



2026 Rules Interpretations Newsletter #1

January 28, 2026

Another USA Volleyball season is well under way. We want to review the new rules for this season.

DOUBLE CONTACT ON 2ND BALL IS NOW LEGAL

For those who work NCAA and/or NFHS, you have a head start on this rule change. USA Volleyball is using the same interpretations as NCAA and NFHS unless noted.

USAV 9.2.3.2: at the first hit of the team, the ball may contact various parts of the body consecutively, provided that the contacts occur during one action. At the second hit of the team, the ball may contact various parts of the body consecutively, provided that the contacts occur during one action, and the ball is next touched by a teammate.

We must still watch and judge if a ball was contacted multiple times on the 2nd or 3rd contact. The 3rd contact criteria and interpretations have not changed. If it is a double contact on the third ball, it should be called immediately. The ball does not need to cross the net before calling this fault.

On the 2nd team contact, we must judge who contacts the ball next. If an opponent contacts the ball after a double hit on the 2nd contact or if the ball crosses the net, the double hit is called when the opponent contacts the ball or when the ball completely crosses the plane of the net. This means there may be a delayed whistle for a double hit on the 2nd team contact. If we accidentally blow our whistle before the next contact, and play would have continued, we must stop play and issue a replay.

Below are some common situations related to this rule change:

- **SITUATION 1:** Team S #5 clearly double hits the team's second contact. The ball is next contacted by S #4 who hits the ball over the net.
 - **RULING:** The 1st referee allows play to continue. S #5 is not called for a double contact since the ball was next contacted by a teammate.
- **SITUATION 2:** Team S #7 clearly double hits the team's second contact. The ball travels toward teammate S #10 but crosses the net without being touched by S #10 or any other teammate.
 - **RULING:** The 1st referee whistles a double contact when the ball completely crosses the net, and awards a point and the serve to Team R since the ball was not next contacted by a teammate.
- **SITUATION 3:** Team S #1 clearly double hits the team's second contact. The ball travels toward teammate S #8 and is contacted simultaneously by S #8 and a Team R blocker.
 - **RULING:** The 1st referee allows play to continue. After a double contact, if there is simultaneous contact in the plane of the net between a teammate and an opponent, the double contact is not a fault.
- **SITUATION 4:** Team S back-row setter #3 sets the ball above the height of the net and double contacts the ball. The ball enters the plane of the net and is next contacted by Team R #7.
 - **RULING:** Illegal attack on Team S #3; point Team R.



In summary:

- If no other fault occurs, a double hit on the 2nd contact becomes a fault when the ball completely crosses the net or is first legally touched by an opponent.
- After a double hit on the 2nd contact, if the ball enters the plane of the net and there is simultaneous contact between a teammate and an opponent, the double hit is not a fault. As a reminder, USA Volleyball rules allow simultaneous contact with the ball in the opponent's space.
- After a double hit on the 2nd contact, if a previous fault occurs before a teammate or opponent contacts the ball or the ball completely crosses the net, the previous fault takes precedence. For example, if there is a net fault on the blocker before they touch the ball, we would call the net fault first.

Review the “Critical Rules Interpretations and Points of Emphasis” module for additional scenarios.

SCREENING RULE CHANGE

The serving team's hands must be at or below the head on the serve.

A new rule this year is that the serving team must not have their hand(s) above their head when their team serves.

12.5.3: Any player of the serving team is forbidden to raise their hands above the head during service, until the ball has passed beyond the net. The 1st referee may warn a team through the game captain, if he/ she suspects that the team is deliberately screening.

When we beckon for serve, we should be checking the entire serving team. Front-row and back-row players are not allowed to have their hands above the head until the serve crosses the net. If we see this before we beckon, we need to remind the players to lower their hands. If we notice this after we beckon, we need to watch for a deliberate attempt to screen. If we see a screen, we should call it. If not, we will warn the team immediately after the rally, especially if they win the rally. We can warn as many times as needed. We can even call a screen one time and then go back to a warning if it was more of a “I forgot” moment and not a deliberate attempt to screen. Use your best judgment. Hands above the head does NOT fall under the same criteria as other screens. We could call a screen even if the ball does not pass over the player(s) with their hands above their head. See USAV 12.5.2 for more criteria on what is considered when looking for other types of screens.

ONE OR TWO-HANDED TIPS, SETS, AND SERVES

We are starting to see many different ways of playing the ball. Many setters now “set” the ball in a downward tip/attack motion when the ball is tight to the net. We also see a lot more setters setting the ball with one hand. We must judge these contacts based on the rules—not the body position or the “way” they are playing the ball.

9.2 Characteristics of the Hit

9.2.1: The ball may touch any part of the body.

9.2.2: The ball must not be caught and/or thrown. It can rebound in any direction. (see also 9.3.3; diagram 11-Signal 6)

9.2.3: The ball may touch various parts of the body, provided that the contacts take place simultaneously.

Apply the rule when judging any contact. If we cannot say there was a fault, we should not be calling a fault.



A server may only contact the ball with one hand or arm.

12.4 Execution of the Service

12.4.1: The ball shall be hit with one hand or any part of the arm after being tossed or released from the hand(s). (see also diagram 11-Signal 10)

12.4.2: Only one toss or release of the ball is allowed. Dribbling or moving the ball in the hands is permitted.

Hitting or “tipping” (open hand) the serve is allowed as long as only one hand or arm contacts the ball and the ball is not caught and thrown over the net. Setting the ball over the net with two hands on the serve is illegal.

TECHNIQUE CHANGES

Substitution notification: The change to allowing 15 subs has brought a slight change to our mechanics. We will now tell the team when they have used the 12th, 13th, 14th, and 15th sub. We will tell the R1 when a team uses 15 subs.

Libero designation of 0, 1 or 2 for each set: USA Volleyball now allows the designation of 0, 1, or 2 Libero(s) for each set. Designating two Liberos is no longer for the match. This means we need to be extra careful when checking the lineups and ensure we know how many Liberos have been designated and that the player numbers are correct.

Each set, when we receive the lineup from the team, we need to check that all starting positions have a number and the Libero boxes have a number or an “X”. And no duplicates. An “X” says they are not designating a Libero. If we see an empty Libero box, give them a gentle reminder to add that if they are not designating a Libero in that box.

When we check the lineups, if a team has 2 Liberos listed, we should encourage BOTH to be near the court when checking the lineup. Once you have checked all 8 players, give the authorization signal and either Libero may enter the court. The other Libero would return to the warm-up area.

REMINDERS – PROTESTS

Who can protest?

At any level, the CAPTAIN must be the one who protests. For younger age groups, if you have a captain that is having trouble communicating what they are protesting, the R1 may get off the stand and go talk to the coach. If there is a certified R2 (and the captain is having trouble), the R2 should talk to the coach and then go talk to the R1.

Who can accept a protest?

At any level, the R2 does NOT have the right to accept or deny a protest. If a coach approaches you as the R2 and they want to protest, the only thing you should say is, “You need to send your captain to the R1.” If the R1 needs to have a talk with the R2 after the captain protests, they can call their R2 over to clarify.



Remind teams you can accept protest, but it may be a red card for protesting judgment.

If the R1 feels a protest is based on a judgment call, they can deny the protest. We need to be careful there is not some sort of rule interpretation involved. If in doubt, accept the protest. But if you feel it is a judgment protest, calmly remind the team you can accept the protest, but if the protest committee agrees that it is a judgment protest, a red card will be issued to the head coach. This gives the team one more chance to withdraw. If they still insist on protesting, the R1 should accept the protest. Remember, only the protest committee can assess a red card for protesting judgment.