

VOICE OF THE COACH SURVEY REPORT

May 2025

**VOLLEYBALL NEW ZEALAND
POIWERA AOTEAROA**



This survey aimed to understand the experiences, challenges, and aspirations of volleyball coaches in Aotearoa. The insights inform Volleyball New Zealand's future practices for coach development and support.

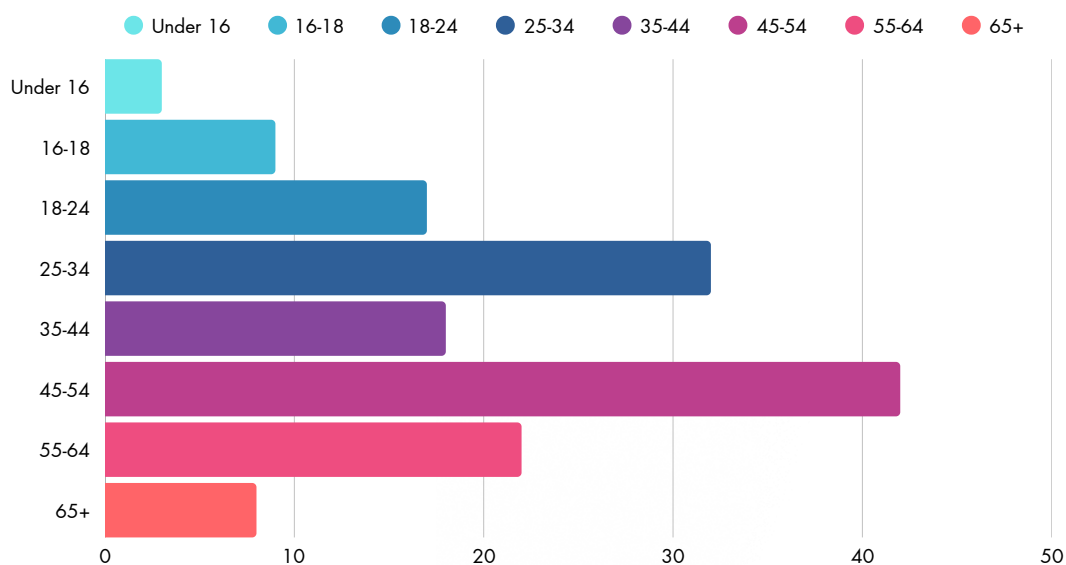
Contents	page 2
Demographic Overview	pages 3-6
Understanding the Experience of Coaches	pages 7-10
Understanding Coaching Practice	pages 11-12
Considerations and Implications	pages 12-14
Reflections	page 15



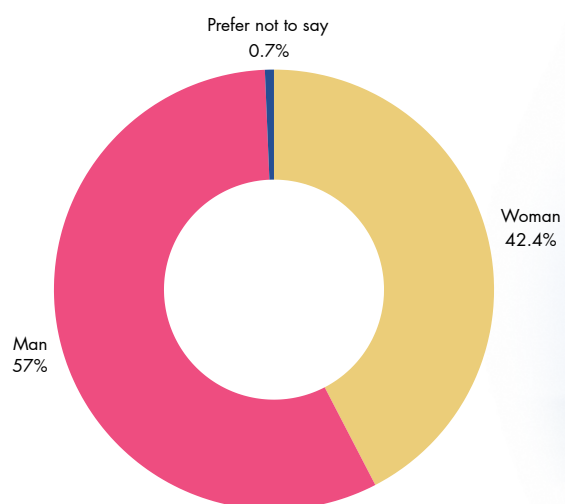
General Information - Demographic

1.151 Response (12.5%)

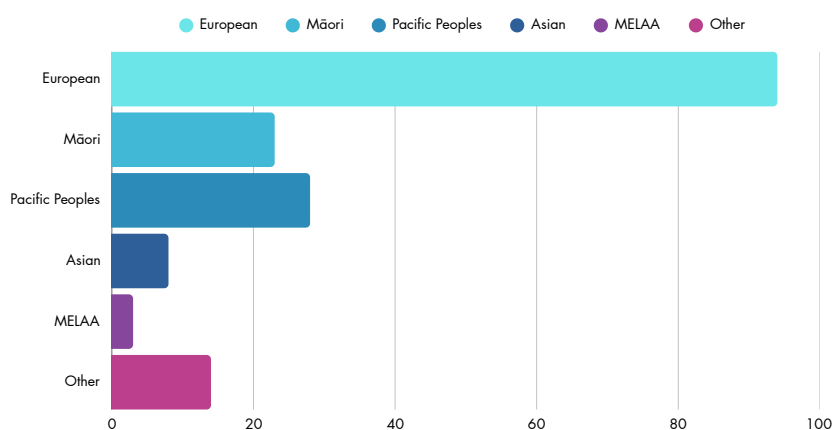
2. Age Group



3. Gender

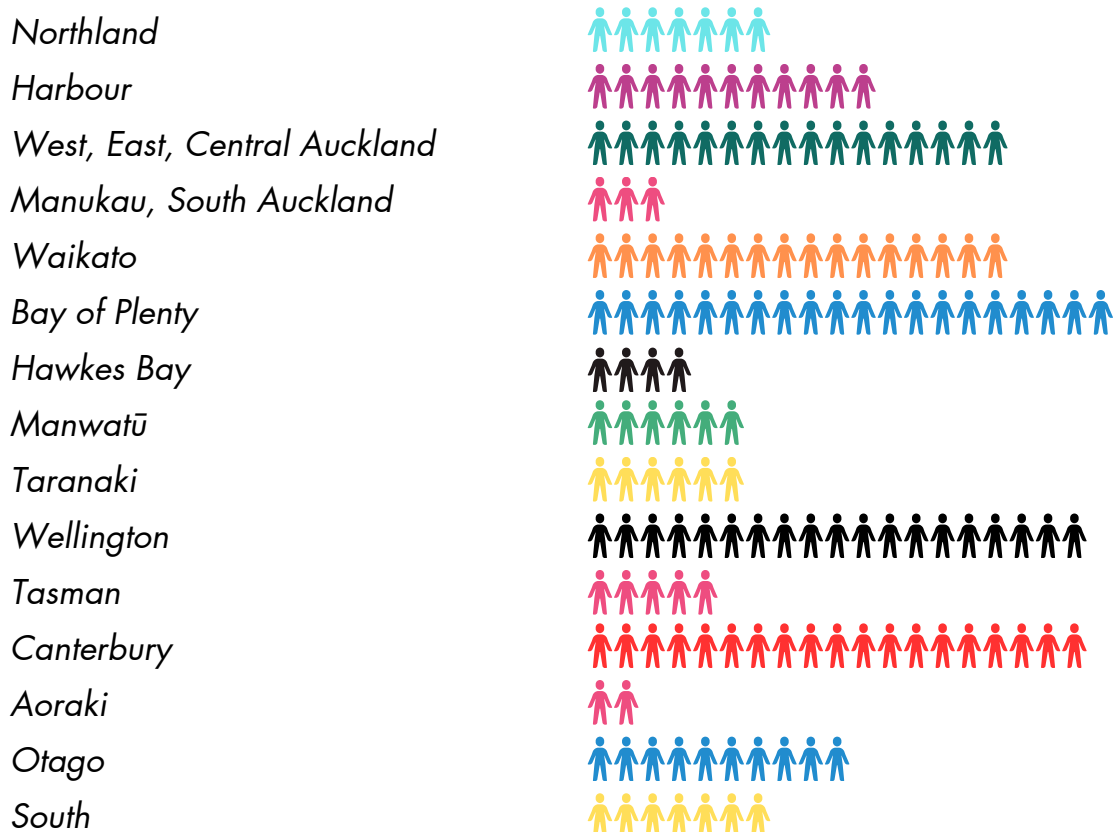


4. Ethnicity

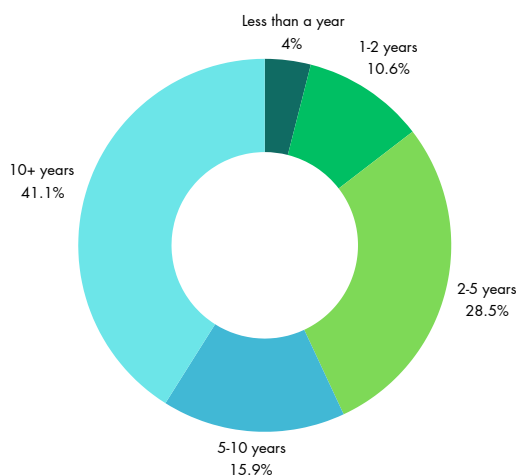


*MELAA = Middle Eastern, Latin/American, African

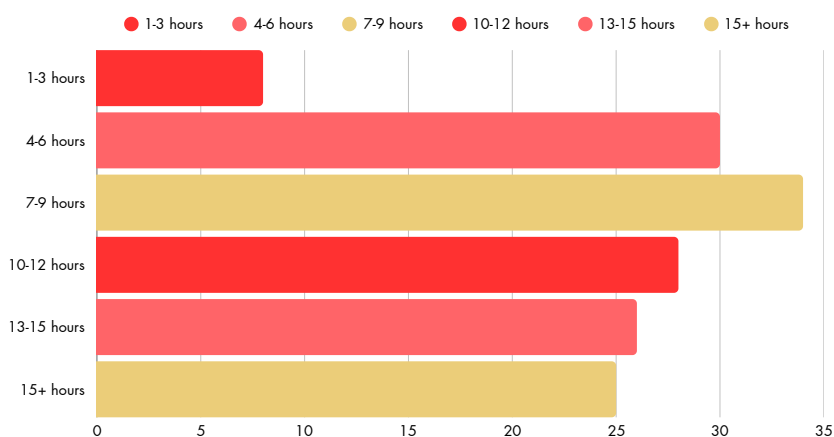
5. Location (based on Regional Associations)



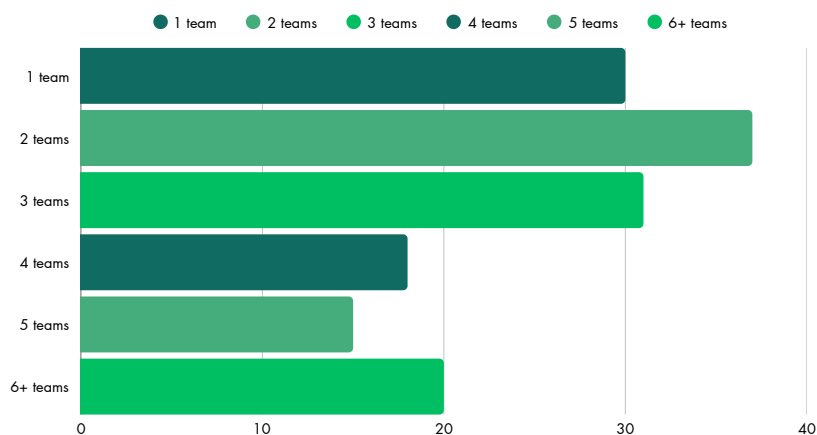
6. How many years have you been coaching?



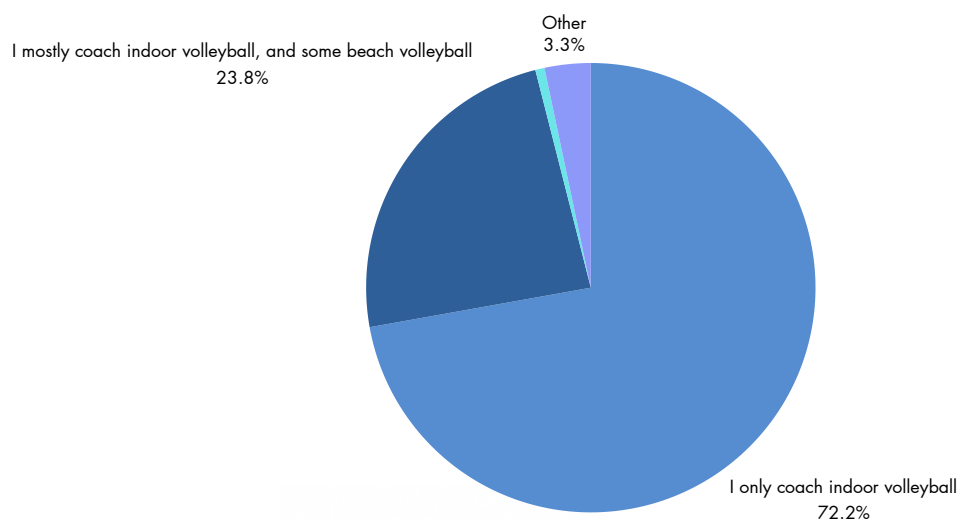
7. On average, how many hours a week do you spend coaching (inc. planning and travel)?



8. How many teams have you coached in the last 12 months?



9. Which statement best applies to you?



10. In the last 12 months, who have you coached?

The following statements are true:

- Most coaches, coach junior and/or secondary school aged participants
- Some coaches, coach club level volleyball
- Few coaches, coach other players/groups



Understanding the Experience of Coaches

11. Why do you coach?

Coaches identified these to be the top 6 reasons they coach:

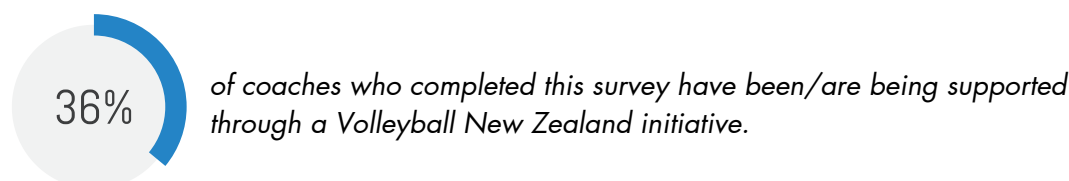
1. Passion for the sport (105 responses)
2. Seeing the players achieve potential (66 responses)
3. Development (e.g. development of the players/skills) (60 responses)
4. To give back (52 responses)
5. Teaching/Sharing knowledge (45 responses)
6. Seeing the fun/enjoyment of the players (41 responses)

12. What coach development have you undertaken in the last five years?

Coaches identified these to be the top 7 coach development opportunities they have taken part in:

1. Self-Directed Learning (Reading, Podcast, etc.) (114 responses)
2. Observation (being observed or observing others) (78 responses)
3. Coaching Course(s)/Programme(s) (72 responses)
4. Volleyball Specific Workshop(s) (47 responses)
5. Mentor (39 responses)
6. Coaching Forum(s)/Discussion(s) (36 responses)
7. Generic Coaching Workshop (33 responses)

13. What VNZ certification have you completed/currently completing?



14. What other volleyball specific coach development have you completed/attended?

- 20% of respondents have attended a Coach Workshop(s) with their Regional Association.
- 15% of respondents have attended a previous VNZ Coach Course (Local, Regional, etc.)
- 11% of respondents have completed a FIVB Level I and/or II Course (in-person)
- 11% of respondents have completed a FIVB Level I and/or II E-Learning Course (online)



15. What other generic/cross code coach development have you completed/attended?

- 9% of respondents have completed/attended Tertiary Education (i.e. Degree/Diploma in Sports Coaching)
- 8% of respondents have attended a School Coach Development Initiative
- 5% of respondents have completed Coaching for Impact (Sport NZ)
- 5% of respondents have attended an RST (i.e. Sport Waikato) Course/Workshop
- 5% of respondents have attended a Good Sports Course (Active Sport and Recreation)
- 3% of respondents have completed/attended Core Knowledge (HPSNZ)

16. What has had the greatest impact on the growth of you as a coach?

Coaches indicated the following trends and insights:

- *Learning from Others:* Peer support, mentorship, and collaboration were the most frequently mentioned factors. Coaches cited specific mentors, observing senior coaches, and being part of coaching communities as highly impactful.
- *Self-Reflection:* Many coaches mentioned personal growth journeys, including pivotal life experiences that re-shaped their 'why'. A strong desire to be better for their players was a recurring theme.
- *Player-Centered Development:* Seeing athletes improve, grow, and love the game deeply motivated coaches. Personal success as a coach was often tied to players' progress and character development.
- *Lived Experience:* Playing the sport at various levels and coaching through experience featured prominently. Some credited multi-sport backgrounds and diverse coaching contexts as drivers of adaptability and perspective.
- *Formal Learning and Resources:* Coaches found value in structured learning: courses, certifications (e.g. FIVB, VNZ), books, videos, and online platforms.

Other notable mentions include cross-code influences, where coaches reflected on transferable skills. Others highlighted the influence of their cultural values and upbringing. Some coaches mentioned that growth often came from tournaments and events. A few coaches also touched on the importance of their philosophy developing over time – a shift from technical instruction to emotional intelligence, wellbeing, and culture-building was commonly noted.



17. Pains – pick the top 3 challenges you face as a coach

Coaches indicate these 5 reasons to be the hardest challenges:

1. Takes up a lot of my time (64 responses)
2. Not enough time with the players/team (50 responses)
3. Its volunteer – I don't get paid (42 responses)
4. Meeting the needs of all the players (ability and personality) (42 responses)
5. No additional support (its just me) (39 responses)

Summary of the above:

- *Time pressure: the most common challenge is the sheer time commitment required to coach. Many responses also mention a conflict with work, family, and other responsibilities, underscoring how demanding coaching is as a volunteer.*
- *Limited time with players: Coaches feel they don't get enough time to develop players properly, especially in short seasons or with shared players across multiple sports.*
- *Lack of Financial Incentive: Without financial support, the time investment is harder to justify and sustain. The pain point is often paired with emotional fatigue and/or lack of recognition from schools or communities.*

Further implications:

These insights point to a sustainability issue in volunteer coaching. Coaches are motivated and passionate, but structural and systematic barriers are holding them back. There is a clear demand for better administrative and logistical support, resources and training, recognition, financial support, and strategies to engage players more effectively.



18. Gains – If VNZ were to focus on 2 aspects to improve coaching experience/development, what would it be?

Coaches indicate these areas for improved coaching experiences:

1. Creating content to listen to, read, watch (45 responses)
2. Providing more coaching resources (38 responses)
3. Running more coaching clinics (observing a guest coach) (35 responses)
4. Hosting a FIVB course (30 response)

Other notable mentions (14-20) include creating a 'community of learning' (i.e. a Facebook group), support via a mentor, hosting a National Coaching Conference, recognising coach's contributions, developing more volleyball specific workshops, and running more volleyball specific courses.

Based on the above insights, if VNZ were to focus on just two main areas to significantly improve the coaching experience and development, they should prioritise:

1. Providing more accessible and high-quality coaching resources Why? It was the most frequent suggestion, and it aligns with the biggest pain that coaches face – time.
2. Offering varied and accessible learning opportunities. Why? Coaches are asking for flexible, diverse formats that allow development on their terms (especially valuable for volunteers with limited time)



Understanding Coaching Practice

19. In your own words, what does a quality training/practice session look like?

Coaches' insights provided the following:

- *Skill Development.* Many responses highlight the importance of improving player/athlete skills. A structured progression approach was frequently alluded to.
- *Athlete Engagement.* Participants emphasise the need for athletes to be fully involved. A quality session stimulates focus and enjoyment, which boosts learning.
- *Challenge and Progression.* Quality training should push athletes beyond their comfort zone. This suggests that training should adapt to varied skill levels and provide clear progressions.
- *Structure and Planning.* A clear session flow was mentioned: warmup – skill development – game situations. This suggests that quality sessions follow a deliberate, purposeful structure.

Summary

Coaches' agree that a quality training/practice session is:

- Focused on developing specific skills through progression
- Engaging—physically, mentally, and emotionally
- Delivered in a supportive environment that fosters relationships and psychological safety
- Structured, with a clear beginning, middle, and end
- Adaptable to athletes' needs through differentiation and challenge

20. Have you heard of Balance is Better?

 49.7% Yes

 50.3% No

Note. While Volleyball New Zealand is an identified Balance is Better sport, we have not done a lot to implement the principles of Balance is Better explicitly into our communities.



21. If you answered YES to Q20, what does Balance is Better mean for you, coaching volleyball?

Coaches insights identified these recurring positive themes:

- *Early Specialisation vs Multi-Sport Participation.* There is strong support for athletes participating in multiple sports and delaying specialisation. Many coaches encourage players to 'generalise before specialising' citing benefits like broader athletic development, reduced injury risk, greater enjoyment and long-term engagement.
- *Player Wellbeing/Holistic Development.* A high number of coaches referenced wellbeing as central to their coaching. There is a concern about overtraining, athlete burnout, and mental/emotional load.
- *The big picture.* Coaches recognise that volleyball is one part of a young person's life and understand broader commitments like work, school, and family.
- *Long-Term engagement in sport.* Coaches aspire to keep youth involve in volleyball and sport for life.

Coaches' insights also highlighted these mixed/negative themes:

- *Conflict between codes.* A high number of coaches voiced a frustration with other codes encroaching on volleyball's short season. Coaches feel that volleyball often respects 'Balance is Better', but other sports do not.
- *Implementation.* Several coaches understand and support the philosophy in theory but struggle in practice.
- *Dismissive.* A few respondents felt Balance is Better is too 'generic' or 'not helpful'.

Key Takeaways

- Support is strong for the 'Balance is Better' philosophy in principle, especially around early diversification and wellbeing.
- Coaches want to create enjoyable, sustainable sport experiences that allow athletes to grow on and off the court.
- There are real-world frustrations at play. Specifically, coaches feel that other codes/sports encroach on volleyball's short season. This highlights a need for cross-code collaboration and better school-level implementation.



Considerations and Implications

For Volleyball New Zealand to continue to improve the coaches' experiences, future proofing the system that supports them with the following, will be integral to sustainable development and retention.

- *Resources.* Provide more accessible, practical coaching tools and high-quality coaching resources (read, listen, watch) to all levels. **Why?** It was the most frequent suggestion, and it aligns with the biggest pain that coaches face – time.
- *Learning Opportunities.* Offer more varied and accessible learning opportunities, combining structured learning, mentoring/observation and real-world experience. **Why?** Coaches are asking for flexible, diverse formats that allow development on their terms (especially valuable for volunteers with limited time).
- *Balance is Better.* Promote awareness of Balance is Better through coach education, social media, and other various communications (website, newsletters, etc.). **Why?** Only 50% of coaches who completed the survey had heard of Balance is Better.
- *Balance is Better.* Advocate for improved cross-code collaboration with Sport New Zealand. Consider a targeted approach with Regional, Club, School alignment. **Why?** A high number of coaches voiced a frustration with other codes encroaching on volleyball's (already) short season.
- *Systems and Structures.* Advocate for changes to the systems and structures of volleyball. A different model could improve the quality of administrative and logistical support, reduce volunteer burnout, and improve the quality of experience. **Why?** Coaches can feel unsupported in their roles. Furthermore, some coaches feel they don't get enough time to develop players properly, especially in short seasons.
- *Specific support –* Create the following material: Strategies to engage players more effectively; Games Based Approach to coaching; and Skill Acquisition for Excellence (SAFE). **Why?** Meeting the needs of all the players was a common struggle for coaches. Furthermore, some coaches need additional support with creating optimal learning environments, that focus on engagement and improvement.



Considerations and Implications continued

- **Coaching Communities.** Develop more connected coaching communities (mentoring, online forums, regional networks) to encourage self-reflection and observation opportunities where coaches can learn from others. **Why?** The two most common responses to 'what had the greatest impact on the growth of you as a coach?' were learning from others (peer support, collaboration, observation, etc.) and self-reflection (personal journeys, introspection, learning from experience, etc.)

Note: There is a glaring disparity between what had the greatest impact on the growth of a coach (learning from others (observation and mentoring), self-reflection) and the learning opportunities coaches are asking for (creating content, providing resources, workshops). Therefore, it is important to create opportunities that have a blended approach – one that is flexible, adaptable, and allows for a mix of in-person and remote learning activities.

- **Recognition.** Recognise and celebrate coaches, their coaching, and the diversity of coaching pathways. **Why?** Recognition is one of the most common drivers for motivating coaches. Most coaches aren't paid and are giving up a lot of their personal time to support others.
- **Coaching Clinics.** Encourage Regional Associations to run coaching clinics, where participants can observe more experienced/guest coaches coaching. **Why?** It was one of the most common responses to 'If VNZ were to focus on 2 aspects to improve coaching experience/development, what would it be?'. Furthermore, coaches explicitly talk about the importance of learning from others.
- **FIVB Courses.** Explore ways to host an FIVB Level I and/or II Course in Aotearoa. **Why?** That, alongside developing more volleyball specific workshops, and running more volleyball specific courses, were some of the most common responses to 'If VNZ were to focus on 2 aspects to improve coaching experience/development, what would it be?'.



Reflections

First and foremost, Volleyball New Zealand want to thank every coach that participated in this survey. The insights are invaluable and will most definitely contribute to the next phase (and beyond) of the coach development landscape within volleyball, in Aotearoa. This survey aimed to understand the experiences, challenges, and aspirations of volleyball coaches across the motu. Based on what we've learned, there are things we will start doing, keep doing, and stop doing, to better support the experience and development of coaches at all levels.

There are positive signs that come from this survey. Particularly, coaches refer to being deliberate, purposeful, and challenging within their coaching practice. That indicates that coaches are invested in learning and development. It is also pleasing to see that coaches are passionate about creating enjoyable volleyball experiences that allow players to grow on and off the court.

There are some exciting opportunities that have been identified through this survey. Namely, the community can expect to: access more relevant, applicable resources and micro-learning opportunities; connect with communities of practice to encourage learning with/from others; see as Volleyball New Zealand continues to strengthen the Blended Learning Approach to coach development opportunities.

There are also some opportunities presented via this survey. In the current model, volleyball coaches are doing an exceptional job. The following questions need to be asked. What age could volleyball be made accessible to young people? What is the volleyball season? What does a quality volleyball campaign look like? Do we have the resources and support structures/systems in place? Is it sustainable and conducive to producing high quality and lifelong participation? Ongoing reflection and implementation of strategic priorities will play a critical role in the future of coach development.

Lastly, if anyone feels that the survey results have been misinterpreted in any way, or you feel that your thoughts and ideas could impact the decision making and strategic direction of the coach development landscape in Aotearoa, please contact our Coach Development Manager - shaun@volleyballnz.org.nz

Congratulations to Steven Henderson, who won 'Championship Behaviours: A Model for Competitive Excellence in Sports' written by Hugh McCutcheon, for completing the survey.



Shaun Matthews
Coach Development Manager,
Volleyball New Zealand.

