comes to the right
 - Drop the left shoulder and be strong with the right shoulder coming back in the direction of the toss to the target.
 - Do the same with ball going to the left – drop the right shoulder, etc.
 - Watch the chin and head for the contact
 - Can move knee slightly if necessary to keep wide base.
- Move the athlete to a standing position and repeat but with little movement of the legs

- Let ball just hit the arms – no need to put ball high in the air but it should go in the direction of the target.
- Now the athlete can work on their contact point and hand position
 - Arc of the ball is still low
 - Watch the chin and eyes
- Have them try to ‘block’ off the ball by transferring their weight over their knees in the right angle and using their shoulders to create an ‘angle of incidence and reflection’.

Step 3: Standing With Step (Shoulders, Chin & Eyes to Target)

- Players can be in pairs
- Ball is inside of the body
 - Movement forward (1m) and to teach the ‘hips’ coming through on contact.
 - Ball trajectory is low and to the partner or target, ball should spin backward.
 - Step into the ball but with wide base, not narrow (i.e. one foot far in front of the body).
 - Emphasize that the ‘knees are ahead of the toes’ and the ‘shoulders are ahead of the knees’. **BEND AT THE WAIST – DO NOT CROUCH OR SIT DOWN!**
- Ball is outside of the body
 - Shuffle step first then cross-over with weight transfer
 - Shuffle is 1-2m and for 3-4m use cross over
 - Move behind the ball, cut off the angle of the ball to target
 - Do not wait for the ball to come to you - intercept the ball ‘in front’ of your knees
 - Keep ball in front of body & always try to keep it at waist/knee height
- Get the ‘Tosser/Attacker’ to step in the direction they throw/hit and face with their shoulders so this creates a ‘**key**’ for the digger. Throw with attack motion.
 - If the defender cannot get behind the ball then the shoulders and angles for contact come into play.

Note: The reason for teaching how to handle balls all around the body quickly is that more balls come outside of the body than in front of the body when you start learning. However, the coach continues to tell the player when to move behind the ball and when to reach outside the body for the ball.

Step 4: Moving Backward

- Step backward - 45-degree angle, lead with the foot on the side you move to.
 - Contact ball and create angle by dropping the trailing shoulder
- As ball goes further (more than one step) a ‘running’ cross-over step is used

- The athlete may get to a ‘still’ moment (go with leading foot and then after contact follow through with the back foot)
 - Arc of ball is higher
 - Maintain form – try not to be ‘short levered’ with the arms. (“Eyes” on the hands are presented to the target direction)

Step 5: Moving to the Ground

NB: Take players back to their knees for a repeat of the previous drill by falling to the side (or in pairs – keep arc and toss low if tossing underhand)

- Fall on side – on Rt – keep Rt Shoulder high & drop Lt Shoulder (opposite for movement to the Lt. – angles of fall is NB.
 - Contact with two hands
 - Rotate the knee slightly to allow contact with floor by hip (put kneepad in hip or mat, if necessary.
 - Rotate slightly after contact so palm of the slides along the court, opposite leg should move upward
- Next start by having the player stand
 - Step out –proper angle
 - Sit on their heel with their seat (butt) touching their heel – hands presented in front
 - Throw ball at them when they are sitting on that leg and ready to dig with hands between the legs.
 - Gradually increase that distance and get players to ‘push’ off that leg
 - Use of the shuffle and then after a cross-over step
 - Add speed to the drill as it will make it easier for the athlete

Note: You can show how to use 1 hand and contact point on the ‘snuff box’ area of the hand – push through the ball. The ‘pancake’ contact is not used when moving at angles unless at a last resort.

- Skills to teach with sideward movement
 - Step and Slide
 - Step, Slide & roll
- Skills to teach for forward movement
 - Sprawl
 - Run & Sprawl/roll

Note: The basic principles taught here when not going to the floor are adjusted for Serve Receive but they are basically the same. Teach all these fundamentals very quickly – within two practices so players learn to be ‘students of the game’. Ask questions they should know the answer.

Individual Technique for the Underhand Pass

Note: This may help in the understanding of the progression concepts that I just presented.

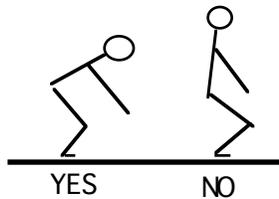
1. Basic Dig

i. Arms

The **arms** should be held "**out**" **in front of the body** and since the weight of the body is forward there is a small **space** between the **elbows** and the **stomach/chest**. The arms should be positioned just outside the knees. It is extremely important that the forearms are held **out and in front** of the body. They should be relaxed and slightly bent, ideally with the insides of the arms facing the target and the palms facing up.

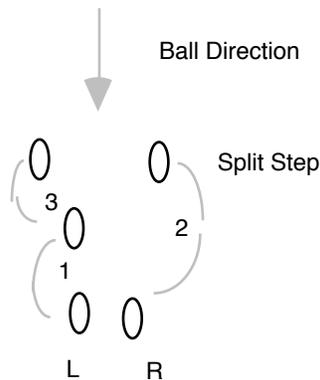
ii. Back

The back should be rounded so the shoulders rotate over and towards the chin. The back should be in a flat position, in relationship to the floor, than in an upright stance.

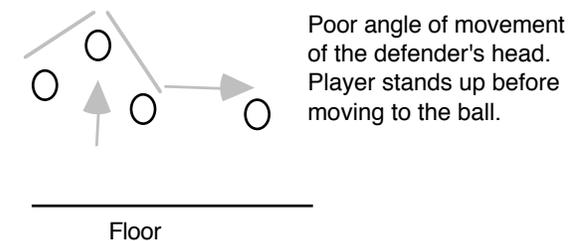
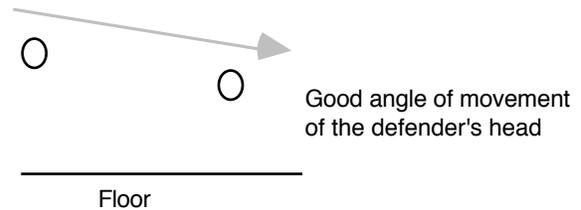


iii. Contact – “Split Step “

In fundamental individual defense the "split-step" is done by the defender just prior to the attacker contacting the ball to stabilize them self. Once the defensive player has determined the correct position on the court to be, the defender's feet are quickly spread apart and they are wider than the shoulders so the center of gravity will lower for the defender.



Moving from a narrow base to a wide base causes the center of gravity to be lower and the the defender to prepare for the contact by the attacker.



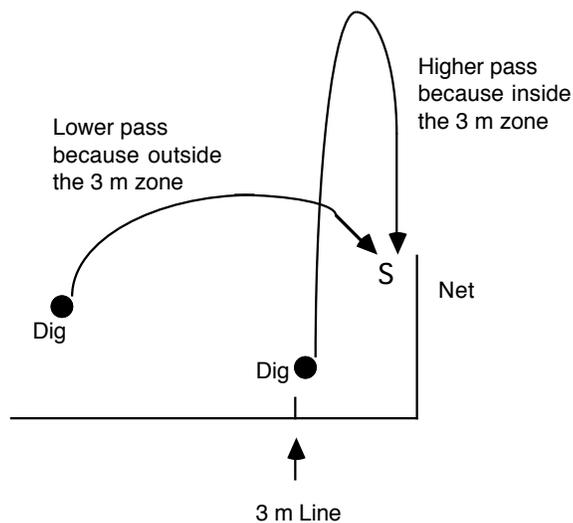
iv. **Playing The Ball**

The hands should come together in such a way that the **heels or lower part of the hands come together**. After that there is a hand position that can be stabilized by the fingers pressing 'down'. It is important for the thumbs to be parallel so the hands become flat which may be used in an emergency dig for a low ball. Usually one hand (the left hand for right handers and the right hand for left handers) is put in a loose ball and the other comes around it so the thumbs are parallel on the top.

It will be necessary to move to the ball since it may not come exactly at the speed or the trajectory you expect. The defender should try to move so that the **ball is always played at the mid-line of the body**. **"ARMS IN FRONT OF KNEES AND KNEES AHEAD OF TOES."** On occasions the defender will have to use some other defensive skill to react to a ball outside of the body.

v. **Contact**

The **contact** of the ball is on both arms and just above the **wrist area**. **Angle of Incidence = Angle of Reception**. **"USE SHOULDERS TO CREATE THIS CONTACT POINT AND HAVE 'HEELS' OF HANDS ACTING AS 'EYES' TO LEAD THE BALL AND PART OF THE BODY/ARMS TO THE TARGET ZONE."**



The passer must decide if attackers have enough time to get away from the net in their blocking action and get ready to attack. When contact is further back the 'arc' of the ball can be lower since there is more time for the blockers to become attackers.

vi. Post Contact

The ball should spin backwards after it leaves the arms. Arms should not follow through above the shoulders.

vii. Follow Through

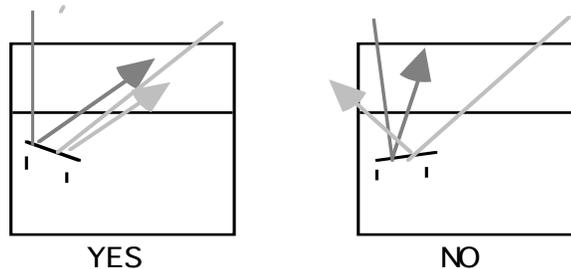
The defender should always **follow with the feet** in the direction of the pass since the next action is usually to cover the attacker in case there is a block that returns the ball.

viii. Important Points to Stress

- a. Always move at **45 degrees** on the court, never in a straight line.
- b. Try to keep ball in front and in the mid-line of body.
- c. Arms away from the body and straight. By keeping the arms away from the stomach it allows for the shoulders to be rotated more easily when they have to be moved outside of the player's body.

d. Angle of Incidence = Angle of Reflection

On left side of the court the left foot should be forward and on the right side of the court the right foot should be forward. This causes the shoulders to face in the direction of the pass. Note: Players should stay square to the direction the pass is coming from and just before contact move into the ball so that the outside leg is slightly ahead of the inside one, thus creating a new angle which is **square to the target area**.



The same is true for the other side of court except the foot position is reversed.

There is a technique of passing the serve and the dig with the left foot always back. However, the author thinks that this is an advanced refinement for players to work out. It can cause fundamental problems if not applied properly. Definitely, when players develop their own style this variation can be seen.

- e. Stop and "split" step just before the contact with the ball takes place.
- f. If ball goes high or outside of the body try to continue on in the direction the ball takes you but create a good angle with your arms and shoulders to bring the ball back to the target zone.
- g. Follow through after to cover the ball in case of a block.

2. Hard/Soft Attack and Ball Hit Outside the Mid-line of the Body

i. **Hard Attack**

If an attack is very hard or faster than normal but right at the body of the defender it may be possible to control the ball by "**giving**" with the ball by the arms/body to absorb the harder contact. The trajectory of the ball, after contact, should be higher than normal. This is why the arms are slightly bent upon contact – as if the ball rolls backward when contacted as it goes up. The bent elbows act as a shock absorber.

ii. **Soft Attack**

Sometimes the ball is not attacked as hard or as fast as expected. It may be a tip or just a simple spin attack. In this case the **elbows or wrists may have to be used** to give some added force to the ball once contact is to be made. Follow through is more exaggerated than normal and the legs not used as much. Again the ball should travel higher than normal.

iii. **Ball Hit Outside the Mid-line of the Body.**

Ideally the defender should move behind the ball. This is extremely important to be taught as a basic principle. Eventually this may not always be possible so other solutions have to be found.

a. **High Ball at Left or Right of the Body**

Player should move backward to try and create the proper angle with the shoulders, arms and feet to "deflect" or "block" the ball to the target zone of the setter. The **shoulders** have to **rotate** slightly and the top arm should "open - up" slightly to prevent the ball from deflecting off the hands and into the backcourt. In essence, the top arm acts like a "**railway**" **barrier** to stop the ball from going on. At the same time **the chin should drop** and be tight to the lower shoulder and arm. A quick backward movement using the shuffle step or a cross over will allow the body to be prepared to contact the ball. If you move to the 'R' then the 'L' shoulder drops and if to the 'L' the 'R' shoulder drops. Keep the 'chin' down so the eyes are parallel watching the ball come into then arms.

b. **Low Ball at Left or Right of the Body**

The defender is not able to move behind the ball. Try to move at 45 degrees to get into the path of the on-coming ball. There should be a step **with the foot that is on the side of the ball**. The back leg should become straight and the front leg should be bent so the weight of the player is over the front knee. This lowers the player towards the ball. The transfer of weight should be low so it causes the body to lower; this almost becomes a 'sitting' action when the athlete

moves to the weight all on the leading leg. The back leg is the "**propulsion leg**" and is used to launch the player to the ball. When the ball is contacted with two hands the player should continue the follow through and land on their side. The "propulsion leg" should be straight after the finish and the player should watch the ball with their eyes. Slide through and do not try to stop the movement with your hands. This becomes the first step of learning the "stride and slide" and "sprawl" techniques.

c. Ball Hit at the Head or Above

The defender uses a 'beach' dig or almost a blocking action to save this ball but deflecting it 'spinning upwards. Palms are open and on contact, one hand (like in the block action where the blocker tries to prevent an attacker from wiping the ball off their hands) turns outside the ball and shoulders try to move behind the ball giving it some stabilization. The ball hits the flat hand and rebounds into the 'turned' hand, saving the ball. When going to the right the right hand is turned and when going to the left the left hand is turned. Palms should be relaxed and wrists should not be bent backwards.

3. The Roll and the Dive

Generally, it can be said that men "dive" and women "roll". However, even this is changing. Experienced players use the techniques of "Stride and Slide and Sprawl" more often than the roll or dive. The new rules that allow 'simultaneous/multiple' contact when digging and this dictates that back row players challenge balls more often, rather than always digging balls at their shoe level. Although the roll is still taught to players it is not used as much, except when a reaction is needed to the ball.

i. The Roll

The object of the roll is to protect the defender from hurting themselves and to bring them back to their feet quickly. Ideally the ball should be played with two hands but if the ball is in an emergency position one hand can be used. There are two types of rolls:

a. Asian Roll

This is the roll popularized by the Japanese women. The action is the same as playing a ball when it is outside of the body but it finishes with the player going diagonally over their back to get to their feet. Some important teaching points:

- **Push off the leading leg** and fall on your side
- Assist the fall by sliding the leading palm on the floor and by rotating to the side of your knee.
- Once you make contact with the ball (one or two hands) bend the wrist. The hand should be in a fist or in a position where the fingers form around the thumb. Play the ball high.

- Once on the ground and after contact bring your legs up to a **"bicycle" position** when your back is on the ground.
- You should **go diagonally** over your back. If you are going to your **right** you should go over your **left shoulder** and your head should tilt to the right shoulder. The opposite is true if you are moving to your left
- Come to your feet and be prepared to face the direction of the pass.

b. Log Roll (Judo roll)

This roll is very similar. However, the player does not go over the back diagonally but rather across the back (almost sideways). It is a roll not in a compact position like the Asian roll but it is done in more of a "stretched position." Some important teaching points:

- The preliminary movements are the same as the Asian Roll.
- After making contact, instead of going to a "bicycle" position with your legs just **tuck the knees to your chest** and then roll away from the direction of the pass. Try to **watch the ball with your eyes** as you rotate across your back.

4. The Stride and Slide

The purpose of this skill is to allow the defender to move the body and forearms forward to dig a ball that is hit in front or to the side of the body. Mainly used by positions #5 and #1 to recover tips that cause the defender to move into the 3 m. zone.

i. Technical

Basically this has been covered in the section where the ball is hit low to the side of the defender. However, it is important to move forward as well to dig a tip or slower hit ball. When this occurs the last step is a long stride that brings the player's center of gravity lower and over the leading foot. Push off this leg and bring the hands together and begin to extend them under the ball. Rotate slightly on the knee that you are pushing off of and prepare to land on you side. (On the left side for #5 position diggers and on the right side for #1 position diggers). Try to dig with two hands as long as possible. The side of the leg, the side of the body and the arm should contact the ground and sliding should follow. One hand can be used when the ball is just out of reach of the two hands. Contact on the lower forearm for two hands and on the hand and thumb point for one hand.

Recovery can be a roll (any of the two already mentioned) or a long slide type of movement.

5. The Sprawl

This movement is used to go forward but there may be no time to take more than one step. It is used mainly by players in #6 position or by players who do not have time to do the stride and slide.

i. Technical

The player can lunge forward and push off either or both of the legs to play the ball either with one or two hands. If two hands are used then it is almost the same as a dive but very low to the ground. If one hand is used then the hand not touching the ball is used to brace the body and a push occurs from this hand and the leading foot to reach the ball. The ball is "popped" up and in many cases there is a slight turn so the body lands on the side.

Recovery is by a long slide to chest or rotation to the side of the body. Sometimes a roll can be added at the end even if this is a forward movement.

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