



CONSIDERATIONS ON THE 12 SUBSTITUTION RULE

By: Julien Boucher – Technical Director – Volleyball Canada
June 2008

A couple of years ago, when Volleyball Canada developed its new Long Term Athlete Development model, one of the priorities it wanted to address was the individual technical and tactical development of its young athletes. Too-early specialization was identified as one of the main shortcomings within the old development model and one way to counteract this problem was to disallow the use of the libero in the youngest age categories (14U, 15U, and just recently, 16U boys).

While the no-libero rule does not solve all of the problems related to technical development at an early age, it certainly helps to foster an environment where coaches should feel the need to develop ALL individual skills of their young athletes and dedicate more time to training these skills.

To complement this rule adjustment, Volleyball Canada, through its Domestic Development Committee, also decided to allow teams in the same age categories to use 12 substitutions, to provide coaches with more freedom in utilizing non-starters during competition. This also enables more athletes to "see the court", as long as this rule is LIMITED to the in-and-out format.

While this rule has been used very effectively in recent years in different Provinces/Territories, certain Associations are currently using a different system of substitution for their domestic competitions, one that offers almost no limits to the number of times a non-starter can enter the court during the course of a game. This becomes problematic and counter-productive with respect to the original intent and why the 12-sub rule was implemented in the first place.

First, the inconsistent application of the rule throughout the country serves to create confusion and a sense of doubt in our officials at National Championships.

Second, it has been proven that many coaches take advantage of the 12-substitution UNLIMITED rule to create more opportunities for shorter players to be utilized as back-row specialists. In essence, there is nothing wrong with encouraging shorter athletes to play our sport, except, in this circumstance, this is being done at the expense of our less-skilled, taller athletes who are prevented from performing back-row skills during competition. Furthermore, it prevents these same athletes from using the skill of SERVING in competition, which, from a long-term athlete development stand point, is disastrous.

Note that statistical data can be obtained through the Ontario Volleyball Association as to the number of players who enter the court on average during a game where the unlimited 12-sub rule is in effect.

In order to be successful in changing (read improving) the way we develop our athletes technically – and ALL experts agree that we DO need change - Volleyball Canada needs all of its partners to implement a set of rules that are consistently applied across the country.

Therefore, I strongly recommend that, starting in the 2008-2009 season, the LIMITED 12-substitution rule be used for ALL Regional, Provincial and Territorial competitions at the 13, 14 and 15 & under categories as well as in the boys 16 and under.

JB

*For a more detailed look at how competition rules affect athlete development, please read: "**Competition is a Good Servant but a Poor Master**", produced by Istvan Balyi and Richard Way for Canadian Sport for Life. This article is available for download on the Volleyball Canada website at: <http://www.volleyball.ca/index.asp?Page=333>*