



A BUMP IN ACTIVITY

How parks can generate a flurry of interest with snow volleyball

BY MARY HELEN SPRECHER

One of the up-and-coming forms of volleyball is played on snow. In fact, the sport is expected to experience a veritable blizzard of growth in years to come. International Volleyball Federation (FIVB), the governing body, hopes this will ultimately lead to its inclusion in the Winter Olympic Games.

Snow volleyball was showcased as a demonstration sport at the 2018 Winter Olympic Games in PyeongChang, South Korea, and the inaugural FIVB Snow Volleyball World Tour began in March 2019, and continues today. (The USA's snow volleyball teams have become a force to be reckoned with on the international level; the reason is that the discipline translates well to people who are used to playing the beach game.)

Like its beach counterpart, snow volleyball has an appeal to spectators who are looking for entertainment as well as a sporting event.



This snow-surface sport originated in Europe, which remains a stronghold of play. However, USA Volleyball has been encouraging venues like ski resorts to set up snow volleyball facilities, generally near a ski lodge where people congregate before and after their runs on a mountain. While the sport is played by teams of two or three at the pro level, the recreational version offers more flexibility.

In fact, snow volleyball may be exactly what a park needs during the winter months to bring in more users who might otherwise stay home. Because the sport can be played throughout the winter (in areas where snowfall is consistent), it can increase park use and allow for additional programming during the season. (Even in areas where snowfall is intermittent, the sport can be a great option to keep kids busy when school is closed due to weather.)

There are plenty of reasons why a snow volleyball program can succeed. Most people already know the rules (or at least the basics), and the equipment is inexpensive to purchase and install. From there, it's only a matter of promoting the game. And because it's so fun to watch, the word can

easily be spread, particularly by contacting local media, who might want to do a feature on the new program.

Like its beach counterpart, snow volleyball has an appeal to spectators who are looking for entertainment as well as a sporting event.

"The really good thing about volleyball as a whole is that we have taken that beach vibe and tried to translate it to all our disciplines," says Jamie Davis, president and CEO of USA Volleyball. "When it's played in tournaments, we have music between every point, and the spectators really get into it."

And, he notes, it's a natural for parks that want to increase use and drive engagement during colder weather.

"Snow volleyball courts would be a fantastic addition to parks and recreation facilities in the United States' cooler climates. The sport is fun, wholesome, athletic, and will allow those who love to play volleyball outdoors on the sand and grass the ability to now play year-round. In addition, skating rinks, ski resorts, and other outdoor venues could add snow volleyball courts to diversify the activities on their properties to attract even more patrons."



from those of the indoor and beach games, a special ball has been developed; the surface is less slippery than that of a traditional ball. However, at a recreational level, at least while the game is becoming established at a park, a regular volleyball can be used. Should snow volleyball draw enough long-term interest, a special ball can be purchased.

SETTING UP COURTS

At ski resorts, he adds, temporary bleachers are often erected by packing snow a few feet high and then putting down wooden planks for people to sit on. Players generally find it most comfortable to wear the type of attire for running in cold weather: exercise tights or workout pants, long-sleeve tops, and shoes with a cleated or textured sole that provide traction on snow. (Some players find soccer shoes to be the best footwear.) Gloves can be worn depending on the temperature and a player's preference.

Because the conditions of the snow game are so different

“Setting up snow volleyball courts is relatively easy and will certainly attract attention,” says Davis. “USA Volleyball will be more than happy to help provide the necessary specs and also help source the special balls that are used [in] playing on the snow.”

Courts are generally marked out with line tape (which may need to be swept off, or even reapplied in case of a heavy snow that covers the lines). The lines should be made of a resistant material, and any exposed anchors should be soft and flexible. Alternatively, paint can be used to delineate courts

on the snowpack; however, note that, during vigorous play, the paint might be worn away.

According to the FIVB Snow Volleyball Rules, the following court dimensions and guidelines govern the game:

PLAYING AREA

The playing court is a rectangle measuring 52-1/2 feet x 26 feet (16m x 8m), surrounded by a free zone, which is a minimum of 6-1/2 feet (2m) wide on all sides. All lines are 3/4 of an inch (5cm) wide. The color of the lines should be bright enough to stand out clearly against the snow. (Size-wise, the court is similar to that of beach volleyball; the free zone is slightly different in dimensions, however.)

PLAYING SURFACE

The surface must be composed of snow, as flat and uniform as possible, free of rocks and anything else which may cause injuries to the players. At the international level, snow must be at least one foot (30 cm) deep to keep players safe from any obstacles that may cause injury.

“You don’t want the snow to have too much powder or too much ice,” adds Davis. “You really need to keep the safety of the athletes in mind.”

NET DIMENSIONS

The top of the net is 8 feet (2.43 m) for men’s play and 7.3 feet (2.24 m) for women’s play. The height of the net may vary for specific age groups. The net height is measured from the center of the playing court with a measuring rod. Again, snow volleyball courts in parks are not bound by age and gender restrictions since they will likely be used by a mixture of visitors.

POSTS

The posts supporting the net are placed outside each sideline and should be rounded and smooth, fixed to the ground without wires. There cannot be any dangerous or obstructing objects. Posts must be padded.

Ultimately, Davis believes snow volleyball in parks can make the sport grow.

“The more opportunities you provide people to play volleyball, the more they will play, and participation will continue to grow. People who try it for the first time on snow will love it and will then play year-round in the warmer months. Furthermore, our goal is to have snow volleyball

added to future Olympic Games, and if successful, it will be the only sport to be played in Winter [Olympic Games] and Summer Olympic Games. With that kind of exposure every two years, the sport will definitely grow.” **PRB**

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