



Storm in a t-cup?



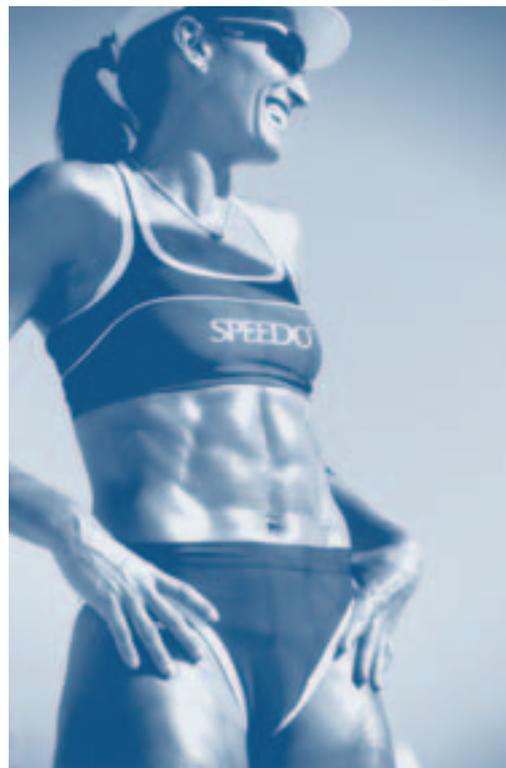
In September 16, 1998, the minutes of the meeting of the Beach Volleyball World Council of the Federation Internationale de Volleyball (FIVB) recorded that players in all world class matches should meet new uniform requirements, which included 2-piece garments for women and form-fitting shirts and shorts for men. The Council includes promoters in its makeup, as well as national and federation representatives, and they had been complaining for some time that many team uniforms were not presenting a cohesive and attractive image for the spectators and potential TV coverage. Baggy tee-shirts, NBA-style shorts and athletic leggings were just not enough to match the fantasies that the promoters wished to offer.

The women's regulations include a stipulation that the sides of the uniform bottom should not be more than 6 cms in depth on the hip and that the tops should be tight fitting with open back, upper chest and stomach. Tops didn't cause a great deal of comment - after all jogging bra styles have been prevalent for some time and every promoter supplies players with appropriately 'logoed' garments at each venue. The ruling that they have to be a tight fit was possibly beneficial in many cases.

It was the apparent unashamedly chauvinistic requirement for bikini-style bottoms that caused the major offence to many women competitors - even though the dimension quoted could be termed 'substantial' in the context of much of the modern swim and leisurewear market. The sexy image generated was deemed to be demeaning by some and dangerous by others. One US newspaper even quoted a psychologist from the Australian Institute of Sport in suggesting that the

requirements "... could hinder women's performance and induce eating disorders." Subsequently, medical advisers proposed that there is also a strong probability of UV-induced skin damage on exposed areas of soft tissue.

Nor were the men's rules thought to be any the less controversial - if not to say uncomfortable. Shirts to be tight-fitting with open arms - no problems. Shorts to have an inside leg measurement no greater than two-thirds of the distance from hip to knee, but by design definition they are tighter than the basketball shorts to



As official as it gets, Speedo Volley 2-piece worn by US-squad member, Barbara Fontana



ensure a smooth surface for the promoter's logo. It's the tightness that is causing some discomfort and there is anecdotal evidence to suggest that collecting a ball from ground level and sideways lunges can have severe side-effects on male physiology.

All the players found themselves between a rock and a hard place in dealing with the situation. The arguments from the FIVB could have been reasonable - if thought specious by some - but it was the financial loop-closing that finally swung the balance of opinion. Beach volleyball at World level requires a lot of space and facilities; the promoting companies either owned the space and/or had the finance to underwrite the events. No funding - no games - no World Championship.

Almost two years forward and it is obvious that the rules have been accepted and become a part of a growing international sport. But it is undoubtedly fortunate for both parties - FIVB and players - that the textile industry and garment manufacturers have a number of products and designs that do allow the Federation's requirements to be met without loss of propriety or compromising the comfort factor. Of these probably the increased availability and use of various elastane fibres has been the most beneficial. Woven into fabrics that fit closely and comfortably - the resulting garments maintain modesty, are almost sand-proof, and have an ultra-violet protection factor of anything up to 40. The elasticity also ensures smooth areas on the uniforms to facilitate maximum logo exposure to satisfy the promotional requirements of the event sponsors.

Men's shorts are a cross between athletics and swim-wear - again including an elastane input - and the tops for both genders usually specify a high moisture vapour transmission (MVT) rate that ensures cool comfort throughout the whole of a series of matches at any one event.

Women's beach volleyball is one of the opening

events at the Sydney Olympics - in fact timed for 9 o'clock on Sunday, September 16th. In the environmental conditions likely to be encountered in Australia manufacturers are going to have to match personal propriety, comfort and protection from UVR. With the textiles currently available the last two shouldn't cause any problems, but meeting FIVB regulations and Olympic athleticism might be a challenge for the first.

It may be a social comment or perhaps merely a case of practicality, but there is no recorded instance of the FIVB's uniform rules being adopted for use in the thousands of the organised or impromptu beach volleyball matches played every year on the world's shorelines. Only one international manufacturer, Nike, appears to have developed a definitive beach volleyball range - although many others offer garments that meet the FIVB's requirements without being sport-specific, of which some of the elements of Speedo's Active Swimwear range are a good example. And replica kit sales? Well - perhaps they're a little way into the future. 

Derryck Draper

Speedo study in contrasting styles. Left: Maximum cover-up for male players. Right: The Tankini promotional outfit worn by two members of the Australian squad.

Strength, speed and grace. Carrie Busch and Nike make full use of performance - enhancement fabrics

