

# Guide to Selecting a Junior Club

## By Chuck McCracken - Carolina Region

Deciding which volleyball club is right for you can be a difficult decision. First of all, it is a serious commitment of time and money. It is my hope that this guide will help the volleyball family make an informed decision.

At a minimal level, club volleyball provides the opportunity to learn and improve volleyball skills through hours of additional practice and competition. Club volleyball gives players the opportunity to enhance athletic, social and leadership skills, making new friends from other schools and areas. In addition, since players regularly officiate matches when they are not playing, leadership skills and knowledge and understanding of the game is enhanced. Many players have gone on to be successful college players (at all levels), some are on partial to full athletic scholarships. Others have gone on to coach at the high school or college level or returned to coach at the club level.

Some teams will only travel to tournaments in North Carolina, while others will also travel to other parts of the country. While there is no guarantee that you will be seen by a college coach, the chances are better if they play club ball. The high school season coincides with the college season, making it difficult for college coaches to get out to watch players very often. In many cases the high school matches start around 5 or 6 making it difficult for a coach to even get to local matches without having to miss their team's practice. The heaviest recruiting time is during the club season. A majority of college coaches search for prospective players at Junior Olympic events. Larger tournaments involving teams from several states, national qualifiers and the Junior Olympic Volleyball National Championships attract the most college coaches.

Club volleyball is a HUGE commitment of time. The club season generally begins in November with tryouts and runs through mid-April for in state play and can run through early July for teams going to the Junior Olympic National Championships. Teams generally practice around 2 hours at a time and practice 1-3 times per week. Teams will generally play in at least 6 tournaments (some will play in as many as 12). Tournaments last from 1 day up to 4 days.

Club volleyball also requires FINANCIAL commitment. The cost can run as low as \$250 to over \$5,000 depending on the level of competition, number of tournaments, practice facility costs, coaches' travel costs, coaching expenses (some volunteer, some receive expenses, some get a salary), supplies, equipment, balls, printing, postage, etc. and sponsorship. Costs should be used for comparison between clubs to make sure you know what is and is not covered in their fees. Costs may vary depending on quality; two jerseys and a pair of shorts can cost \$100, USAV registration is \$35 per player and a share of the \$55 team fee, tournament entry fees vary from \$110 for regular season one day tournaments to \$700 for national qualifiers and \$900 for the Junior Olympic National Championships. Hotel, food and transportation costs are generally the responsibility of the player/parent.

You should also think about why you want to play club (recreation, more experience for high school play or possible college scholarship). No matter what your objective, you should be playing because you have fun, love the game and want to play. You must be willing to work hard and take the responsibility for your improvement. Your coach is there to help you work toward your goals.

The most important factor is the kind of coaching you will receive. Coaches at each club have a wide range of coaching experience, from very successful high school and college coaches (head and assistant) to those with little experience.

Parents of a volleyball player have a shared responsibility with the player. A few of the biggest responsibilities are encouraging good sportsmanship and responsible behavior, support and encourage your child win or lose, providing support financially and assist with transportation. Parents also have the responsibility to conduct themselves in a reasonable, responsible manner. Parents must be aware that they have as much, if not more, influence on the chemistry of their team than the coach. How can a player be a good team member when they have to listen to a parent bad mouth their teammates or coach? How can the team have good chemistry when parents sit in the stands and make disparaging comments about players or coaches to other parents?

### **Questions to consider:**

- How many practices per week and the duration of each practice?
- Where are the practices held?
- Do they have to practice during the holidays and on days following tournaments?
- How many tournaments will they attend, when and where?
- Is the club a non-profit organization?
- Does each team in the club fund itself or are the monies shared between the teams?
- What is the coaching experience of each coach?
- Do they have a written standard of conduct for players and coaches for trips and practices?
- Are coaches required to travel with the team when traveling out of state?
- Will tournament information such as when, where and how be given to each player as soon as possible before each tournament? Many times this information is not available until the last minute due to the late arrival of information from the tournament directors.
- Are the requirements of fund-raisers clearly spelled out as to participation, distribution (to all on the team or to those who work) and accountability for funds, etc.?
- Do they have an itemization of what is being paid by your fees?
- Some clubs charge one fee for the season or charge an initial fee with periodic or monthly fees. Some teams use fund-raisers to fund their teams and some teams use a combination of the above. If a club is unwilling to disclose their financial policies, you may want to seek another club.

Choosing a volleyball club is serious business. It is a commitment in time and money as well as an individual commitment to a club for the duration of the season. Spending a little time researching your options and opportunities may save you from a frustrating (or worse) season. Be sure to ask lots of questions. If possible, talk with players and parents who have played in the club before. If a club is hesitant to answer those questions, it is probably best to move on. Remember, volleyball is supposed to be FUN!