Dear Little Volleyball Girl,

It is finally here. Time for you to prepare for the sport you will fall in love with.

You will put on your colorful spandex and matching tall socks, slip on your knee pads that swallow your petite knees, tie up your shirt in the back, and top it off with a matching bow. Oh and don’t forget your oversized jug of water that has your name decaled on it.

Your forearms will hurt or even bruise, along with your elbows and hips. You’re going to want to hit the ball as hard as you can, which by all means, please do. You will run around shagging balls for half the practice and asking for water for the other half. But this is only the beginning.

As soon as that serve goes over the net for the first time, your excitement will send you jumping for joy. When your team finally gets three touches on the ball to send it over, you will search for approving faces on the sideline and in the audience.

So just know that every time you step out on that court, play with your friends, touch the volleyball, and listen to a coach, your life begins to shift down a new, rewarding path.

Every win becomes a delicious treat that you long for and every loss will crush your heart with a lesson attached. You will learn how to make friends and learn that by every teammate you gain becomes a new family member. Your coach becomes a role model that you long to please, and your parents in the stands will become your biggest fans. With every high and low in this fast paced game, there will be something to learn. Here are a few things to remember:

You started this journey because it was fun. Play for yourself and for your enjoyment.

As the years go on and the game begins to get tougher and more complex, remember why you started. You will be putting in countless hours, missing holidays and weekends, and summer vacation will become camp season. You will be faced with grueling practices and tiresome tournaments, but again, remember why you started.

You began this journey because it was fun. When you look back on your volleyball career, you won’t remember the bruised knees, the losses, the 15 hour tournament days, the conditioning, and the missed serves. These become fleeting memories compared to what was really important. The funny cheers about the other team’s mistakes, matching your socks with your teammates, making pre-wrap headbands, locker room dance parties, school bus singalongs, and playing serving games. You will remember the funny mishaps, inside jokes, and the way your heart raced during the National Anthem right before the game started. You will remember the way your coach praised you and that big, warm hug that was always waiting for you from your parents after ever game, win or lose.

Now that you know why you play the game, you need to know how to play the game.

I’m not talking about how to serve or rotate, I’m talking about your intensity. You will bleed and cry. You will be banged up and in pain at times. Exhaustion will creep in, and you will still have a set to go. If you’re going to play this amazing game, don’t just be a body on the court, be SOMEBODY on the court.

Be the hardest worker. Sacrifice your body for the ball. Dive out and own those battle scars. Every scrap, scar, knot, and bruise with tell a story. Be fearless and ruthless. Nothing hits the floor, not on your watch. Play the ball first, then worry about falling into the stands. Every point is a result of an error, so why not go for everything? Why not block every ball and hit with aggression? You can’t help it if the defender didn’t get her hands in front of her face in time. There is always ice for you after the game and a plastic surgeon for her. Play the game 100% or don’t play at all. Effort is everything. Give it to your team, coach, parents, and most importantly, yourself.

Be appreciative of all the help along the way.

Take note and remember all the coaches that go above and beyond for you. Also recognize that some are parents that are away from their own children to be with you. Thank them and be coachable. Love your teammates because they are your sisters. Sometimes sisters fight and are mean, but at the end of the day there is still love and respect. Lastly, thank your parents for all the countless hours they put in for you to play a game you love. They wake up and drive you to tournaments to watch you play. They will spend thousands and thousands of dollars on travel teams, gas, hotel rooms, private lessons, leagues, the latest gear, and all the special tournament shirts that you will beg for. You are their pride and joy. Everything they do is for you and your happiness.

By deciding on playing volleyball, you are entering a lifestyle that so many of us have lived and long to return to.

You will learn more than techniques and skills. Your character, morals, and virtues will be molded because of this sport. Also, cherish your opportunities. There is no greater feeling than serving an ace, killing the ball, digging the other team’s big hitter, getting a stuff block, or setting up your hitters from your knees. You will go from learning how to grip your hands to make a flat platform to running stack plays. From little girl to older girl, collegiate athlete to adult league. You will always identify as a volleyball player.   
Your time as a player will fly by and before you know it, it’s gone. Trust me.

Don’t take volleyball for granted. You only have so many chances to play this game.

Love this game and give it everything you can. You can’t even begin to imagine what it will give you in return.

And just remember “every champion was once a contender” like every volleyball player says “spike” before “kill”.

It will take time, but just know you will do great things kid. All you have to do is begin.