

“Alright, who’s ready for some volleyball practice?”

Anxiousness churned in my stomach as I glanced nervously around the unfamiliar gym. I could feel the stares of the other kids prickling at my skin as we stood awkwardly in a group. My coach stood in front of us, introducing himself to us as Coach Joe and chattering about how much fun we would have. Inwardly, I seriously doubted that. My parents had signed me up for a volleyball camp for a week at a place called City Beach, and I wasn’t looking forward to it.

I glanced around at the circle of kids surrounding me. Most of them were girls, and all of them looked older than me. I stared nervously at their unsmiling, unfriendly faces, knowing that I wasn’t going to get along well with my new teammates.

“Why don’t we start off the day with a volleyball game?” Coach Joe suggested brightly, glancing at us with his glowing, dark brown eyes. My heart sank like a stone. I hardly even knew how to play volleyball, and he expected us to play a *game*? Right then and there, I knew that this wasn’t going to be a fun week at all.

Coach Joe marched us out to the volleyball court. He gave us a brief explanation about the setup of the volleyball court and which positions each of us would take. He divided us into two groups and each team scrambled to their side of the net. I managed to find a spot at the front and faced the opposing players.

The other team served first. I watched as a girl who appeared to be about twelve or thirteen years old stepped up to the serving place at the back. Coach Joe’s whistle rang shrilly through the gym as he tossed a ball to the girl. She held the ball out steadily in front of her. Then, with a massive swing, she slammed her wrist into the ball and stood back in satisfaction as it sailed high into the air and plunged down on the other side of the net. With a jolt, I realized the ball was whizzing straight down through the air right to me! In a frantic split second, I decided to set it back over the net. Flinging my hands above my forehead and stretching my fingers, I felt the ball touch my fingertips and I hurled my body upwards, hoping that the force would send the ball back over the net.

But instead of feeling the satisfying smack of the volleyball bouncing off my fingertips, the ball slammed down hard onto my right thumb. Excruciating pain coursed through me as I felt my thumb crumple under the force of the ball. The volleyball bounced awkwardly off my thumb and landed on the ground on my side of the net. It was a point for the other team.

But my main focus wasn’t the volleyball game, it was my thumb. My hand throbbled with pain and the base of it was red and swollen to twice its normal size.

Did I break it? I wondered anxiously. I cautiously attempted to move it around and bend it. A sharp, fiery pain stung my thumb when I did, but thankfully I could move it, which meant it wasn't broken.

Tears welled up in my eyes, and I blinked sharply, trying to push them back. I had never had an injury like this before, and I had no idea what to do. I darted out of the volleyball game and hurried over to my coach, who was staring eagerly at the game and watching the players. It took a few moments for me to finally get his attention. "Coach Joe," I said breathlessly. "Coach Joe?"

He turned his hazy dark eyes on me. "What is it?" he questioned.

I parted my jaws to speak and managed to sputter out a few words before my voice cracked and I started sobbing like a baby. Coach Joe stared at me, sympathy and confusion brimming in his eyes. "I hurt my thumb," I choked out, tears sliding down my cheeks and splattering everywhere. "I hurt it when I was hitting the ball."

Coach Joe directed me towards his front desk and took out a bag of ice. "Here, the ice will help with the swelling," he offered gently. I pressed the bag against my injured thumb, sighing with relief at the welcoming sensation of the pain being numbed. My coach led me over to a bench along the sidelines and said, "You can sit out for a while right here."

I plunked down onto the bench and propped my chin up on my elbows, wrapping my thumb in the bag of ice as tears of pain blurred my vision. Absently I watched the game as my thumb pulsed with a fiery pain, numbed slightly by the bag of ice. I sat out for the rest of the volleyball day.

For the next three days, I didn't go to volleyball camp because my thumb still hurt. Thankfully, the pain subsided enough on the third day so that I could go to City Beach for the last day of camp. I enjoyed every moment that day, and Coach Joe really helped me learn all sorts of new techniques, including overhand serving. Although I had some doubts at the beginning of volleyball camp and I injured my thumb on the first day, I had a wonderful time at City Beach.