

serious sport despite the image

Richard finds the spike is not so easy

THE spike is probably the most visually impressive shot in beach volleyball.

Leaping into the air and rolling the palm to smash the ball into space on the opponent's side of the net is the definitive point-winning shot.

"Let's try one," says Ali, launching the ball into the air like a faux set.

And so I leap, miss, lose my balance and fall prostrate in the sand. It was the wind.

It's not as easy as it looks – and I never thought it looked all that easy.

In beach volleyball, a team scores points by grounding the ball on the opponents' court, or when the opposing team commits a fault (error or illegal action). The first to 21 wins and it is best of three.

After serving, players

need to 'dig', ordinarily using the wrists with hands locked together, to get the ball in play, a second player will then 'set' to get the ball into a scoring position, and then the ball can be 'spiked', 'poked' (using the knuckles or straight fingers), or 'dinked' with a closed hand over the net in a bid to score (open-hand 'dinks' are illegal).

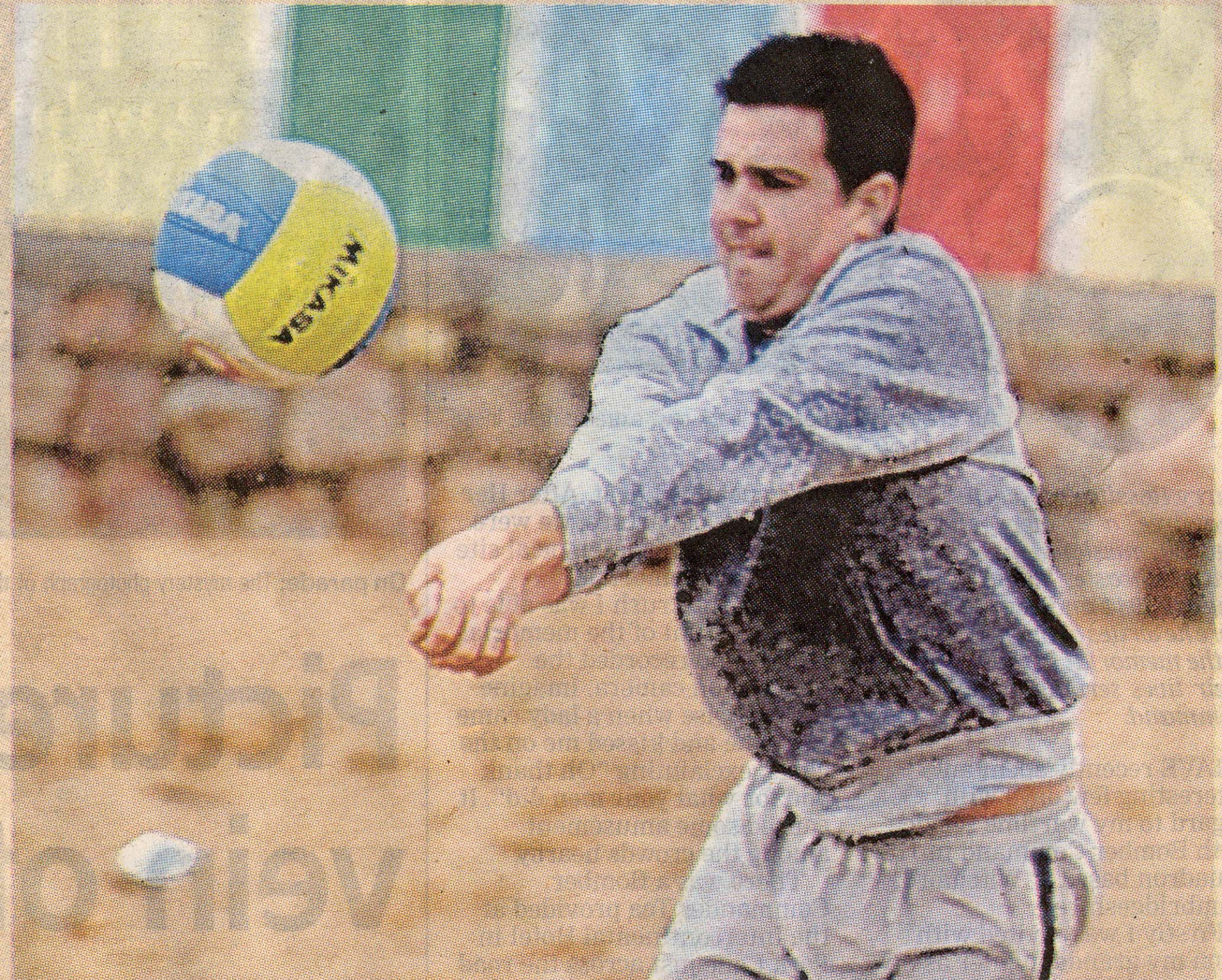
Only three touches are allowed either side of the net and the first touch cannot be used to set up an attack.

Hand signals are often employed to decide how you will defend an attack following a serve, whether both will retreat to attempt to 'dig' or where a 'block' will take place (a player raising their hands near the net to prevent the opponent's attack from

scoring). The sport has its origins in Santa Monica, California, and Hawaii, in the Twenties – and began to appear in Europe in the Thirties.

Now an established Olympic sport, the swimsuit (or bikini) was made the standard beach volleyball uniform for women in 1999 but this was relaxed ahead of the London Games to allow shorts and sleeved tops to be worn. The dress-code in Exmouth is whatever you feel comfortable in.

Around Exeter, Exmouth is the only club offering the chance to play organised beach volleyball at £10 a season, although there are plenty of opportunities to get involved in volleyball, which will be the subject of a separate feature later this year.



Handy: Richard Birch makes a good fist of his first attempt at beach volleyball at Exmouth