

Play Triples to Warm-up, Learn, and Have Fun

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Triples is a must for practice because it incorporates play with serving, serve receive, setting, hitting, floor defense and transition. For game-like drill devotees, triples has it all. I like to use 10-15 minutes of triples in each practice to help warm-up and emphasize skills that we are working on.

BASE TRIPLES

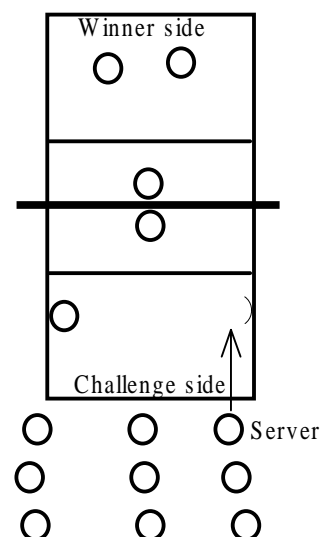
Triples can be played in many different ways but here are the basic guidelines for the base drill.

- Start with 3 lines on the back line. The first 3 go over to the far side (winners) and the next 3 come in to the near side (challenge). The left line stays on the left side of the court. The middle line sets and blocks. The right line stays on the right side of the court. *See figure 1*
- The serve is initiated on the challenge side and the winner of the rally goes to the winner side. It is essentially a "King/Queen of the Hill" with a one point rally game.
- Make sure that the team coming off retrieves the ball and sprints off the court to the endline.
- The next team then has 5 seconds to initiate play. The server should count off the 5 seconds to alert the winner side when play will be initiated. This seems to help the winner side to get in serve receive formation quickly.

Figure 1: Base Triples Formation

In this base drill the play is initiated by a serve from the right side player on the challenge side. In this formation it is important to emphasize:

- *communication on serve receive,*
- *getting to base defensive position every time, and*
- *serving between or to the side of the serve receivers.*



STARTING PLAY

There are many ways to change the base drill to achieve your particular goals. The first is how you initiate play; by the serve or by other means.

When starting play on the serve, you first designate what will be the penalty of a missed serve. If the serve is missed, a new server can come in and the other 2 players on the challenge side or the whole team can be replaced. If the goal is to associate more anguish with a missed serve, then replace the whole team. If the goal is to help develop tougher serves, then just replace the server or even give them 2 serves as in tennis.

By changing the way you initiate the drill you can change the drill to meet your specific needs for that day. For example, if your goal is to set the right side with a backset, you can initiate play with a toss to the setter from the left side player. The middle front player would then backset to the right side player. A variation would be for the middle front player to execute a standing spike to the left side player and backset the dig. Another idea would be to have the right side player do a standing spike from the net and then play. This might be the best variation of the drill because it is the most game-like as the ball comes from the right side of the court and the right side player has to transition from the net to hit. You can run this as a progression too, depending on the level of the team. Of course once you achieve the initial contact; you play triples straight up.

As you can see, this type of approach can be used for just about any type of skill that you are trying to focus upon. *See table 1.*

Table 1: Skills and Triples Variation Ideas

Skills	Triples Variation
<i>Offensive coverage</i>	Hitter tips back into court on the challenge side
<i>Individual defense</i>	Play is initiated by a toss that results in a dive, roll, or pancake
<i>Delivering a free ball</i>	Ball is tossed to that the players have to execute a standing spike or shovel pass
<i>Pursuit</i>	Play is initiated by a toss off the court that all have to follow

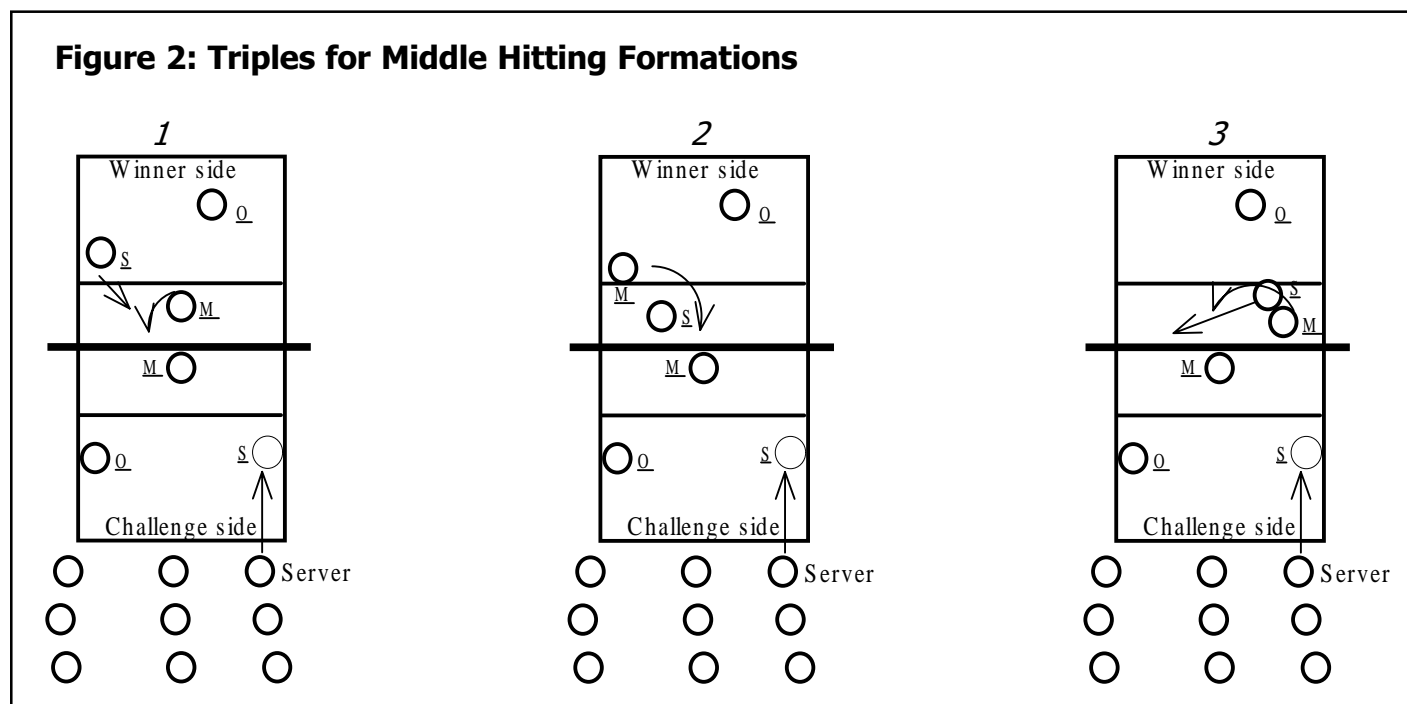
- Hitting line* First set has to be a line shot
- Setter dump* Play is initiated by a setter dump

The combinations are endless and it's important to note that the particular skill being emphasized on the challenge court has equal significance on the winner side. For example, for the setter dump variation the defense on the winner side should stay in the base defensive position until the play can be read. Picking up the dump correctly is important too!

TRIPLES FOR MIDDLE HITTING

Another use of triples is to help incorporate serve receive and setting the middle. In this version there are 3 lines: outside hitters, setters, and middle hitters. On the winner side, there is only 1 receiver and the setter and middle hitter get into a designated formation that you use for serve receive. For example, if your team is running a 6-2 with the setters following the middle hitters, your team is probably running 3 setter/middle hitter formations. *See Figure 2*

- 1) Setter is RB. Setter releases from the RB, Middle hitter is in the middle front.
- 2) Setter is MB. Setters are stacked middle. Middle hitter comes from right front.
- 3) Setter is LB. Setter and middle hitter are stacked left.



Your team may be running an offense with different serve receive formations but the idea is to run your different formations in this drill. When serving in this drill, the serve must go to the side of the receiver but not directly to him/her. In addition to the serve receive formations, you can vary the side that the serve goes to, and who serves on the challenge side. Again, after the initial play, regular triples ensues.

TWO POINT RALLY TRIPLES

Another variation of triples that is useful is to play is a 2-point rally game. If the challenge side wins then they serve again. If the winner side wins then they rotate and serve. This can be used very effectively with the middle hitter serve receive triples drill that was described above. To place extra emphasis on the middle attack, give an automatic win (2 points) to the first team that kills from the middle. Be sure to keep a few balls on the winner side to keep play moving.

CONCLUSION

Triples has it all. A fast paced, game-like drill that is as innovative and imaginative as you are. Consider incorporating some triples into your next practice sessions. Your players will love it.

About the Author



Al Morel is currently the varsity coach at Cushing Academy In Ashburnham, MA and St. John's High School in Shrewsbury, MA. Previously, he coached at Holy Cross College and at the University of Massachusetts. At Holy Cross, Al compiled a 149-59 record and was selected as Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference "Coach of the Year" three times. He is a 16-time medalist in the Bay State Games and is the former commissioner of the New England Region, USAV.