

Youth Volleyball Rules for 2-4 Player Teams

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USA Volleyball has a full rule book annually updated – called Domestic Competition Regulations - which follow the rules of the International Volleyball Federation (FIVB). This set of rules is designed to simplify these regulations for youth play for 5-12 year old teams who should be playing less than the six person game.

Teams

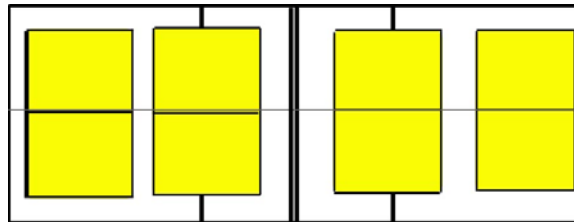
Teams can be made of two, three or four players a side. Teams can be all of one gender, or coed at any percentage. This is a non-contact game.

Spirit of the Rule: *Substitutions are unlimited, and often should be done by “circulation” where the players rotate from playing to waiting out in a consistent pattern. A team can play with one player less than team size for the program. US Teams play many two, three and four person games, with uneven numbers, to allow players to touch more balls per rally and to cover more court area, and learn faster than playing 6 vs. 6.*

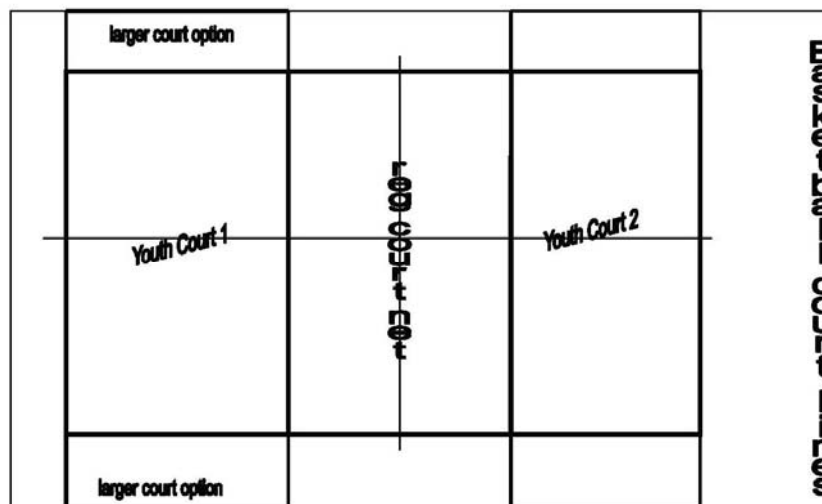
Playing Area Options

Courts need to be consistent for the league, and smaller than the adult sized courts. The most common options include:

- Two youth courts on one regular adult court – 4 meters wide each with a 2 meter buffer between each court sideline. The depth per court can vary from 4 meters, to 4.5, to 6, and even 9 meters.
- Four youth courts on two linked adult nets – again 4 meters wide, and either 4.5 meters deep (adult court sideline), or 6 meters (normal basketball court sideline)



- Two youth courts on two linked adult nets – 6 meters wide (adult endline to adult 3 meter line) and 4.5 or 6 meters deep as in B.



Playing Surface Options

The rule book notes that the surface must be flat, horizontal and uniform. Youth games around the world are played on city streets, concrete surfaces (tennis courts can be modified into great kid courts), grass courts, wood courts and beach or river sand. As long as the court is consistent for both teams, play on! A buffer area of 2 meters before changing into a new surface or a wall is required around all sides of the court.

Spirit of the Rule: Lines are suggested but not required in youth volleyball – marking just the corners allows the kids to determine the ball being in or out by consensus, including the important concept of “do over!”

Nets & Balls

When possible, a net should be used, so the players can learn to play out of the net. To make more nets and save money, a simple rope can serve as a fine “net” for all levels of youth play. The official ball for kids under 12, is a “lite” version of the adult ball. These are adult size volleyballs which are constructed of lighter materials, and thus easier to contact for younger players. The net height for a youth program may vary, from 5-6 foot for younger players, to 7 foot for 12 and unders. A badminton net/court, without extenders for younger players, and with for the older kids, is an excellent youth court option.

Spirit of the Rule: When making two youth courts on one adult net (indoor or portable outdoor nets), putting an antenna or some marker on the top of the net, so the edge of that court is seen, is also helpful. If no such markers exist, the pole is the out of bounds court marker on one side, while the line below the net is the other marker. Regarding balls, beach balls, outdoor volleyballs, oversized volleyballs, “market” balls, even balloons and balloon balls are also fine options, as some of these balls move slower and if used indoors, are not impacted by the wind. Both sides are using the same ball, so the game is fair.

Uniforms

They need to match, shorts and shirts, and be numbered 1-99.

Spirit of the Rule: For youth programs, while looking like a team is important, it is not required to have matching tops or shorts. It allows for good branding of your program, but is not mandatory. Jewelry must be removed, except for medical alert and religious ones.

Coach

Calls time outs and substitutions, and determines the starting line up order

Spirit of the Rule: The game teaches the game, so a team does not have to have a coach at all to play. As that which you teach, you learn, we encourage older players, 10-12, to spend time coaching the younger players in your program. There only must be adult supervision around the activity area; many great physical education moments occur when one teacher is training a class of 30 or more.

Warm up

Optional for youth play. If your space allows you to warm up safely while other teams are playing, then you can simply get on the court and start play once you have the first server determined. Teams warming up should have an equal amount of time on the court. During this time, serve or side is determined, either by a coin toss, “odd or even” or even paper-scissors-rock game. The team winning the toss can elect to serve first, or pick a side, and the other team then gets to pick the other option. The warm up can be shared on the same court, or one team can warm up (hitting, serving etc) for a short set time, 2-4 minutes, while the other team is off the court.

Spirit of the Rule: When warming up outside, each team helps the other team stop their spikes and/or serves, so nobody has to chase a ball far down the field or beach.

Playing Format

To Score a Point – Basically there are three ways 1. The opponents make an error. 2. The opponents get a penalty for poor conduct 3. The team puts the ball down on their opponent’s court. If an error occurs simultaneously, a replay is called, otherwise, the first fault made is the one called, and errors that occur afterwards, unless a conduct violation, do not matter.

Spirit of the Rule: Transitional and cooperative scoring of a “point” is also an option to promote more rallying. In cooperative scoring, the ball is the opponent, and both teams work together to get as high a score as possible by counting each three contacts per side/net crossing of the ball as a point. A transitional point is scored only after the two

teams rally a pre-determined number of rallies across the net (much like Americans determine who will serve in table tennis by playing “P-I-N-G”) before a point can go up on the scoreboard.

To Win a Set

Sets, or games, are played to 25 points around the world, with the winning team having to have at least a 2 point lead.

Spirit of the Rule: *Kids like to play more teams, for shorter matches, than one team for a long time. You can play to less than 25 points, or start each game above zero (e.g. 10-10 and we are playing to 25).*

To Win a Match

A match can be either one game, or best two out of three, with the deciding 3rd set, if needed, being played to 15 points.

Spirit of the Rule: *When a match is over before the scheduled time, let the kids keep playing until the next match is on.*

Rotation and Position Faults

At the moment of the serve being struck, all starting players must be on the court or court lines, not standing outside the court. Rotation for service moves in a clockwise direction. A player may not touch any part of the opponent's side of the court, except for with their foot or feet. As there is no center line on many courts, err in this case in keeping/teaching the players to stay away from the other team's side, by making sure their feet are certainly partially on their own side of the court. You can unintentionally touch the net poles and guy wires.

Spirit of the Rule: *Equal playing time is strongly encouraged, rather than having starters and subs. Rotating through the line up, so that players come in to serve and/or into the front row, as long as each player is circulating equally through the rotational pattern (not determined by the number or serves made or errors), is best.*

States of Play

Ball In

The ball touches the surface of the playing court, including the boundary lines.

Spirit of the Rule: *If the line bounces, the ball is good.*

Ball Out

The ball touches completely outside the playing court; touches an object or person standing out of play (more than 2 meters away from the side/end lines); passes completely under the net; or touches the support lines, antenna, posts, or net itself outside the antenna.

Spirit of the Rule: *The ball can touch the ceiling, and play continues, unless the ball is banked in from one team to the other team's side.*

Playing the Ball

The ball may not be carried/thrown. The ball cannot be double hit, except on the first contact of your three possible hits. Unintentional double hits (e.g. off a player's arm and glancing off their head) are allowed. The ball must be hit over the net with a maximum of three contacts. The ball can hit ANY part of the player's body, including the feet.

Spirit of the Rule: *Let them play – call only flagrant faults, and let them learn – focus on the performance, over the outcome of the contact or play. Long rallies are fun, as we are playing VOLLEYball. Hitting the ball over after one or two contacts is allowed, however good teams work to get all three contacts – pass-set-attack or good pass, good set, good bye!*

Ball handling Faults

Hitting the ball more than four times. Lifting/carrying/throwing the ball.

Spirit of the Rule: *As the ball by the laws of physics must actually be coming to rest a tiny bit before rebounding away, the term “visibly comes to rest” is a judgment call. Give them a lot of latitude when first learning to play, so the rallies continue and only the blatant carrying of the ball is called.*

Net Play

Players may not touch the net, unless the ball drives the net into them. The ball may hit the net and continue over at any time, as long as it passes fully between the antennas.

Spirit of the Rule: *The most common injury in volley occurs during collisions/contact right at the net. Make sure to teach aggressive players to jump further back, and to always stay out of the net.*

Skill Specific Play

Service

Can be done by overhead action, jump/spike action, underhanded or windmill (roundhouse). Youth players can hit the ball out of their hand, but should work towards a low and consistent toss in time. A youth player gets two chances at service tossing, letting the ball drop to the ground (not catching it) if their first toss is not good. Serves can take place anywhere on the endline of your side of the court, and up to 5 meters behind the endline if space permits. The server must hit the ball before stepping on the endline or into the court (a jump server may be above the court, but must serve the ball before landing in the court). You may not kick the ball for a serve however.

Spirit of the Rule: *As some servers can dominate the game at the youth level, it is permitted to limit each server to a maximum of 3-5 serves, before rotating and having a new server of the same team. Likewise, it is permitted to move the service line up into the court, to allow younger/weaker players to get the serve over the net. Should the endline be less than 2 meters from the back wall, players can step in at all levels to wherever the 2 meters from the wall line would be. Only call service foot faults if the player is gaining a clear advantage. – Good Miss: Over the net and out...Bad Miss – into the net.*

Reception/Defense

Normal ball handling rules apply, just remember that first ball reception can be done overhead, like a set, or with a forearm pass. The ball can rebound off any surface of your body, so heading the ball, like soccer, or even kicking up a save is allowed. The ball can be touched one or two handed as well.

Spirit of the Rule: *We want to encourage hustle/effort. Good Miss?- Playing the ball up high and/or to the center of the court. Bad Miss? - Playing the ball over the net or on a very low trajectory.*

Setting

This is the second contact by the team, most frequently placing the ball up to be spiked, by using two hands. The set does not have to go the way a player is facing, and can even be set behind the setting player, called a backset. This second contact is of course also legal if done with a forearm pass/dig type action. The main desire is to make the ball hittable.

Spirit of the Rule: *This is the ball, when setting with both hands, that players may carry/throw. Give them a lot of latitude when they first start setting. Good Miss? – Too high, too far off the net, too far inside the court. Bad Miss?-- Too low, too close to the net, too far outside the court.*

Attacking

This is the act of directing the ball towards the opponent's side. A player can jump and spike or tip, stand and set it over, forearm pass it over, etc. The tip action (one or two handed) cannot be caught or thrown over. Any one of the two to four players on a youth team may jump and attack the ball from above the top of the net.

Spirit of the Rule: *Getting the attackers to start learning first OFF the net, and running, jumping and swinging fast. Good Miss? – Over the net but out. Bad Miss?-- Into the net.*

Blocking

A ball blocked counts as a touch, but does not count as one of the team's three hits, and can thus be played by a blocker without being called for a double hit. A team cannot block the serve, nor block a ball that is completely on the other side of the net (it must be hit into you, you cannot block a ball unless part of the ball is on your side of the net, or the team hits the ball into your block). In Youth Volleyball, only one player maximum should jump to make a block.

Spirit of the Rule: *Blocking is one of the ways to get a lead in rally scoring, by stuff blocking. However, unless the net is low enough that the blocker can get their full hand above the top of the net during their blocking action, it is better to not block at all and teach the player(s) to read and play defense. Many attacks at the youth level do not deserve a block, and at most the attack needs only a one person block, taking the crosscourt angle. A double block is permitted by the official rules, but is strongly discouraged. Good Miss? Not touching the ball. Bad Miss? Touching the net, or blocking the ball out of bounds.*

Injury

Stop the game immediately and tend to the injured player. A replay is called.

Spirit of the Rule: *Volleyball is a very safe, non-contact sport. Still a sprained ankle, and jammed fingers can happen. Should the team size due to injury, or just a no show, drop to below the correct number per side, it is fine to let the team play that is short a player.*

Referee

Stands by one of the net supports and directs the match from start to end, with their decision being final. The referee whistles for each new serve. They make the ball handling calls, in and out calls, and other judgment decisions. It is encouraged that the kids learn to referee when not playing in a match, with some sort of adult guidance and teaching going on at the beginning of the youth's refereeing experience. If a referee whistles by mistake, a replay is called.

Spirit of the Rule: *A referee is not required, as long as both teams are willing to call their own faults, including net contact fouls. When there is no referee, playovers are important to agree on quickly, in the case of a disagreement, so play can continue. A player may not contact the net at any time when there is no referee (as opposed to a player being able to touch the net after the ball hits the floor when there is a referee).*

Parental Conduct

Kids first, winning second. Praise in public, criticize in private. Be the most encouraging parent you know.

Paralympic, Deaflympic and Special Olympic Players

A player with a hard cast on, should not be allowed to play volleyball, even if they pad the cast. Only a small finger splint or cast, padded, which does not gain the player an advantage in contacting the ball, is allowed. Please be a talent scout for our USA Teams with these young players. Volleyball is played in both a "Unified" and standard form for Special Olympians. An entire program and training manual for these athletes is available, go to www.specialolympics.org. Athletes who are hearing impaired should consider trying out for the USA Deaf National teams, men and women, who compete every four years in the Deaflympics somewhere in the world. www.deafsportsusa.org. Finally, those disabled athletes missing a limb, should check out the USA Standing and Sitting Volleyball National team programs, with sitting teams which train year round at the University of Central Oklahoma. Scholarships are available for collegiate level players, and the teams, men and women, compete in both the World Championships, held in 2008, 2010, etc, and the Paralympics, held 2 weeks after the Olympics in the same city. www.usparalympics.org

The Spirit of Coaching Youth Volleyball:

1. *Catch them Doing it Right* - Punishment is not necessary in youth volleyball. Volleyball is fun; the kids want to try hard and learn. So always choose encouragement and praise rather than threat of punishment to inspire and motivate.
2. *I Hear & I Forget – I See & I Remember – I DO & I Understand* - Kids learn by doing, not listening. When you have a choice between explaining or showing, always show briefly, then get them touching the ball as quickly as possible. Your drill should be games, and intro's should be 30 seconds or less then get the balls in play!
3. *Reward Performance over Outcome* – Praise an *attempt* to learn a skill or the *attempt* to incorporate a strategy more than actual outcome. Kids who feel free to try new things become learners for life ...and better volleyball players.
4. *Mistakes are Simply Opportunities to Teach* – They are not directed at you, or done on purpose, but inherent in learning new things, and even in doing things one is already good at. Since the game is a rebound sport, but no special rebound equipment available, each player must learn his or her own way to do each skill – with your fundamental guidance.
5. *Teach Positive Errors over Negative Errors* – This way the learning happens faster and rallies will last longer.
6. *Be Consistent* – The kids need to be able to rely on you, winning, losing, succeed or erring.
7. *FeedForward Works Better than Feedback*. It's human nature for all of us to willingly accept a positive encouraging reminder on what we are *about* to do. Our job is not to point out their past error, it is to encourage and inspire future success. Speaking to young learners about what they are about to do also teaches them to be their own coach and control their own destiny. FeedForward coaching is a collaborative in nature, the athletes can feel that you are on their side to help them succeed rather than being just another grown-up telling them what they did wrong. So, FeedForward allows your coaching to really make a difference in kid's lives, and it also makes coaching more fun for you!