



# My Son Wants to Play Volleyball

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Your son, like my son Cody, must be, or may soon be asking – “I want to play volleyball too, how do I get on a boys team?” . He loves the anti-gravity game, the spike and jump serving, and wants more than peppering with his sister, or the games we play in clinics and our backyard. Others out there know boys who want to play this great lifetime sport, but just not with their older sister’s club at practices and even tournaments. So what can happen for these lost boys who want to leave Neverland?

The great thing about our sport is that it can be played coed, and mixed ages. It is a non-contact sport, where skill is most important. Think of the way top tennis playing young players take on adults all the time; Martina Hingis was 15 when she won her first Open event. When kids play against an opponent who is more experienced than they are, no matter what age or gender, they get better faster. Here are some ideas on giving boys the chance to make volleyball their lifetime sport.

## Start a New Boy’s Team

This is the best option. The best way is to take advantage of Jr Olympic Girls Volleyball Clubs in your area, and start a team with that club for boys. If a club does not have the time for such, or is too expensive, the most effective way to start is to:

1. Get the kids and coach to be a member of USA Volleyball
2. Find a court to practice on one night a week
3. Contact all the JOV Clubs in your city and plan a schedule where your boys get a second day of training once a week, practicing with then scrimmaging a 14-16 year old JOV girls team.
4. Finish by traveling one weekend to compete either in a USA Men’s B event, or even somewhere drivable to compete against other boy’s teams in a tournament or long scrimmage day. The lower levels of USAV Men’s volleyball – “B”, “C” or “Novice” are skill based, and a new team of boys can play in such USA Volleyball tournaments, against the adults.

Likewise, USAV Regions understand the problems of boys’ volleyball development, and will sometimes (even special events once a month only for instance) let 13 & under boys play against 14, 15 and 16 & under girls, and 16 & under boys play 18 & under girls. Most commonly the boys play in the pool play, getting in three matches or so, but are not allowed into the playoffs. Make sure to inform parents in advance of this non-contact sport option. They should know that many of the best female players in the US got there by playing coed or with their brothers, gaining that valuable game experience with a ball that went faster, such that playing boys will help advance the girls talents of those lucky enough to play against them.

From a coaching point of view, an adult needs to be in the mix, but get the Jr. Olympic Girls to coach 12,13 and 14 & under, coed or boys only. The myth of adult wisdom that only adult kids can teach – if coached well, any JOV player can learn more while giving back to the sport by coaching little kids. These JO kids coaching younger players need adult supervision, but do great coaching as well.

## **Create a League**

Get the YMCA, PAL, Boys & Girls Clubs, Church Recreation, and of course the Parks & Recreation to create a quality youth program for kids of any age and both genders. You do not need to take over the gym. Great kids programs can be run in racquetball courts, using the Wallyball net set ups. You can also share the gym, taking only HALF the gym, and putting up Kidz Courts on one half, while

You need not do this from scratch. Contact the United States Youth Volleyball League, [www.usyvl.com](http://www.usyvl.com) and they can assist you.

## **Play On Adult Teams**

Junior Olympic Volleyball is a great program, but it has only been around about 20 years. Before such age group competition was created, boys played on men's teams. The best example of this is Rod Wilde. He would play back row for his dad's Ft. Dodge Cornshucker team (not the real name, but close enough for farm work) at the Men's AA level. This is a great option still, for the faster speed of the adult ball for the younger players gives them a great advantage when they play against kids their age. Rod went on to become one of the best floor defenders ever in the USA National team, in part due to his training with adults early on. They can play in recreational leagues, with permission, in most programs.

## **Play Doubles with a Parent**

Doubles or triples is a fantastic way to get lots of gamelike ball contacts in by playing doubles on any surface, not just sand. Karch Kiraly started this way at about 8, playing with his father against adults. You might even create a Father/Son tournament (along with a Mother/Daughter division), to get everyone out training and playing for fun in the warm weather time of your state.

## **Create a Kidz Court**

The tradition of volleyball in Hawaii is well known, as that state turns out more National team and top level talent per capita than any other state in the US. One of the reasons is the family tradition of playing together at gatherings. The other can be seen at the Outrigger Canoe Club, where right next to the two adult courts, on the incredibly valuable beach frontage of Honolulu, they have a 6 meter by 12 meter court for kids, with a lower net, permanently set up. There, the kids learn shots, cooperation, and hustle from the adults playing games next to them.

There are dozens of parents who have put up courts, smaller than regulation size, in their backyards that allows their kids the chance to learn the most valuable skill of playing over the net. Others have set them up in a fast putup/takedown way, in the driveway, on concrete or asphalt, so kids can play even one on one, acquiring the most valuable reading, anticipation and creative skills that comes from over the net learning. If you go to Puerto Rico, you will see those talented kids learning in the streets, with the curbs being the sidelines, for a net strung across a little used thoroughfare. When I played in Italy, there were not many flat areas other than the holy soccer fields that no other ball could be seen upon. So they closed the street and held kids triples tournaments.

## Play Coed

Coed picnics, adults and kids mixed together, have always been one of the most fun ways kids learn to play volleyball. The surface does not matter. One of the most fun times I have had playing with my son and daughter was in Alaska, on a wood chip court. Alaskan rules included you can hit it off the black spruce trees and back into the court, one time per match your side gets four hits if you call it, first serve of the summer mulligans, and more. It was a blast under the endless summer night. If you get good enough, shoot for taking a team, with your son, to the USA Coed Volleyball Nationals. There, skill level competition exists at the most serious, yet fun level.

## Start a Varsity Program

A starting point can be helping make sure the intramural volleyball games played at school are run well and fun. The highest level is to create a statewide varsity program. Twenty of the states have boys varsity programming already. Take a look at [www.nfhs.org](http://www.nfhs.org) for more on volleyball at the high school level. Recently Maine (1997) and Florida (2001) began varsity programming for boys, and Colorado has been working on a solid program to do the same. If you are from a state without boy's varsity volleyball, take a look at what Paul Hastings and the progress and planning at [www.chsbva.org](http://www.chsbva.org)