



100 PERCENT ICE

INTENSITY, CONCENTRATION, ENTHUSIASM

By Dr. Paul Salitsky

I have come to firmly believe what separates the eventual champions from the rest of the pack is a simple concept: 100 percent ICE.

It stands for 100 percent Intensity, Concentration and Enthusiasm. In my work with youth teams up through Olympians, I am convinced these three factors can explain a significant amount of success. Perhaps most importantly, all of these skills are completely learned and under your control. It might not feel that way all the time (like after your coach yells at you), but in all reality, it is.

INTENSITY

What is it? Think about the most intense volleyball player you are aware of. What behaviors make them like that? Grit, fight, determination, go-for-it attitude, facial expressions? What behaviors tell you the athlete has these characteristics? Can you do those things?

The answer is yes. It is a choice we make every day during practice. Do you exhibit a different level of intensity during practice than what you want to have during matches? Can you simulate small (30-90 seconds) sections of practice just like the intensity you want to have for competition? How quickly can you learn to adjust your intensity?

Too many volleyball players I see just “go through the motions” in practice and warm-ups with the expectation that somehow “it” will “just happen” during the match. Intensity must be practiced like any other skill if you expect to count on it during a crucial part of a match.

Most coaches are aware athletes that consistently maintain high intensity effort for the duration of a long match are also the ones who bring high intensity and focus to everyday practices. What does your game face look like? What does your coach see when they look at you?

CONCENTRATION

How do you adjust when your coach yells “Focus!”? Concentration is a skill that must be worked on every day to improve. Since you need a flexible broad→narrow, internal→external shift in focus for efficient execution of volleyball skills, you must practice this shift during training. How quickly can you refocus after you lose concentration for a moment? What is it that you actually do when you realize your focus is drifting?

One of the ways we teach athletes to gain the most focus and concentration during competition is to teach them how to play “one play at a time.” This can start with a simple attitude shift that requires you to leave the last play in the past and concern yourself with readiness and anticipation of your role in the upcoming play. The future will take care of itself. Self-control, planning your performance and trusting yourself are all crucial ingredients if you truly want to play one play at a time.



ENTHUSIASM

Again think of an extremely enthusiastic athlete. What behaviors that you can observe tell you they are enthusiastic? Upbeat, positive, encouraging, loud? Can you do those things? Is your enthusiasm different for training than for matches?

Enthusiasm is one of the few things I want you to “fake it till you make it.” Not because it seems superficial, but simply because enthusiasm is contagious. You are required to be enthusiastic for your teammates to aid in their motivation and effort, so you can expect the same from them when you are dragging or low on energy.

So ask yourself, on your team, are you the player known for encouraging teammates the most? What would have to change to win that award? Think what your team would look (sound) like if everyone was trying to win that award.

Have you ever walked into a gym or tournament and seen a team like this? They have so much enthusiasm that it spills out of the court around them. Athletes can learn to motivate themselves to get to a place like this for every competition. Coaches can learn to model the enthusiasm they want to see from their athletes.

CONCLUSION

One way to achieve 100 percent ICE in everyday practices is to set high goals for yourself and always work hard to meet them. This can aid you in keeping the majority of your focused effort on today’s goals and training rather than something else.

Another tactic is to take the next step in simulation training. Your coach shouldn’t have to design intricate wash drills just so you can pretend that it is kind of like competition. You can make more of each drill and ball contact in practice if you simulate how you will feel, think and act in matches just by imagining yourself in that competitive environment.

I have two quotes that I usually share with athletes I work with:

“If you want to be a winner, act like one.”

“Relentless pursuit of excellence”

These are not meant to sound superficial or overconfident. It just means that if you truly want to follow the path of a champion, you must show responsibility, put forth effort, have purpose, enjoy yourself and be relentless.