

Volleyball Rules

Volleyball is a **team sport** in which two teams of six players are separated by a net. Each team tries to score points by grounding a ball on the other team's court under organized rules. It has been a part of the official program of the **Summer Olympic Games** since 1964.

The complete **rules** are extensive. But simply, play proceeds as follows: a player on one of the teams begins a 'rally' by serving the ball (tossing or releasing it and then hitting it with a hand or arm), from behind the back boundary line of the court, over the net, and into the receiving team's court. The receiving team must not let the ball be grounded within their court. The team may touch the ball up to 3 times but individual players may not touch the ball twice consecutively. Typically, the first two touches are used to set up for an attack, an attempt to direct the ball back over the net in such a way that the serving team is unable to prevent it from being grounded in their court.

The rally continues, with each team allowed as many as three consecutive touches, until either (1): a team makes a *kill*, grounding the ball on the opponent's court and winning the rally; or (2): a team commits a *fault* and loses the rally. The team that wins the rally is awarded a point, and serves the ball to start the next rally. A few of the most common faults include:

- causing the ball to touch the ground or floor outside the opponents' court or without first passing over the net;
- *catching and throwing* the ball;
- *double hit*: two consecutive contacts with the ball made by the same player;
- four consecutive contacts with the ball made by the same team;
- net foul: touching the net during play;
- foot fault: the foot crosses over the boundary line when serving.

The ball is usually played with the hands or arms, but players can legally strike or push (short contact) the ball with any part of the body.

A number of consistent **techniques** have evolved in volleyball, including *spiking* and *blocking* (because these plays are made above the top of the net, the **vertical jump** is an athletic skill emphasized in the sport) as well as *passing*, *setting*, and specialized player positions and offensive and defensive structures.

Refinements and later developments

The first official ball used in volleyball is disputed; some sources say that Spalding created the first official ball in 1896, while others claim it was created in 1900. The rules evolved over time: in the Philippines by 1916, the skill and power of the set and spike had been introduced, and four years later a "three hits" rule and a rule against hitting from the back row were established. In 1917, the game was changed from 21 to 15 points.

History

Origin of volleyball



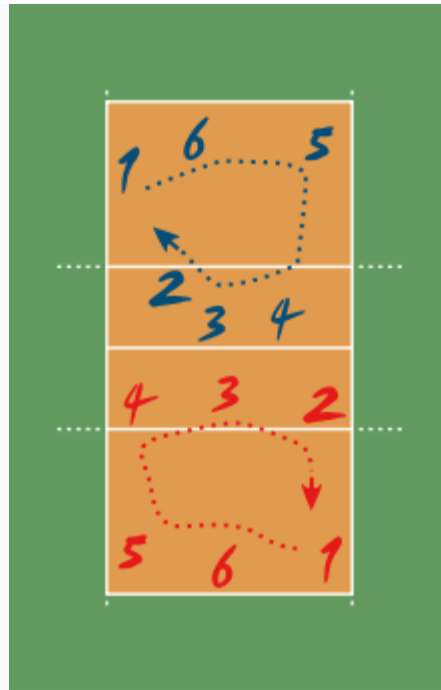
William G. Morgan

On February 9, 1895, in [Holyoke, Massachusetts](#) (USA), [William G. Morgan](#), a [YMCA](#) physical education director, created a new game called *Mintonette* as a pastime to be played (preferably) indoors and by any number of players. The game took some of its characteristics from [tennis](#) and [handball](#). Another indoor sport, [basketball](#), was catching on in the area, having been invented just ten miles (sixteen kilometers) away in the city of [Springfield, Massachusetts](#), only four years before. *Mintonette* was designed to be an indoor sport, less rough than basketball, for older members of the YMCA, while still requiring a bit of athletic effort.

The first rules, written down by William G Morgan, called for a net 6 ft. 6 in. (1.98 m) high, a 25 ft. × 50 ft. (7.6 m × 15.2 m) court, and any number of players. A match was composed of nine innings with three serves for each team in each inning, and no limit to the number of ball contacts for each team before sending the ball to the opponents' court. In case of a serving error, a second try was allowed. Hitting the ball into the net was considered a foul (with loss of the point or a side-out)—except in the case of the first-try serve.

After an observer, Alfred Halstead, noticed the volleying nature of the game at its first exhibition match in 1896, played at the International YMCA Training School (now called [Springfield College](#)), the game quickly became known as *volleyball* (it was originally spelled as two words: "*volley ball*"). Volleyball rules were slightly modified by the International YMCA Training School and the game spread around the country to various YMCAs.

[Beach volleyball](#), a variation of the game played on sand and with only two players per team, became a FIVB-endorsed variation in 1987 and was added to the Olympic program at the [1996 Summer Olympics](#). Volleyball is also a sport at the [Paralympics](#) managed by the [World Organization Volleyball for Disabled](#).



(Rotation pattern)

After a team gains the serve (also known as siding out), its members must rotate in a clockwise direction, with the player previously in area "2" moving to area "1" and so on, with the player from area "1" moving to area "6". Each player rotates only one time after the team gains possession of the serve; the next time each player rotates will be after the other team wins possession of the ball and loses the point.

The team courts are surrounded by an area called the free zone which is a minimum of 3 meters wide and which the players may enter and play within after the service of the ball.^[16] All lines denoting the boundaries of the team court and the attack zone are drawn or painted within the dimensions of the area and are therefore a part of the court or zone. If a ball comes in contact with the line, the ball is considered to be "in". An antenna is placed on each side of the net perpendicular to the sideline and is a vertical extension of the side boundary of the court. A ball passing over the net must pass completely between the antenna (or their theoretical extensions to the ceiling) without contacting them.

Game play

Each team consists of six players. To get play started, a team is chosen to serve by [coin toss](#). A player from the serving team throws the ball into the air and attempts to hit the ball so it passes over the net on a course such that it will land in the opposing team's court (the *serve*). The opposing team must use a combination of no more than three contacts with the volleyball to return the ball to the opponent's side of the net. These contacts usually consist first of the *bump* or *pass* so that the ball's trajectory is aimed towards the player designated as the *setter*; second of the *set* (usually an over-hand pass using wrists to push finger-tips at the ball) by the setter so that the ball's trajectory is aimed towards a spot where one of the players designated as an *attacker* can hit it, and third by the *attacker* who *spikes* (jumping, raising one arm above the head and hitting the ball so it will move quickly down to the ground on the opponent's court) to return the ball over the net. The team with possession of the ball that is trying to attack the ball as described is said to be on *offense*.

The team on *defense* attempts to prevent the attacker from directing the ball into their court: players at the net jump and reach above the top (and if possible, across the plane) of the net to *block* the attacked ball. If the ball is hit around, above, or through the block, the defensive players arranged in the rest of the court attempt to control the ball with a *dig* (usually a fore-arm pass of a hard-driven ball). After a successful dig, the team transitions to offense.

The game continues in this manner, rallying back and forth, until the ball touches the court within the boundaries or until an error is made. The most frequent errors that are made are either to fail to return the ball over the net within the allowed three touches, or to cause the ball to land outside the court. A ball is "in" if any part of it touches a sideline or end-line, and a strong spike may compress the ball enough when it lands that a ball which at first appears to be going out may actually be in. Players may travel well outside the court to play a ball that has gone over a sideline or end-line in the air.

Other common errors include a player touching the ball twice in succession, a player "catching" the ball, a player touching the net while attempting to play the ball, or a player penetrating under the net into the opponent's court. There are a large number of other errors specified in the rules, although most of them are infrequent occurrences. These errors include back-row or libero players spiking the ball or blocking (back-row players may spike the ball if they jump from behind the attack line), players not being in the correct position when the ball is served, attacking the serve in the front court and above the height of the net, using another player as a source of support to reach the ball, stepping over the back boundary line when serving, taking more than 8 seconds to serve, or playing the ball when it is above the opponent's court.

Scoring

When the ball contacts the floor within the court boundaries or an error is made, the team that did not make the error is awarded a point, whether they served the ball or not. If the ball hits the line, the ball is counted as in. The team that won the point serves for the next point. If the team that won the point served in the previous point, the same player serves again. If the team that won the point did not serve the previous point, the players of the serving team rotate their position on the court in a clockwise manner. The game continues, with the first team to score 25 points by a two-point margin is awarded the set. Matches are best-of-five sets and the fifth set, if necessary, is usually played to 15 points. (Scoring differs between leagues, tournaments, and levels; high schools sometimes play best-of-three to 25; in the [NCAA](#) matches are played best-of-five to 25 as of the [2008](#) season.)^[19]

Before 1999, points could be scored only when a team had the serve (*side-out scoring*) and all sets went up to only 15 points. The FIVB changed the rules in 1999 (with the changes being compulsory in 2000) to use the current scoring system (formerly known as *rally point system*), primarily to make the length of the match more predictable and to make the game more spectator- and television-friendly.

Recent rule changes

Other rule changes enacted in 2000 include allowing serves in which the ball touches the net, as long as it goes over the net into the opponents' court. Also, the service area was expanded to allow players to serve from anywhere behind the end line but still within the theoretical extension of the sidelines.