Volleyball Rules Cheat Sheet (2026)

The core rules on one page, plus where high school, college, club and FIVB differ. By Ryan Walker, PlayingVolley.com

The basics every player needs

- **Teams and court.** Six players per side on an 18 x 9 m court (59 x 29.5 ft). Net: 2.43 m (7 ft 11 5/8 in) men, 2.24 m (7 ft 4 1/8 in) women.
- **Rally scoring.** Every rally scores a point, no matter who served. Sets go to 25, win by 2, with no cap. A deciding set goes to 15, win by 2.
- **Three contacts.** Each team gets three contacts to send the ball over. A block touch does not count as one of them.
- **No double hits.** The same player cannot contact the ball twice in a row. Exceptions: a team's first contact and a player who just blocked.
- **Any body part.** The ball may be played with any part of the body, feet included. It cannot be caught, held or thrown.
- **The serve.** Serve from behind the end line after the whistle: 8 seconds (5 in US high school). A serve that clips the net and goes over is in play.
- **Rotation.** When your team wins the serve back, rotate one spot clockwise. The player rotating into zone 1 (back right) serves.
- **At the net.** Touching the net between the antennas while playing the ball is a fault (high school calls almost any net contact). So is a foot that lands completely in the opponent's court.
- **Back row.** Back-row players may not block, or attack a ball that is completely above the net from in front of the 3 m (10 ft) line.
- **Libero.** Back row only, different-colored jersey, cannot block or attack a ball completely above the net. Replaces players without using a substitution.

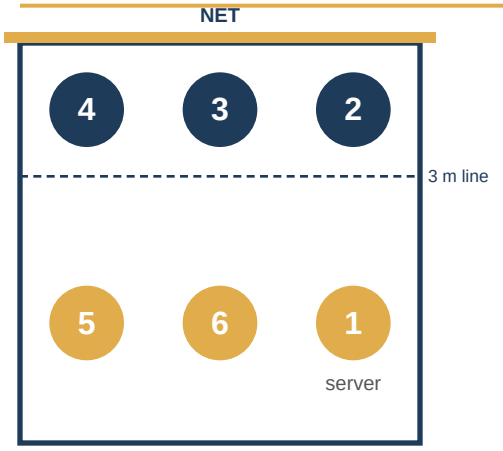
Where the rulebooks differ

Rule	FIVB (international)	NCAA women	High school (NFHS)	Club (USAV)
Match	Best of 5	Best of 5	Best of 3 or 5 (by state)	Set by the tournament
Serve clock	8 seconds	8 seconds	5 seconds	8 seconds
Subs per set	6	15 (D1), 18 (D2, D3)	18	15
Liberos	Up to 2	0, 1 or 2 per set	0, 1 or 2 per set	0, 1 or 2 per set
Libero serves?	No	Yes, one spot per set	Yes, one spot per set	Yes, one spot per set
Double contact on 2nd touch	Fault	Legal if a teammate plays it next	Legal if a teammate plays it next	Legal if a teammate plays it next
Net contact	While playing the ball	While playing the ball or if it interferes	Almost any contact (loose hair excepted)	While playing the ball
Ball hits ceiling over own court	Out	Playable (15 ft or higher)	Playable	Playable (15 ft or higher)
Serving team alignment	Free to stand anywhere	Must be in rotation order	Must be in rotation order	Must be in rotation order
Fifth-set side switch	At 8 points	No switch	State rules	Tournament rules
Video challenge	Event rules (VNL)	Yes, head coach	No	No

Rotation, overlap and common faults

Zones, who must line up where at the serve, and the whistles that cost the most points.

Zones and rotation



- **Front row:** zone 4 (left), 3 (middle), 2 (right).
- **Back row:** zone 5 (left), 6 (middle), 1 (right). Zone 1 serves.
- **Rotating:** clockwise when you win the serve back. Each player moves 2 to 1, 1 to 6, 6 to 5, 5 to 4, 4 to 3, 3 to 2.
- **After the serve is hit,** players may move anywhere on their side.

The overlap rule (checked at the moment of the serve)

- **Front and back.** Each back-row player must be farther from the net than the front-row player in front of them: 5 behind 4, 6 behind 3, 1 behind 2.
- **Left and right.** In each row, the left player must be farther left than the middle player, and the right player farther right than the middle player.
- **Only these neighbours count.** Zone 5 can stand in front of zone 2, for example. Diagonal players are never compared.
- **Feet decide.** Position is judged by where each player's feet touch the floor, not by arms or body.
- **Who must be in order.** US rules (NCAA, high school, club): both teams. FIVB 2025-2028: only the receiving team; the serving team may stand anywhere.

The whistles that cost teams the most points

- **Service faults:** foot on or over the end line, serve into the net, serve out, or the clock running out.
- **Out of rotation:** a player overlapping a neighbour when the serve is hit.
- **Back-row attack:** taking off on or in front of the 3 m line and hitting a ball that is completely above the net.
- **Libero set:** the libero sets with fingers from in front of the 3 m line and a teammate attacks it above the net.
- **Net and centre line:** net contact while playing the ball, or a foot landing fully in the opponent's court.
- **Lift or carry:** the ball comes to rest in the hands instead of rebounding.
- **Four hits:** a team plays the ball four times (block touches don't count).

Coach's tip: before every tournament, read the rules packet for the sub limit, match format and side switches.
Full guide with examples: playingvolley.com/volleyball-rules-and-regulations-explained/