

## 6 Introduction to volleyball

Volleyball has come a long way from the dusty-old YMCA gymnasium of Holyoke, Massachusetts, USA, where visionary, William G. Morgan, invented the sport back in 1895. It has seen the start of two centuries and the dawn of a new millennium. Volleyball is now one of the big five international sports, and the FIVB, with its 218 affiliated national federations, is the largest international sporting federation in the world.

Over the last decade particularly, volleyball has witnessed unprecedented growth. With the success of its world competition such as the World Championships, Olympic Games, the US\$15 million World League, Grand Prix, World Cup, and World Grand Champions Cup, the level of participation at all levels internationally continues to grow exponentially.

The beach volleyball phenomenon, although hugely visible, is still just in its infancy. From the first FIVB World Tour event just over ten years ago, to the overwhelming spectator and television success of 'Beach' at the Atlanta 1996 and Sydney 2000 Olympic Games, beach volleyball has opened up Volleyball to a completely new market.

### A brief history of volleyball

Volleyball is a complex game of simple skills. The ball is hit from up to 60cm above the height of a basketball hoop - that's about 3.65m - and takes 0.3sec to get from the spiker to the baseline receiver. That means the receiver must assess incoming angle, decide where to pass the ball and then control the pass in the blink of an eye. A purely rebound sport (you can't hold the ball), volleyball is a game of constant motion.

A team can touch the ball three times on its side of the net. The usual pattern is a dig (an underarm pass made with the forearms), a set (an overhead pass made with the hands) and a spike (the overhead attacking shot). The ball is served into play. Teams can also try to block the opponent's spike as it crosses the net. A block into your own court counts as one of your three touches in beach volleyball, but not in volleyball.

Power and height have become vital components of international teams, but the ability of teams and coaches to devise new strategies, tactics and skills has been crucial for success at the Games.

Volleyball was invented in 1895 in Massachusetts, the United States, by William Morgan. He was a friend of James Naismith, who had invented basketball at a nearby gym only four years previously. Volleyball was originally called mintonette.

There are six players on court in a volleyball team, who each must rotate position (clockwise) every time their team wins back service from the opposition. Only the three players at the net positions can jump and spike or block near the net. The backcourt players can only hit the ball over the net if they jump from behind the attack line, also known as the three-metre line, which separates the front and back part of the court.

Volleyball has developed into a very specialised sport. Most teams will include in their starting line-up a setter, two centre blockers, two receiver-hitters and a universal spiker. Only certain players will be involved with service reception. Players will also have specialist positions for attack and defence. Substitutions are allowed during the game.

In 2000, volleyball used a new scoring system. Teams scored a point on every rally, regardless of which team served. Formerly, a team could only win a point if it served the ball. Winning the serve back from the opposition was known as a side-out.

Matches are played best of five sets. The first four sets are played to 25 points, with the final set being played to 15 points. A team must win a set by two points. There is no ceiling, so a set continues until one of the teams gains a two-point advantage. Previously, all sets were to 15 points, with the first four sets having a ceiling of 17 and the final set requiring at least a two-point winning advantage.

Prior to Sydney 2000, the FIVB introduced a new specialist role: the libero. This player wears a different coloured uniform from the rest of the team and can be substituted in backcourt for any player on the team. The libero cannot serve, spike the ball over the net or rotate into the front-line positions, but plays a vital role for the team in serve reception and backcourt defence. There must be at least one point played between a

libero substituting off for a player and going back on the court for another player - hence he/she cannot be on the court for the whole game. The libero added an extra dimension to backcourt defence in 2000, improving the reception of teams, lengthening the rallies and giving a vital role to shorter players.

**Service** – A serve begins each rally. A player must hit the ball with his or her hand over the net to land inside the lines of the court. Players may serve underarm or overarm (hardly anyone at elite level would offer an underarm serve). A popular serve is the 'jump' or 'spike' serve: the player jumps and serves the ball while airborne. Players such as Italy's Andrea Sartoretti are devastating jump servers, able to serve at great speed with tremendous spin.

Each player gets only one chance to serve. A new rule means the serve can now touch the net and continue into the opponent's court. Before, a net touch on service ended the rally and the point was awarded to the receiving team. When the serving team loses a rally, it loses the right to serve. The receiving team then rotates one position on the court.

**Dig** – The 'dig' is a forearm pass that is used to control the ball and pass it to the setter at the net. It is usually the first contact by the team and an effective shot to use in defence, such as when receiving a spike. Nowadays, a specialist receiver called a 'libero' handles much of the team's serve reception and is pivotal in backcourt defence.

**Set** – The 'set' is an overhead pass used to change the direction of the dig and put the ball in a good position for the spiker. It is usually the team's second contact. Setting is the tactical centre of volleyball. A setter must be good enough to keep the big blockers from dominating the net. The setter must feed his or her best hitters while also looking for opponent's blocking weaknesses (such as a short player on the front line or a slow centre blocker).

**Spike** – Crack! The 'spike' is when the ball is hit or smashed across the net. It is the most powerful shot in volleyball - and the most effective way to win a rally.

**Block** – This is the first line of defence in volleyball. The objective of the 'block' is to stop the spiked ball from crossing the net or to channel the spike to defenders. The three front-court players share blocking. Teams usually opt for a 'read and react' block (whereby they try to react to the ball leaving the setter's hands) or for a 'commit' block (whereby they decide before the point whether to jump on the quick middle balls). The key to good blocking is penetration - the best blockers reach well over the net and into the opponent's court rather than reaching straight up, where they can be easily 'tooled' by quality hitters.

### **The ball**

After testing many colours, the FIVB introduced a ball with yellow, blue and white panels at the World Championships in Japan in 1998. It replaced the traditional all-white ball.

### **The Rally Point System**

In 1998 the FIVB also tried some different scoring systems. At its World Congress in October 1998, the FIVB ratified the 'rally point' system. Every rally would now earn a point. The first four sets are played to 25, but the winning team must be ahead by at least two points. The fifth set is played to 15 - and again the winner must have a two-point margin. The new system is designed to make the scoring system easier to follow and games faster and more exciting.

### **The libero**

Since Atlanta 1996, the FIVB has also introduced a new specialised defensive player: the 'libero'. The libero can perform only as a backcourt player and may not play an attacking shot (when the ball is hit back across the net), serve or block. If the libero makes an overhead set of the ball in front of the 3m attack line, the ball may not be spiked over by the team. If the libero makes the same action behind the front zone, the ball may be freely attacked. The libero must wear a jersey with a different colour or design than those of other team members.

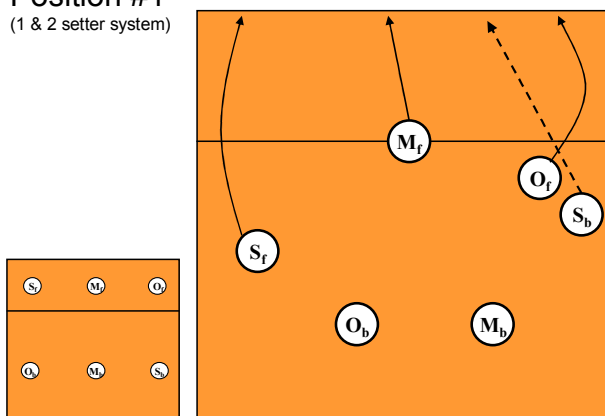
## Rotation

Each of the six players on an indoor team rotates a position after winning back service from the opponent. This is the key to the tactics of indoor volleyball - you cannot simply keep your best blockers and spikers at the net or your best defenders in backcourt. After serving from position one, players rotate to position six (middle back), then position five (left back), position four (left front), position three (middle front) and position two (right front) before returning to serve.

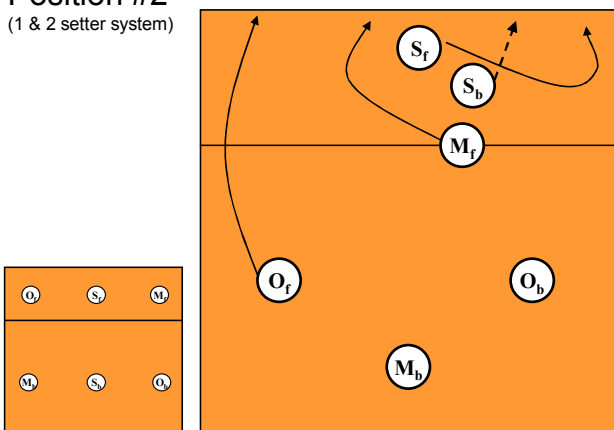
A team must be in correct rotation order before the serve is put into play. Once the ball is served, the players can move positions but backcourt players cannot move to the net to block or spike. They must make all attacking actions from behind the attack line (hence the advent of the backcourt attack to have great spikers participating in all six rotations). The rotation rule explains why a setter often appears to be 'hiding' behind his or her players before a point. The setter must be in proper rotation order before sprinting to the net or a point is given to the opposition.

## Receiving positions

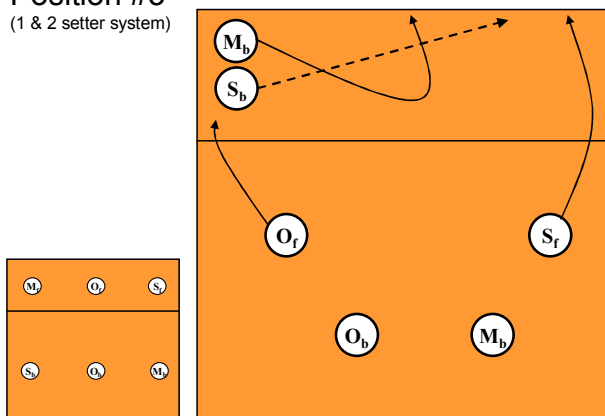
Position #1  
(1 & 2 setter system)



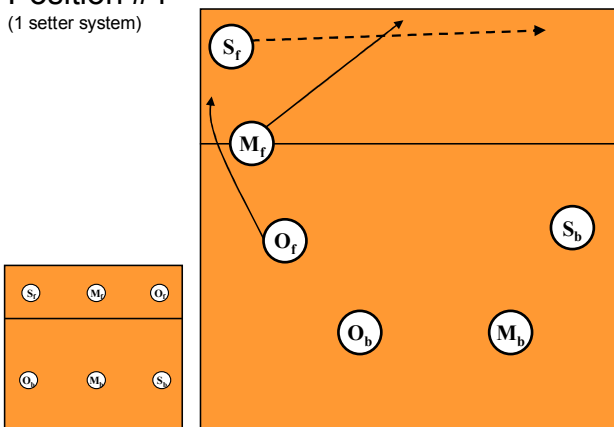
Position #2  
(1 & 2 setter system)



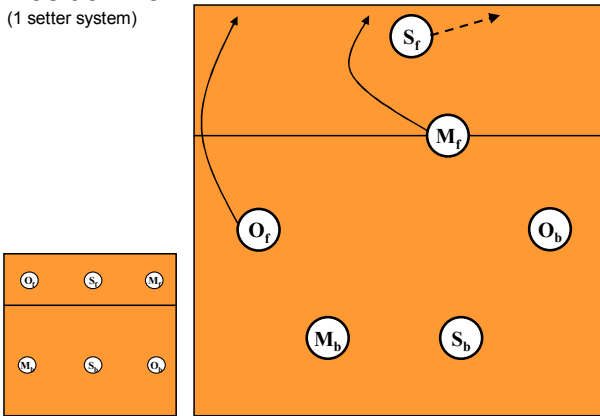
Position #3  
(1 & 2 setter system)



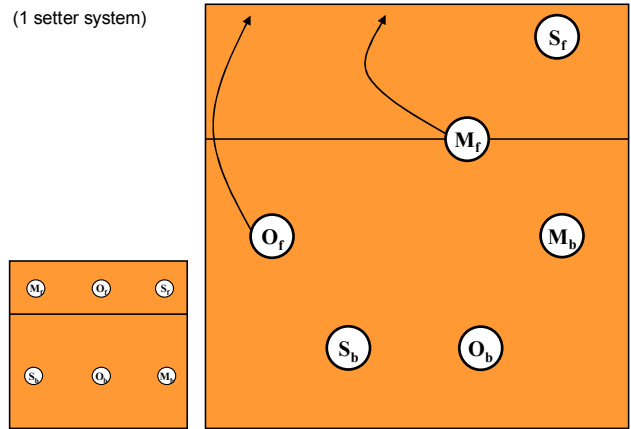
Position #4  
(1 setter system)



Position #5  
(1 setter system)

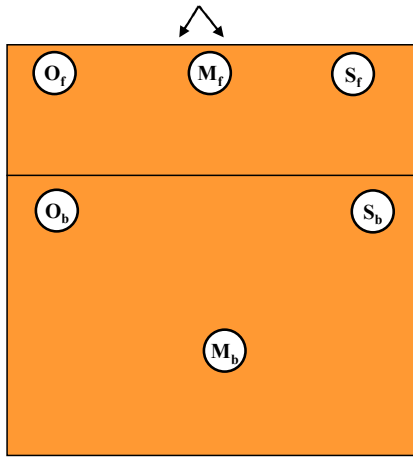


Position #6  
(1 setter system)

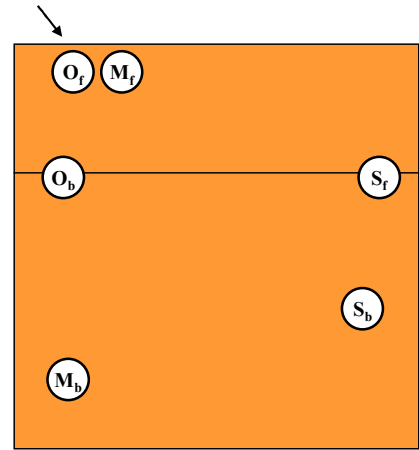


Defence positions

From 3  
(starting position)



From 4



From 2

