

Volleyball Rules of Emphasis and Rules Changes 2026

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Host Management Best Practices

Referee's Platform Safety

Student-participants' and officials' safety continues to be the top priority of the Volleyball Rules Committee. Often overlooked, referee platforms can be incredibly dangerous if they are old, broken, improperly set up, etc. It is critically important that these platforms are safe and secure and provide the correct line of sight for our referees to confidently climb the ladder, stand on the platform and officiate without fear of injury.

By rule, hosts must provide a safe, stable platform. The first referee (R1) should carefully examine the stand prior to the match, and if the first referee determines that the platform is unsafe, the match will still go on, and the R1 will work from the floor. When evaluating the referee stand, ensure the platform is secured over top of the top ladder rung. Never step onto a platform where the platform is simply touching the top ladder rung. Referees should not use ladders, chairs, boxes, trash cans or similar substitutes that could endanger the well-being of the official. Additionally, to appropriately officiate a match, it is preferred that the referee stand be adjustable to ensure that the R1's head is 2-3 feet above the height of the net. If there are any issues, the referee should notify the host school and the state association.

Equipment Evaluation

Regularly evaluate volleyball equipment for signs of wear like frayed nets or cables, posts that are bending inwards, and padding that no longer protects or fits tightly—plus any parts that no longer hold proper tension. If a post or net has been taped or improvised to keep it working, it is a sign the system is not performing—or protecting athletes and officials—the way it was designed to and should be replaced.

Also check equipment for safety and playability. Systems that have loose tension within the net or can no longer meet current net height rules are strong replacement candidates. As a rule of thumb, heavily used school systems often need major components refreshed every 8–12 years, sooner if usage is high or maintenance has been inconsistent. Check with the equipment manufacturer for recommendations regarding replacement timelines.

Prematch Readiness

To set the match up for success, it is imperative that assistant officials (scorer, libero tracker, timer and line judges) are secured by host management and have reported to the first referee no less than 20 minutes prior to the starting time. This allows assistant officials the time necessary to complete their prematch duties as outlined in Rule 5. Host management's prematch readiness creates a smooth prematch for all officials and allows the match to begin without delay.

Electronic Devices

As our society continues to increase its use of electronic devices in all aspects of our lives, it is important to remember that when on the court, there are specific rules governing their use.

1. At no time during the match may an official use an electronic device to review a decision of the referee. (11-3-2)
2. At no time shall the first or second referee consider replay. (5-1-2)
3. A team may use electronic devices during the match as long as they are not in restricted areas as determined by the host (9-2-1a) and as long as the first referee determines that they are not interfering with the contest. (9-2-1b)
4. No player shall wear any audio (microphone) or video (camera) device during the match. (9-2-1 NOTES 1)
5. Referees are permitted to wear headsets for communication purposes. An excellent free resource is the NFHS course; Officiating Volleyball: Using Wireless Communication on the NFHS Learn platform.
6. State associations may have policies to further address the allowance and/or restriction of electronic device use during matches. (9-2-1 NOTES 2)
7. Each state association may, in keeping with applicable laws, authorize exceptions to NFHS playing rules to provide reasonable accommodations to individual participants with disabilities or unique and extenuating circumstances. The accommodations should not fundamentally alter the sport, heighten risk to the athlete/others or place opponents at a disadvantage (4-1 NOTES 2).

Bench Personnel – Non-Playing Teammates

High school volleyball allows student-athletes to compete with their friends representing their school and community in an environment that serves as the extension of the classroom. As part of the experience, non-playing teammates (bench players) and other bench personnel have a role to positively support their teammates by celebrating and encouraging those playing on the court with spontaneous cheers. It is not legal for anyone on the bench to use props.

A towel is athletic equipment and is not considered a prop if used in conjunction with a spontaneous celebration.

State associations may require a sportsmanship message to be read by public-address announcers prior to the match encouraging good sportsmanship. Game officials shall not address spectators at any time; however, referees have the responsibility to notify game management of any spectator misconduct. Unsporting conduct by spectators is the responsibility of the host management. In the absence of host management, the responsibility for addressing spectator behavior shall revert to the host head coach.

Identification of the NFHS Authenticating Mark on Game Balls

The NFHS Authenticating Mark ensures easy identification of inflated and non-inflated balls used in interscholastic competition for which the NFHS writes playing rules. All such balls are required to display the NFHS Authenticating Mark. The use of conforming equipment is essential to the integrity of contests played under the NFHS rules. This mark helps to promote a level playing field by ensuring consistency in the equipment being used. The mark allows for the development of more sophisticated standards in balls and clearly communicates to administrators, coaches, and officials that these standards are being met.

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4-2-1a, 4-2-1i(3) (NEW), 4-2-2: Libero uniform bottoms may be any color and no longer must match the team uniform bottoms.

Rationale: Allows more flexibility in the libero uniform bottoms while ensuring that the libero uniform top continues to contrast with their teammates.

5-5-3b(21): The second referee will provide a double whistle warning between sets at two minutes, 30 seconds (4:30 when intermission is used) instead of 2 minutes, 45 seconds.

Rationale: Improves pace of play between sets by notifying teams earlier to make their way onto the court for the officials to administer lineup checks before the final audio signal and resumption of play.

6-4-2, 10-4-3a, 10-4-3d: A team may designate up to two liberos, but only one libero can be in the game at a time. When a team designates two liberos and one is injured/ill, a new libero may be re-designated. When a team designates two liberos and one is disqualified; the team must continue with one libero.

Rationale: Allows more student-athletes to participate by creating an additional opportunity for coaches without having to utilize a substitution.

6-4 PENALTIES 1c (NEW), 12-2-8b NOTE (NEW): If non-playing teammate(s) (bench players) enter the court during play it is illegal alignment. It remains a conduct violation if a coach or team attendant (anyone not in uniform) enters the court while the ball is in play.

Rationale: More appropriately assesses illegal alignment (loss of rally/point awarded to the opponent) to non-playing teammates who enter the court while the ball is in play. A player who enters the court during play may still receive a conduct violation if they engage in disconcerting acts, disrespectful language, etc. This penalty realignment allows officials to appropriately penalize teams based on participant actions.

6-5-1: Players on the serving team are not permitted to raise their hands above their heads during service until the ball has passed beyond the net.

Rationale: Discourages player positioning during the serve that prevents the receiving team from viewing service contact and/or the flight of the ball and assists officials when evaluating the existence of screening. This change aligns with all other volleyball rules codes.

9-2-1 NOTE 1 (NEW): Players shall not wear any audio or video devices during the match.

Rationale: Clarifies the prohibition of electronic communication with and by players during the match and aligns with other NFHS rules codes.

12-2-8m (NEW): It is an unsporting conduct violation if coaches, non-playing teammates or team attendants use props on the bench during celebrations.

Rationale: Clarifies appropriate bench conduct for consistent enforcement by eliminating the use of props in bench celebrations while promoting sportsmanship and preventing disruption and potential safety concerns.

2026-27 Volleyball Editorial Changes