



From the Provincial Court to the volleyball court

Many Provincial Court judges are enthusiastic volunteers, not just as speakers on legal topics but in a variety of community activities. Across the province, several judges head to a gym or sports field after a day in the courtroom – not to work out, although they may do that too, but to coach youth sports.

Growing up, Judge Cassandra Malfair played club and high school volleyball. When she was in Grade 12, her high school team won the AAA Provincials.

Since 2020, she has coached girls from under 12 to 14 years old for the Prince George Kodiaks Volleyball Club in Volleyball BC's "AA" (highest) division. Volleyball BC offers club volleyball to provide quality programs beyond the traditional school season. Like other volleyball BC coaches, Judge Malfair completed a series of training modules and workshops to qualify as a coach and she continues coaching education to maintain her certification.

COVID restrictions limited her first two seasons, but competition resumed in 2022. Her teams have done well. Her last two under 13 teams won regional championships and came 7th at provincials. Due to the exploding popularity of girls' volleyball, the Kodiaks club has added under-12 teams to accommodate all the girls who want to play. Obviously proud of the youngest group she has coached, Judge Malfair reports the under-12 team has started off strong, going 5-1 and effectively tying for first at their first ever volleyball tournament: a 20 team "Super-spike" event in the lower mainland last weekend.

Judge Malfair explained why she enjoys coaching these Grade 6 to 8 girls so much.

"I am very privileged to be the first club volleyball coach girls experience at the start of their volleyball pathway. I get to see the most dramatic transformations and contribute to the ignition of their lifelong love (if not obsession) with the sport. They start off shy, self-conscious, with little-to-no volleyball experience and very little confidence. By the end of the season, they are bold, competitive, driven, and bonded with their teammates, who become their close friends.

They spend their free time thinking about volleyball or practising skills in one way or another. They are all about volleyball, and that passion drives them all the way through high school. They learn to think of themselves as athletes, with all the healthy choices and self-respect that title encompasses. My favourite part is watching these kids set goals for themselves, and then achieving, if not surpassing them.

I greatly enjoy watching the girls age and go through different levels of volleyball. It is an ideal way to connect with my local community, as I get to know a lot of people, both athletes and their parents.

Volleyball is a tough sport because it is a game of mistakes. It is hard on young athletes because any error they make results in a point (and corresponding celebration for the other team). Successful coaching often requires humour and levity to mitigate the athletes' anxiety under pressure. I have resorted to doing the hokey pokey or running-man during time-outs to alleviate my players' nerves during a high stress game. My players are often astonished to learn that their animated effusive coach is a judge!"

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