

TCA Southern California players, from top left: Lauren Corp, Kelly Holford, Lydia Bai and March 2009 Volleyball cover girl Hayley Spelman helped Neil demonstrate these drills.

Break Glass In Case Of **EMERGENCY**

These 8 out of system defensive tips will help your team when things don't go according to plan.

By Neil Mason

When playing defense there are four kinds of balls. There's the easy ball right at you, the hard ball right at you, the easy ball away from you and the hard ball away from you.

In order to be a great defensive player you need to be able to consistently create a scoring opportunity off the first three types of balls. In order to be a great defensive player, you also need to create scoring opportunities off that hard ball hit away from you.

For the first two types (easy and hard right at you), a forearm dig is sufficient. However, for the slow and fast balls away from you, you may have to resort to an emergency maneuver to play the ball and keep the rally alive.

We named this article "Break Glass in Case of Emergency" for a reason. The skills that we will outline here are not trained as primary skills. They are not taught as the primary method to handle the ball. But much like a fire hose behind a glass casing, thank goodness you have it when you need it.

The first rule for emergency moves is to go for the ball. It sounds obvious, but many players only go for balls they think they can get. By going for every ball, you will start to get

to more balls than you have ever imagined. Once you adopt this policy of going for every ball, then the need for emergency techniques becomes crucial.

Overhead Series

The overhead series occurs mostly when balls are hit high and off the top of the block and going out of bounds. With the new rules allowing us to use our hands, many teams are moving their defenders a little further up the court, hence a need to play balls overhead if there is a touch.

1 Overhand Dig (Catch)

You want to catch balls hit hard at you above the shoulders. The change in the rules that allows for a double contact on the first ball has led to an increase in overhand digs.

The player needs to



keep her knees bent and have strong hands and fingers (ball-shaped with the thumbs back).

When digging overhead (catching the ball), the player should face the ball and turn toward the target while controlling the ball with her hands. You don't

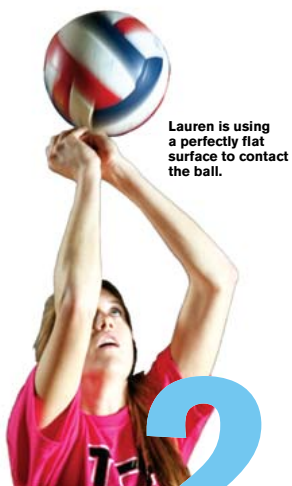
literally catch the ball. Nor do you set it. We

want our players to understand they should get as much of their hands on the ball as possible (surface area equals control).

This technique is great for hard balls hit at your face or higher. ▶

In a full shot, you would see that Lydia's knees are bent. Notice how her fingers spread as she is about to play the ball.





Lauren is using a perfectly flat surface to contact the ball.

2 Tomahawk

You want to tomahawk balls that are slow and clearly above your head. If you try and catch this ball it will not rebound off your hands (because it is moving so slow) and will result in a lift. To tomahawk a ball, use the backside of your wrist and hands. Think of a passing platform that you bring over your head where you play the ball off the back of your hands straight up in the air.

3 Fisty

The fisty is also used for a slow ball hit away from you and significantly high over your head. We want to be aggressive and intercept the ball on its way over your head (playing it in a vertical plane above your head). You use one hand because you have to jump for the ball, and it's inefficient to jump with your hands together. Make a fist and break the wrist back while you play the ball inside your closed hand. If your hand is open, the referee may call a lift. Practice the fisty with both hands so you are comfortable reaching in both directions with either hand.



Hayley uses her 6'6" frame to reach high for a ball off the top of the block.

4 Floor Series

You also must be prepared for the low ball that comes your way. Here's a look at the flipper and pancake.

Flipper

The flipper is used for balls hit laterally or directly in front of you that can only be accessed with one hand.

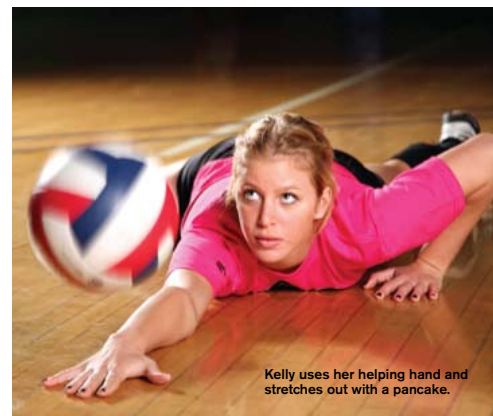
By going with one hand, you can reach and bend your elbow to help bring the ball back to the middle of the court. Take a big first step toward the ball, reach out with your hand fully extended and flip the ball up (or back) with your wrist. It is important to catch yourself with your other hand.



Lauren plays the ball here with the flipper maneuver.

5 Pancake

The pancake is a last-ditch effort to get a ball that appears completely out of your reach. Run full speed and extend your arm out as far as you can, placing your hand flat on the ground, allowing the ball to hit your hand. With a big first step in the direction of the ball, you can really extend farther than you think. If you step with the right foot, pancake with the right hand. The right knee also comes out to prevent bruising and to help get you back up quickly. As you get low to the ground, stretch out the arm you are going to use to pancake the ball with and use the other hand (helping hand) toward your hip to cushion the fall.



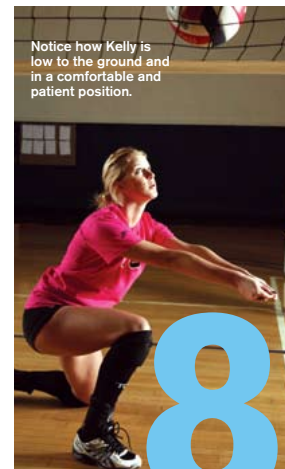
Kelly uses her helping hand and stretches out with a pancake.

6 Six-Touch Pepper

This drill helps players work on the overhand emergency maneuvers that help extend rallies. For this drill, two players contact the ball 6 times each using any 6 combinations of the emergency moves to go with a pass, set and a spike. In any order they must: 1) dig with two hands, 2) fist with the left hand, 3) fist with the right hand, 4) tomahawk, 5) set, and then 6) hit the ball back to their partner.

You can substitute the left and right-hand fisty by passing the ball with one arm. If you are going to do this, be certain to keep your fist closed and play the ball with the flipper motion.

back spin. Vary the height, speed and distance of the tosses/bounces to help better simulate game-like situations.



Notice how Kelly is low to the ground and in a comfortable and patient position.

7 More Practice

Sprawls, flippers and pancakes can be practiced with or without a partner. With a partner, one player stands at the five-foot line, while the other faces the partner about 10 feet from the end line. The partner at the net tosses different types of balls into play at the partner. The passer uses the appropriate maneuver to play the ball. Without a partner, you can get low and toss the ball out in front of you with some

8 Balls Out of the Net

One of the main goals here is to get low and make sure you are underneath the ball. Going to one knee is a good move. Being patient and making a good touch on the ball takes practice. The best players play this ball in almost slow motion. Have your

coach or teammate toss balls into the net at different heights so you can get a feel for how to make the play. Play the ball high and off the net to allow a teammate to make the next touch a good one. Every net has a different feel. Balls will come out of nets differently at every venue. Remember, the arms (platform) should be parallel to the net to avoid sending the ball back into the net.



Neil Mason is the founder and CEO of Team Complete Athlete, which now has club branches in nine locations throughout the U.S. Neil is the director of TCA's Southern California affiliate and has coached TCA teams to numerous club national titles. For more information on TCA, visit www.tcavolleyball.com.

On the Web:

Video of these drills can be found on the TCA Web site at www.tcavolleyball.com.