

Basic Volleyball Rules

Rules

The rules of volleyball are simple, but they're constantly changing, and they can differ depending on the level of competition. I started playing volleyball in middle school, in 2000, and since then, several changes have affected high school and collegiate rules.

Setting up the Court

A volleyball court is 30 feet wide and 60 feet long; each side of the net is 30 feet by 30 feet. A 2-inch line borders the court to serve as the out-of-bounds line. Any ball that touches the line during play is still considered "in" the court.

In volleyball, there are six people on the court at one time for each team. Usually three people are in the front row, and three are in the back row. The front row is sectioned off by a line 10 feet from the net, called the "attack line" or the "10-foot line." Front-row players are not confined to this section of the court, but this is where most of their playing takes place.

Back to Basics

One thing that stays constant despite rule changes, though, is that during each possession on one side of the net, a team can only have three contacts with the ball. The ideal sequence of contacts is usually a pass, a set and a hit—even the terminology has changed over the years. These skills were traditionally called bump, set and spike.

No player can ever make contact with the ball twice in succession, and the ball cannot be caught or carried over the net. A block is not considered as part of a hit, which I'll explain in the ADVANCED section. Each play starts off with a serve. The server steps behind the line at the very back of the court, called the end line, and has freedom to serve from wherever he or she pleases as long as the foot does not touch or cross the line. If the server's foot crosses the end line, it is considered a foot fault, and results in a side-out—a change in possession—of the ball. The server must make the ball go over the net on the serve. It doesn't matter if the ball touches the net on a serve anymore. Balls that hit the net on serves and still go over and stay in the court used to be illegal, but now they are allowed. These serves are called "let serves."

Rotation

Positions are numbered, one through six, starting with the server in the back right corner. Then going in a counter-clockwise direction, the rest of the positions are numbered. The actual direction of the rotation is clockwise, however. After the server finishes, the other team gets the ball, and you get the ball back, everyone just shifts to the right one spot.

Rotation, if not fully understood, can be a very confusing part of the game. In basic volleyball there are three players in the front row and three in the back, and each player just rotates to the next position as the plays go along. Any time a player is in the back row, he or she cannot "attack" the ball in front of the 10-foot line on the court. Attacks are also known as "hits" or "spikes"—usually the third hit of a possession. This rule is in effect to make sure that the strong hitters aren't always able to dominate the game. When the strong hitters are in the back row, they can still attack the ball on the third hit, but they cannot jump in front of the 10-foot line.

Switching

Contrary to the way it may seem, there are actually positions in volleyball, and despite the mandatory rotation, it's possible to play the same position every play. The only catch is that if you're not already in the position where you want to be, you have to wait to move to that spot until after the ball has gone over the net on a serve.

Many teams use a hand-linking system to make the switch easier, but no player can cross another's plane of rotation until the ball goes over the net.

Scoring

As for scoring, this has also changed. When I first started playing, points could only be scored by the serving team, and games went to 15 points. Matches consisted of the best two out of three games. Now volleyball has changed to rally scoring. Essentially, teams score points whenever the other team messes up, and a point is awarded on every serve. Depending on the level of competition, most matches are now played as the best three out of five games to 25 points. Teams must win by at least two points for games to end. Points keep going until one team wins with a margin of victory of two points even if the score is greater than 25.

For official NIRSA rulings go to:

[http://www.wlu.edu/documents/student_activities/NIRSA%20 %20Volleyball.pdf](http://www.wlu.edu/documents/student_activities/NIRSA%20%20Volleyball.pdf)