



## HISTORY OF VOLLEYBALL RULES

*Adapted and updated to 2006, from "A Summary of Seventy-Five Years of Rules" by William T. Odeneal, which appeared in the 1970 Annual Official Volleyball Rules and Reference Guide of the United States Volleyball Association.*

The rules of volleyball have changed many times since William Morgan developed the game in 1895 to provide recreation and relaxation for businessmen at the Holyoke, Massachusetts YMCA. Even the name has changed from "Mintonette" to "Volley Ball" to "Volleyball."

### **THE ORIGINAL RULES OF VOLLEYBALL (1895)**

The first rules, written in longhand by Mr. Morgan, contained the following basic features:

1. Court size was 25 x 50 feet
2. Height of the net was 6 feet, 6 inches
3. Any number of participants was allowed
4. Serves could be assisted across the net
5. A second serve was permitted (as in tennis) if the first was served out of bounds
6. There was no limit to the number of hits on each side of the court
7. Players could continuously "air dribble" the ball up to a restraining line 4 feet from the net
8. Any ball touching the net was considered to be out of bounds
9. Faults by the receiving team, balls landing in the receiving team's court or hit out of bounds by the receiving team resulted in a point for the serving team
10. Faults by the serving team, balls landing in the serving team's court or hit out of bounds by the serving team (except for first serves) resulted in "side out" for the serving team
11. Length of the game was nine "innings," with three serves per team per inning, for three or more players on a team. If one player on a team, one serve per side; two players on a team were thus allowed two serves per side.

\* Look to the bottom of this document for a copy of the first rulebook, from 1897

## **SIGNIFICANT RULE CHANGES (AFFECTING PLAY ONLY) SINCE 1895**

### **1900**

- Height of the net was raised to 7 feet, 6 inches
- Dribbling line was eliminated
- Possession of the serve changed after each side out (eliminating “innings”)
- Length of game became 21 points

### **1912**

- Court size became 30 x 60 feet
- Six players per side
- Each side was limited to three touches of the ball before it had to cross the net
- Teams were required to rotate prior to serving

### **1916**

- Length of game became 15 points
- Two out of three games determined the winner of a match
- Height of the net was raised to 8 feet
- Each player rotated in order and served in turn
- Serves that hit the net or any outside object was out of bounds
- Second serves were eliminated
- Balls could not come to rest in the hands
- Balls could not be touched two consecutive times by one player
- Balls must be played above the waist

### **1922**

- Center lines were added to the court
- Reaching over the net in any manner was prohibited
- Back row players were prohibited from spiking
- One team had to score two consecutive points to win if the score was 14-14

### **1923**

- Right back player served

### **1925**

- Balls could not cross the net completely outside the sidelines
- Two timeouts per game were permitted
- 14-14 tie games had to be won by a two-point advantage

### **1928**

- Four different sets of rules were published: the official rules, simplified rules, modified rules for the playground, and rules for girls and women

## **1932**

- The center line was extended indefinitely
- Players could go outside their court to play the ball
- Players could not interchange positions or move outside their understood playing area

## **1935**

- Two crosses were placed on each side of the court to define the six player positions
- Screening opponents from the server became a foul
- Players could not leave their court unless the ball was on their side of the net
- Any touching of the net was a foul
- A play was not complete unless a player resumed normal control on the floor (the “continuation” rule)
- Deliberate shouting and stomping the feet at an opponent was deemed unsportsmanlike

## **1937**

- Players could reenter a game once
- Multiple contacts were allowed in receiving a hard-driven spike

## **1938**

- One or two-person blocks were permitted if the blockers played adjacent positions (the first mention of “blocking” in the rules)

## **1942**

- Balls could be played with any part of the body from the knees up

## **1947**

- Only front line players could interchange positions to make a two-person block

## **1948** (major rules clarification and rewrite)

- Players must be in their own areas before the ball leaves the server’s hands

## **1949**

- Timed games (8 minutes of ball in play) were allowed
- Teams must win by two points
- Three-person blocks became legal, provided all were front row players

## **1950**

- Balls not clearly batted were considered to be “held” balls

## **1951**

- Back row spiking was allowed, provided the attacker remained in the back court

## **1952**

- Any player could block at the net
- The attack line was introduced at 7 feet, 6 inches
- Players could leave their positions to perform any play, except for a back line attacker
- Blockers must indicate whether or not they touched the ball (the origin of the “no touch” hand signal)

## **1953**

- Substitutes could reenter a game twice instead of once
- Players were allowed to use any part of the body to play the ball

## **1954**

- Screening the serve was allowed

## **1956**

- Players could stand anywhere on the court during the serve as long as they were in rotation order

## **1957** (experimental innovations)

- Balls could be played off obstacles
- All underhand balls must be played with a fist

## **1959**

- Players could have their hands up and move during the serve

## **1960**

- Gloves could be worn during play

## **1965**

- Screening became illegal

## **1966**

- Blocker’s fingers could inadvertently cross the plane of the net if they did not contact the ball or affect play

## **1968** (movement towards the International Rules)

- Servers must toss the ball in the air
- Attack line moved to 10 feet from the net
- Back line spikers could land in front of the spiking line if they left the ground behind it
- Blockers could reach across the net, but could not contact the ball until after it had been hit by the attacker
- One back line player could block, but at no time could there be more than three players deployed in position to block
- Balls must be played above the waist

## **1969**

- Only front line players were permitted to block
- Teams were limited to 12 substitutions per game (see 1974)

## **1970**

- Center lines were widened to 4 inches
- Servers did not have to toss the ball in the air

## **1974**

- Antennae were added on the net, one ball's width outside the sidelines
- Play ended as soon as the ball was "dead" (rescinding the "continuation" rule)
- Players were allowed three entries (starting counts as an entry) per game (completing the "Twelve substitution" rule)

## **1976** (adoption of the International Rules and rules format; old numbering system abandoned)

- Metric measurements introduced (e.g. 30 x 60 foot court became 9 x 18 meter court)
- Metric net heights introduced: 2.43m (7' 11-5/8") for men, 2.24m (7' 4-1/8") for women
- Center lines reduced to 5cm (2")
- Antennae moved to the sidelines
- Best of five games determined the winner of a match
- Six substitutions per team and one entry per player allowed ("Six substitution" rule)
- Balls must be released before they were served
- Balls hitting the ceiling or any other obstruction were "dead"
- Blocks no longer counted as the first of a team's three hits
- Double hits were prohibited on any type of dig (rescinding the "hard driven

spike" rule)

Note: Major international rule changes are generally introduced only after Olympic competition

### **1984**

- A player could make multiple contacts of a team's first hit if there was only one attempt and there was no "finger action" on the ball
- Blocking or attacking serves became illegal

### **1988**

- "Rally point" scoring introduced for deciding games of three or five game matches
- 17 point "cap" introduced for all games (i.e. 17-16 wins any game)

### **1990**

- Attacking a served ball is legal if the ball is not played entirely above the height of the net

### **1994**

- Prosthetic limbs may be worn if the referee determines the player will gain no artificial advantage
- Ball may be contacted with any part of a player's body on or above the knee
- Point limit on deciding games eliminated

### **1996**

- Service zone extended to include full width of 9m. area behind end lines
- Ball may be contacted with any part of a player's body

### **1998**

- Server only receives one toss of the ball to execute the service

### **1999**

- All scoring changed to "rally." Non-deciding games played to 25 with no cap, deciding games to 15 with no cap
- Option to register a Libero on roster allowed

### **2001**

- Ball allowed to touch the net while crossing it on the serve

### **2002**

- During play, a coach may give instructions to players on the court without

delaying the match

## \* 1897 ASSOCIATION ATHLETIC LEAGUE HANDBOOK - VOLLEY BALL \*

During the winter of 1895-96, Mr. W. G. Morgan of Holyoke, Mass., developed a game in his gymnasium which he called, Volley Ball. It was presented to the succeeding Physical Directors' Conference, and the general impression seemed to be that it would fill a place not filled by any other game. It is to be played indoors, and by those who wish a game not so rough as basket ball and yet one where the same degree of activity is demanded. The report as given to the conference by Mr. Morgan is as follows:

Volley Ball is a new game which is pre-eminently fitted for the gymnasium or the exercise hall, but which may also be played out-of-doors. Any number of persons may play the game. The play consists of keeping a ball in motion over a high net, from one side to the other, thus partaking of the character of two games -- tennis and hand ball.

Play is started by a player on one side serving the ball over the net into the opponents' field or court. The opponents then, without allowing the ball to strike the floor, return it, and it is in this way kept going back and forth until one side fails to return it or it hits the floor. This counts a "score" for one side, or a "server out" for the other, depending on the side in point. The game consists of nine innings, each side serving a certain number of times, as per the rules, per inning.

### RULES OF VOLLEY BALL

#### I. GAME

The game consists of nine innings.

#### II. INNING

An inning consists of: when one person is playing on each side, one service each side; when two are playing on each side, two services each side; when three or more are playing on each side, three services each side. The man serving continues to do so until out by failure of his side to return the ball. Each man shall serve in turn.

#### III. COURT

The court or floor space shall be twenty-five feet wide and fifty feet long, to be divided into two square courts, twenty-five by twenty-five feet, by the net. Four feet from the net on both side and parallel with it shall be a line across the court, the Dribbling line. The boundary lines must be plainly marked so as to be visible from all parts of the court. Note--The exact size of the court may be changed to suit the convenience of the place.

#### IV. NET

The net shall be at least two feet wide and twenty-seven feet long, and shall be suspended from uprights placed at least one foot outside the side lines.  
The top line of the net must be six feet six inches from the floor.

#### V. BALL

The ball shall be a rubber bladder covered with leather or canvas. It shall measure not less than twenty-five inches, or more than twenty-seven inches in circumference, and shall weigh not less than nine ounces nor more than twelve ounces.

## VI. SERVER AND SERVICE

The server shall stand with one foot on the back line. The ball must be batted with the hand. Two services or trials are allowed him to place the ball in the opponent's court (as in tennis). The server may serve into the opponents' court at any place. In a service, the ball must be batted at least ten feet, no dribbling allowed. A service which would strike the net, but which is struck by another of the same side before striking the net, if it goes over into the opponent's court, is good, but if it should go outside, the server has no second trial.

## VII. SCORING

Each good service unreturned or ball in play unreturned by the side receiving counts one score for the side serving. A side only scores when serving, as a failure to return the ball in their part results in the server being put out.

## VIII. NET BALL

A play which hits the net, aside from first service, is called a net ball, and is equivalent to a failure to return, counting for the opposite side. The ball hitting the net on first service shall be called dead, and counts as a trial.

## IX. LINE BALL

It is a ball striking the boundary line. It is equivalent to one out of court, and counts as such.

## X. PLAY AND PLAYERS

Any number may play that is convenient to the place. A player should be able to cover about ten by ten feet. Should any player during play touch the net, it puts the ball out of play and counts against his side. Should any player catch or hold for an instant the ball, it is out of play and counts for the opposite side. Should the ball strike any object other than the floor and bound back into play, it is still in play.

To dribble the ball is to carry it all the time, keeping it bouncing. When dribbling the ball no player shall cross the dribbling line, this putting the ball out of play and counting against him.

Any player except the captain, addressing the umpire or casting any slurring remarks at him or any of the players on the opposite side, may be disqualified and his side be compelled to play the game without him or a substitute, or forfeit the same.

## HELPS IN PLAYING THE GAME (1897!)

Strike the ball with both hands.

Look for uncovered space in the opponent's field.

Play together; cover your own space.

Pass from one to another when possible.

Watch the play constantly, especially the opponent's.