

DIG MAGAZINE ARTICLE  
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What was the genesis of Volleyball Vacations?

***I think beach volleyball is a lifestyle that is incomparable to any other sport. It is a very social sport that almost anyone can play. I love how personable our professionals are compared to other pro sports. We are not intimidating, very approachable and love to share our knowledge of the sport. I have always loved to travel and in 1995 I put together my first official volleyball vacation trip to the Turks and Caicos islands. I have been helping produce events since I got out of college and this was my chance to create something very special. I saw a situation where pros and fans could hang out for a week and really share their love for volleyball. I feel that I have created an opportunity for people to go on vacation to exotic destinations, do what they love to do, meet new friends and learn from and hang out with the best players in the world. Volleyball Vacations is a unique business that I have worked very hard to make it what it is today.***

How did it grow to what it is today, and what do you see it becoming?

***I learned in the beginning that you have to take criticism and be willing to change in order to get better with anything you do. I ask people what they like and what they don't like on my trips. I listen to everyone and it really helps me to create the best possible program for each trip. I used to do one volleyball vacation a year and now I have to produce at least 4 trips a year. The trips have been selling out forcing me to find additional locations and I can honestly say that they get better every time.***

***Volleyball Vacations has become so popular that I have had to start specialty vacations. We are implementing this in 08 where we are working on having an advanced training trip, a social/party trip, a back to back vacation where one week for people from the United States and the next week for Canadians and International vacationers and the most requested idea of having a family trip.***

***I have also started a new company called Ultimate Sports Vacations where we are following the success of volleyball vacations and we are renting out resorts and bringing other professional athletes/trainers from sports like tennis, golf, trapeze, yoga, tai chi, martial arts, water sports and fitness experts and nutritionists. The entire resort is full of sports minded, healthy people that are there to learn from the best in their desired discipline. The first USV trip was a huge success and we are already planning the next USV trip at club med in Cancun for fall of 08.***

You also started Dig 4Kids, was this during the same time period as starting volleyball vacations?

***I have coached high school for many years and run kids clinics year around but knew that I could do more to bridge the volleyball gap between inner city schools and beach city schools. Eric Fonoimoana came to me in 2000 and asked me to put together a program that would give children from under served communities an opportunity to excel in school and volleyball. Dig For Kids was created and with Eric winning the Gold medal during our very first program in Carson CA. in the fall of 2000 we gained immediate attention and notoriety. Since 2000 the "digging education" after school program has introduced volleyball to over 20,000 kids and has brought 4 city championships to Carson High School. We have also been able to award \$5000 from the Dig For Kids Keri Walsh EVA (Excellence in Volleyball and Academics)Scholarship. We also have had 12 kids from our after school program receive college scholarships. Dig for Kids after school programs are in session September through April every year during the AVP off season.***

Many volleyball pros are not thinking of how they can give back to the sport, what motivates you to promote volleyball around the world with volleyball vacations, and in your own neighborhood with youth?

***I had to battle my whole life against great odds. I grew up with gangs around me and know the streets and how you can be quickly swallowed up in it all. Some of my friends in high school saw my chance with volleyball as a serious opportunity to improve my life and go to college. Although I didn't see it right away I knew that there was a better life waiting for me if I could somehow get a scholarship to college. I was not going to college if it wasn't for volleyball. This sport has opened doors and created opportunities for me that simply would have never happened. Volleyball has provided me with a free college education with scholarships to UCLA and Hawaii and then given me an opportunity to improve my life and play on the AVP tour for 15 years and still going strong. I love to coach and I still have great love for this sport on and off the court. I am very lucky and blessed to have ever picked up a volleyball. I owe it to every kid I meet that there is a chance to improve your life through education and sports. Sports got me out of trouble and volleyball helped to get me into college and then gave me the ability to give back to children and adults by sharing my passion for the sport.***

How many trips are planned each year, and how do you find the locations?

***I offer 4 to 5 trips a year. I typically have to fly to potential locations and meet with various resorts and see if they have what we need as a group. My main purpose in looking for locations is to find first class resorts and beautiful beaches.***

I know for the Turks and Caicos trip, you worked with Ultimate Sports Vacations. How long has this partnership been, and where do you see that relationship going?

***I Co-founded USV and this concept is really where my business is headed. To be able to have athletes and vacationers from all over the world sharing one resort full of sports was a huge success. The energy every day and night was incomparable to any trip I have ever done. We are doing USV 2 in the fall of 08 at club med in Cancun and then having at least 2 separate USV trips in 09. These USV vacations only add to the already amazing atmosphere and parties at volleyball vacations.***

How many people do you hire to help you on each trip?

***I always have at least one pro coach per 10 vacationers but was fortunate enough to have over two pro coaches per 10 vacationers at USV 1 this past November. I also hire a few assistants to help me with logistics.***

The logistics of all the people coming, and organizing their week must be difficult, how do you manage it?

***Lots of late nights and careful planning. I work harder than anyone I know and sometimes that proves to be very difficult on me as an individual. I love a challenge but balancing a family, training for the tour, Dig for Kids and Volleyball Vacations gets a little overwhelming sometimes. I am close to having a successful formula to follow in preparing and setting up the vacations but every trip seems to get bigger and more challenging. When I go to new locations more preparation is required. I visualize producing a perfect trip and although that is impossible it gives me plenty of motivation to do my best to make sure everyone leaves satisfied with their experience and is happy they trusted me with their vacation.***

Volleyball.com was at Turks and Caicos covering much of the trip-can you talk about your

relationship with them, and the work you've done with them?

***Volleyball.com is HUGE and the biggest volleyball site in the world. They get over 100,000 unique visitors a month and that is impressive. The owner of the website asked me to help him get to the next level as he had a vision but didn't know anyone in the volleyball world that could help him get there. I decided to help him and he offered to promote all my ventures in trade. I do a lot of the interviews for his site and am helping him with putting together a plan that will help the sport grow tremendously world wide.***

Over the years of doing these vacations, do you have a favorite anecdote either from a coach or player that you'd like to tell?

***As "pro coaches" on these trips we all talk about how great it is to see everyone's big improvements over the week. What I enjoy the most is seeing how excited the pro coaches get when they really see how their coaching is helping people improve. I recently remember Sinjin Smith in Canun this past February when he was telling me how much he enjoys coaching and how his "Think Dink" became the most popular phrase of the week. You can imagine how much better people played defense after that trip with Sinjin yelling "think dink" all week. People started digging everything as they finally started off lower and in better defensive positions which proved to stick in everyone's head.***

What do you take away from every volleyball vacation, when you get home and you're unpacking your bags?

***My first priority is figuring out how to improve. I spend hours with my volleyball vacation partners on conference calls and then write it all down so it is ready for the next trip. When that is done I reply to all the emails from everyone from the vacation and the new friendships start to sink in. That is a great aspect of running these trips. I meet so many good people and I really enjoy seeing the volleyball vacations crew when I am traveling on the AVP tour.***

Why do you think there are so many returning customers to these trips?

***I think that people really are surprised on how much they enjoy themselves on these trips. I hear all the time that once they finally came on a trip that they will never stop coming. I feel great about that and figure that if they don't come back then I am not doing a good enough job. It's amazing that I am able to stay in contact with about 90 percent of the people that come on these trips. I am an email freak so I make sure I return every email and that translates into a lot of new friendships.***

***I also feel fortunate to be able to bring so many great pros on these trips that are not only amazing players but are amazing people. To have Aaron Wachtfogel get engaged on the last trip and to share it with the entire group of over 120 people was very rare. He told everyone exactly how his private and special engagement happened and then finished the story with "thank you for sharing this with me." That is pretty cool and I think people appreciate that we as professional athletes are just like anybody else. We are just fortunate enough to do this for a living. Casey Jennings said it so perfectly at the last group dinner when he stood up and explained how much we as pro athlete's appreciate what everyone else does for a living and how hard they work. That we are all the same with our shared love of the sport is a speech I think will stick in everyone's head for a long time.***

Who is your average 'camper', and what is their skill level with volleyball?

***Most people have played for years and are usually "weekend warriors". We get a large variety of players from the person that is very competitive or a AA level to people that are***

***their with their loved one's and want to learn how to play. The best part about these trips is that everyone can learn in a non threatening environment and enjoy playing with people with their same ability as courts are assigned according to each persons ability.***

How many couples have met on these vacations?

***Very often I feel that I should call it [volleyballvacations@loveconnection.com](mailto:volleyballvacations@loveconnection.com) because a lot of love connections occur every trip. I have many married couples that have met on previous trips. I have even been to a few weddings of people I have met on these trips and ended up getting married. It is a great and safe way to meet someone that you probably would be happy to have met. If you are looking for someone that loves volleyball and is a social and fun person then these trips are for you. You get to spend a week siding out and getting to know many new people and usually great friendships are created.***

Also, can you tell me how many 'campers' and 'pros' were at Turks and Caicos, that would be great!

***We had over 120 people in the volleyball vacation group. We also had 20 pro coaches so over 140 total people in our group. Add another 250 sports people in the village and we had over 370 people at the first annual USV trip.***

Where is your next trip and how do you let people know about your trips?

***The next trip will be held on October 5-12, 2008 at club med in Cancun, Mexico. People can go to [www.volleyballvacations.com](http://www.volleyballvacations.com) and sign up for the newsletter to receive all info about the trips and about all volleyball news.***