

# MENTAL PREPARATION SECRETS FOR **SERVE RECEIVE**

## WHAT EVERY PLAYER AND COACH NEEDS TO KNOW



BY PATRICK J. COHN, PH.D. &  
MEGAN MELCHIORRE, PSY.D.

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# BONUS SESSION 1

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## Mental Preparation Secrets for Serve Receive in Volleyball



Serve receive is one the most challenging tasks for volleyball players. It's challenging because of the additional amount of time you have after the serve is hit and before the ball arrives to make a pass, especially when you get a float serve.

Defensively, balls usually come much quicker (pace and shorter distance) and for the most part you're in a position to make the play... therefore, you tend to react and don't try to over-control. With more time, many players over think, second-guess, or over analyze what to do with the ball, which can lead to brain freeze.

***The two most important mental skills for serve receive is to be decisive with what you are going to do and trust in your skills.***

After all your practice is complete and you are performing in games, you have to react to what you see and play athletically. Perfectionist athletes often think too much about the technique of how to make a pass, which can lead to over control. In addition, the serve receive is an opportunity to become indecisive or second-guess your plan or who you'll pass to, especially when you have too much time to think about what to do.

The two most important mental skills for serve receive is to be decisive with what you are going to do and trust in your skills. Essentially, you have to "get out of your own" way. This means trusting in your intuitive mind and learned skills to do the right thing to make the play.

It's interesting that I have to teach volleyball players to think less on the court. To do this, you have to see the ball, anticipate the location intuitively, and trust in your hand-eye coordination to make the pass or get the dig. Focusing too much on proper footwork, perfect platform, and set up can actually confuse your mind and thus body. Likewise, when you second-guess your first instinct, you get frozen by indecision and can't make the play.



## What's a Preserve Routine?

A preserve routine is not just for the server. A preserve routine is also for serve receive, to help you be mentally focused and ready for a serve. The serve receive routine helps you: (1) focus on the process, (2) feel confident in your skills, and (3) trust your decision-making and skills to execute.

You'll also want to be aware of how your mental game might hurt your performance.

### **Some of the mental game errors you might be making include:**

- Worrying about losing a point.
- Worrying about letting teammates down.
- Visualizing shanking the ball or another bad outcome.
- Getting distracted by what's happening on the bench or in the stands.
- Having self-doubt about your ability.
- Indecision or second-guessing your plan.
- Lack of trust in your learned skills.
- Over thinking your mechanics.
- Lacking focus on the process, the mind is in the past or future.
- Worrying about making a mistake that leads to your team losing.
- Engaging in negative self-talk, thoughts, or images related to the process.
- Checking and rechecking what you are doing during the routine.
- Dwelling on the last point and feeling frustrated.

Do you commit any of these mental game errors? You'll need to address the challenges that prevent you from performing well. One way to have a good mindset for serve receive is to use a routine to mentally prepare for every serve.

## Serve Receive Routine Steps

Most volleyball players have a physical routine that might include their position on the court and set up, but do not have a mental routine for each serve. You want to think about your serve receive routine as one behavior prior to the serve as you set up. It shouldn't take longer than a few seconds.

However, I break down the routine into five mental preparation steps or stages in the table below. This is an overview or "template" for a serve receive routine. Here, I emphasize the mental aspects of the routine.

Stage	Behavior	Purpose
<b>SET UP</b>	Be aware of the situation and set up in ready position to make a play. Let go of the last point or play you made.	Feel comfortable with set up and quiet the mind.
<b>REHEARSAL</b>	In a split second, feel or see the pass in your mind. One positive image here.	To have a positive image in your mind.
<b>COMMIT</b>	Anticipate the serve and call for the ball. Commit fully to making the play.	Fully commit to making the play.
<b>FOCUS</b>	Stay focused on your execution and the target. Watch the serve.	To stay task-focused and focus on the moment.
<b>TRUST</b>	Trust what you know and focus on passing to a target. Let it happen instead of forcing it to happen.	To trust in your learned skills and play intuitively.

## Mental Game Tips for Serve Receive

On the following page are a few tips to keep in mind for your serve receive mental approach:

### **Let go of the Last Point**

You want to start your routine by mentally separating the last point from the current point. You let go of the last point by not dwelling on what happened on the play or analyzing your performance. You can also prompt yourself with self-talk by saying, “*That point is in the past,*” or, “*Can’t change the last point, let it go.*” Get the monkey off your back by committing 100% of your focus to the next play.

### **Lock a positive image in your mind**

Do you approach serve receive trying not to shank or make a bad pass? This makes you focus on a negative outcome and creates tension. Instead, make sure you have a positive image of the pass in your mind. For example, can you focus on seeing the right trajectory of the pass? Or you can focus on one correct feeling you want to have, such as feeling freedom of movement and solid contact with the ball.

***The most important feeling to have***  
***is freedom or effortlessness.***

### **Keep Your “Rehearsal” Simple**

The most important feeling to have is freedom of movement or effortlessness, as if you are receiving the ball on autopilot. *In order to gain control of your performance, you have to give up control* to your muscle memory. Also, you don’t have to see a perfect pass. Rehearse the pass you have today, not the perfect pass.

### **Keep Your Mind in the Present**

You want to stay focused on the process or performance cues that will help you prepare for and execute a good pass or dig, such as quick feet or feet to the ball. Your routine should help you focus on the ingredients of your preparation and keep your mind locked into the process, not the past or future. Negative thoughts about the outcome will cause you to tighten up and over control the serve.

### **Commit to Your “First Instinct”**

You'll want to fully commit to the pass. Committing fully means you know what balls you have (seams, lanes, short/deep) and you're prepared to receive in your area. You decide 100% to complete the pass to the setter. You don't want to feel paralyzed by not knowing the serves you play, a serve in the seam for example. When you second-guess your first instinct (playing a ball in your seam), you hesitate to complete the pass.

You'll want to use the performance cues or images based on your learning and performing style. For example, visual and kinesthetic (feel) players use different images. Not all volleyball players can “see” or visualize the play and would rather feel it kinesthetically. In this case, you would feel a solid pass in your mind and not see it in your mind.

## **Summary**

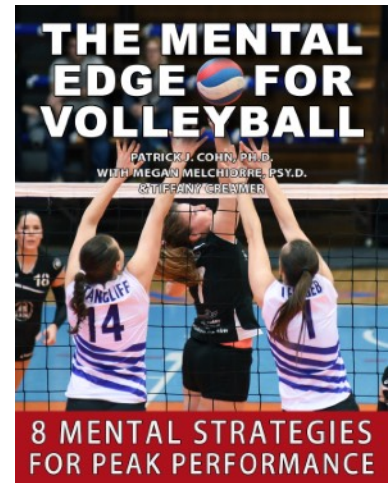
Serve receive is one the most challenging tasks for volleyball players. The additional amount of time you have to think, or over- think, makes it more difficult for players. With more time, many players over think, second-guess, or over analyze what to do with the ball, which can lead to brain freeze. This leads to over controlling your skills and not playing athletically.

At game time, you have to trust in your learned skills. You first let go of the last point by not dwelling on what happened in the play or analyzing your performance. Next, you have to quiet your mind to anticipate and react to the ball. Once you get to the ball, focus on one simple image to pass the ball, such as a target or solid contact.

# Mental Edge for Volleyball

Do you overthink your performance in games? Do you lose confidence easily after a couple of blown plays? Do you become so frustrated with your game that you can't focus on the next play?

Learn how to improve your mental toughness for volleyball and perform with stable self-confidence in games with "The Mental Edge for Volleyball."



This audio and workbook program (digital download only) is ideal for any club, college, or professional volleyball players. In addition, volleyball coaches and parents can also be wise to teach the strategies we provide in the program.

- **Players:** Get the mental edge by learning how to take control of your confidence, mentally prepare for games and perform with composure under pressure.
- **Coaches:** Boost your team's confidence using simple, proven mental strategies.
- **Parents:** Help boost your volleyball player's confidence. Don't let their mind hold them back from playing in the zone.

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**Georgia Miller, M.E., MGCP**, is a mental performance coach for Peak Performance Sports. After playing collegiate volleyball and coaching college, she earned a master's degree from Springfield College with an emphasis in Sport Psychology. In addition to her specializing in mental coaching for volleyball players, she's worked with athletes in basketball, baseball, hockey, football, field hockey, dance, martial arts, gymnastics, lacrosse, and musicians.

**Jaclyn Ellis, M.S., MGCP**, is a mental performance coach for Peak Performance Sports. She earned a Master's degree from Illinois State University. **Dr. Patrick Cohn** is the president and founder of **Peak Performance Sports, LLC** in Orlando, Florida. He has helped every level athlete—from junior, amateur, to seasoned professional—excel in his or her sport for over 30 years.

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