

NERF BALL: AVALANCHE RESCUE TRAINING METHOD

Halsted Morris¹

¹Hacksaw Publishing, Inc., Golden, CO, USA

ABSTRACT: As advanced as modern digital transceivers are people still need to practice in how to use their transceiver. Having realistic practice in how to search with a transceiver builds skills. Good transceiver skills mean confidence. This paper describes the evolution of NERF™ Ball transceiver training, how to do Nerf Ball training, and offers a new Nerf Ball method that further improves avalanche transceiver training, especially for a solo practice.

KEYWORDS: transceiver, training, Nerf Ball, Bash Ball

1. INTRODUCTION

As advanced as modern digital transceivers are people still need to practice in how to use their transceiver. Having realistic practice in how to search with a transceiver builds skills. Good transceiver skills mean confidence. This paper describes the evolution of Nerf Ball transceiver training, how to do Nerf Ball training, and offers a new Nerf Ball method that further improves avalanche transceiver training, especially for a solo practice. Two articles about the Nerf Ball transceiver practice method have been previously published. The first was in *The Avalanche Review* in the October 2005 issue. The second was in Colorado Avalanche Information Center's newsletter *The Beacon*, in spring 2006 issue.

The NERF™ line of toys is from the Hasbro company; which includes the foam NERF Sports Balls (Hasbro, 2016).

2. PRACTICE METHODS

The Nerf Ball practice method is simply where a transmitting avalanche rescue transceiver is placed inside a soft foam Nerf Ball. This pads the transceiver from being damaged; which means it can be tossed and allowed to roll away, and become hidden from a searcher. This method even allows one to do solo practice search sessions. The nine-inch Nerf football was the first type of padded ball that was used for padding an avalanche transceiver with this practice method. The football method has worked well since 2005.

With the Nerf football, in order to make it into a transceiver holder, cut the football in half lengthwise (a bread knife works well), then it is easy to rip-out enough of the foam from the inside to make a form-fitting pocket for the transceiver to sit in. Then place the transmitting transceiver inside the pocket and then wrap several large thick rubber-bands around the football (Fig. 1). For winter practices on snow, a suitable white stuff sack/white plastic bag works well to camouflage the ball. For off-season "dry-land" trainings a camouflaged stuff sack works equally as well. Obviously, make sure the transceiver is transmitting, before you secure the two half's of the ball back together. Otherwise, one is in for a long protracted visual search, for a non-transmitting transceiver.



Fig. 1: Nerf Footballs, showing how to pad the transceiver and rubber-banded together.

Tossing the Nerf Ball back over one's shoulder down a steep hill helps the ball travel further away from the searcher. Doing transceiver practice on a forested slope with plenty of undergrowth makes for better (i.e., more complicated) practice. Once the Nerf Ball is thrown over one's shoulder allow it a minute to "pinball" down the slope off trees, roots and rocks, and to finally come to rest.

Corresponding author address:

Halsted Morris
867 Hill and Dale Rd, Apt A, Golden CO 80401
HM1Hacksaw@aol.com

Essentially with the Nerf Ball transmitter method, one is doing a transceiver search without the victim's "last seen area." This is usually the most difficult sort of transceiver search for most folks, other than a multiple-signal situation.

Just like a real search, one needs to first acquire the victim's transmitting transceivers signal. In traditional avalanche transceiver training parks, the *signal search* phase is minimal or not needed because of the small dimensions of parks. With the Nerf Ball method, search areas become much larger, so the signal search phase becomes real-like, which improves the training experience. After acquiring the ball's (aka victim's) signal the *coarse search* phase is practiced to follow the transceiver's signal. Once one has acquired the victim's signal, then start to use their preferred *coarse search* method. Once the searcher is closing in on the "victim," they may actual see the Nerf Ball. This maybe the only drawback to the Nerf Ball practice method; in that the searcher doesn't have an actual burial, to complete the fine and pinpoint (probe) search phases. But, one can complete and practice a simple *fine* search just above the Nerf Ball transmitter, while it is visible and sitting on the ground. A camouflage pattern stuff sack – white for winter and camo for summer – is one way to make the Nerf Ball less obvious until the last few meters of the search.

The Nerf Ball transmitter practice method has been used during avalanche courses. On packed snow slopes the ball will travel a long ways down slope. Placing the Nerf Ball in a white plastic trash bag can add to the camouflaging of the hidden transmitter. Without foot tracks in the snow to follow, it means there's no "cheating or faking it" with covering the entire search area. On a bumpy/mogul slope, conducting a zig-zag course search while on skis with a transceiver in one hand is very realistic substitution for avalanche debris.

The Nerf **Football** tends to end up lying in a horizontal position, which is typical of most avalanche victims. This usually means that the transmitter flux lines are fairly easy to follow. However, the new Nerf **Bash Ball** allows for the transmitting transceiver to end-up in more vertical and unusual orientations than the football does, which makes for more challenging transceiver searches.

2.1 *Nerf Bash Ball*

The new Nerf Bash Ball is a round ball, unlike the football (Fig. 2). It is hollow inside, and easier to assemble into a transceiver holder. Only one section of the ball needs to be cut to allow placement of the transceiver inside the ball. It is suggested that the transceiver should be placed inside a zip-lock plastic bag to protect it from dust, dirt and water. A short Velcro strap should be used to secure the opening into the ball. Just like with the football, a stuff sack is a good idea to camouflage the ball, and to keep the transceiver inside the ball.



Fig. 2: *Nerf Bash Ball*, the ball on the left has a transceiver inside it.

The Nerf football/Bash Ball transceiver practice method has been used by many ski patrols and search and rescue teams in Colorado for transceiver practice. Most have found that it is a realistic practice method that allows for multiple and quick searches. The objective with the Nerf Ball practice method is to get folks out and doing a lot of transceiver searches.

3. CONCLUSIONS

The Nerf ball transceiver practice method with the new Nerf Bash Ball has improved Nerf ball even more. Nerf Ball is an easy, simple, fast, inexpensive, and realistic way to get in a lot of transceiver practice. With two or more Nerf Ball transmitters a novice or professional can quickly become skilled at multiple transceiver searches. Nerf Ball makes it easy to do avalanche transceiver practice that emphasizes the signal and coarse search phases even if folks don't have a partner or the time to set-up a practice session.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author has not received any financial benefit from the Hasbro Company or any avalanche rescue transceiver manufacture company.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to acknowledge Dale Atkins, Pip Baehler, Bob Feroldi, Rick Grubin, Loveland Ski Patrol and Alpine Rescue Team of Evergreen, CO for their help.

REFERENCES

- Hasbro (2016). Nerf sports products. Retrieved from the Hasbro website <http://nerf.hasbro.com/en-us/toys-games/nerf:sports>
- Morris, H. 2005. First and Ten Beacon Practice. *The Avalanche Review*. Vol 24, No.1, October 2005, page 9.
- Morris, H. 2006. First and Ten Beacon Practice. *The Beacon*. Vol 10, No 3, Spring 2006, page 3.