

Volleyball Habits of Mind

Back-Row Awareness

Back-row players have limitations on where and how they can play a ball. Rule 9-5 Articles 3, 4, 5, and 6 specifically define these limitations and every official must have a complete understanding of this rule in order to correctly officiate back-row play. On every play three players will be back row players. During play, complete awareness of who those three back-row players are and where exactly they contacted a ball is imperative. **Every time** prior to signaling for the serve, make a mental note of who the back-row players are; this action gives the official the best chance of penalizing illegal back-row play immediately, but remember, illegal back-row play can be penalized at any time during a rally. Obviously, it is best to call an illegal back row play sooner rather than later, but do not hesitate to call this after the fact when discovered prior to awarding a point. If you are unsure of a player's back row status during play, take note of where the player positions herself after the contact. Most of the time a player will transition to a defensive base and that will inform you as to whether she was in the front or back row.

A fundamental understanding, to help inform illegal back-row play, is identifying what offense each team is running. This is important because it helps identify the back-row/front-row status of the setter. The backrow setter is the player most likely to commit a backrow violation because her primary position on the court is located in front of the attack line. Many times, if the setter has any height at all and/or jump sets the ball, the setter contacts the ball completely above the height of the net and in front of the attack line. If a ball set completely above the height of the net crosses the plane of the net and is legally blocked or completely crosses the net, it is a back-row attack violation. When the ball is overpassed from a teammate, a back row setter is put into a very precarious situation. If the setter reaches and contacts the ball after it has completely broken the plane, she has committed an illegal back-row attack. If she touches a ball that has partially broken the plane of the net, and the ball is legally blocked after the touching, she has committed an illegal back-row attack. If the setter misses the ball with any part of her hand completely above the height of the net and the ball is blocked back into her hand, she has committed a back-row block.

In a 5-1 offense, the setter spends three rotations in the back row and three rotations in the front row. In order to effectively monitor back-row play, the officials must pay close attention to when the setter is in the back row and when she moves to the front row. Many times a new back row player enters the set when the setter transitions to the front row. This is good to note, because whenever an official sees that player on the court, the official knows the setter is a front row player. The opposite is also true; many times a front row player will be on the court only when the setter is in the back row.

In a 5-1 hybrid, one setter is a back-row setter and another setter replaces her and becomes a front-row setter. Keeping track of the setter in this scenario can be easier because usually the two players who are setting are only on the court when they are in the setter position. It is always helpful to note who the player in the back-row is who is opposite the front-row player in the rotation and vice versa.

In a 6-2 offense, the primary setter is always a back-row player. This can make it easier to identify illegal back-row play, but keep in mind, setter number one may stay in the game and transition to a front row attacker. Make sure to carefully note who the primary setter is to help ensure proper calls are made.

In a 2-4 offense, the setter is always a front-row player. This offense is rare, but a few teams still employ it. This certainly simplifies calling illegal back-row play concerning the setter, but a setter still might transition to the back row and become a secondary setter. Keep in mind the player opposite her in the rotation when she transitions to the back row to help identify her position on the court.

Another scenario for an illegal back-row attack occurs when the ball is set to a back-row player. The official must pay attention to where the back-row player is positioned prior to leaving the ground if the back-row player contacts the ball completely above the height of the net. The most common error is for the foot to make contact with the attack line prior to contacting a ball that is completely above the height of the net. Remember, the entire attack line belongs to the attack zone. If a back-row attacker contacts a ball completely above the height of the net and has any part of her foot/feet in contact with the attack line, or has any part of the foot touching the attack line before jumping off the floor, it is an illegal back-row attack. Many times it is quite obvious whether or not it is a back row player attacking the ball, but especially be aware in scramble situations and/or cover situations when the back row players may be in front of the attack line. In scramble or cover situations, it is also very important to be aware of the libero's position and actions. If the libero uses finger action when retrieving a ball on or in front of the attack line and the next action is an attack of the ball completely above the height of the net, it is an illegal back-row attack.

Libero Play

Any time the libero plays the ball, officials must be aware of her position on the floor. Review rule 9.5.6 to fully understand what the libero may and may not do. The libero may not attack a ball that is completely above the height of the net from anywhere on the court. There is no "safe zone" for the libero when it comes to attacking a ball completely above the height of the net. The libero also may not use finger action to set the ball while positioned on or in front of the attack line, if the next contact is an attack of a ball that is completely above the height of the net. Bump sets made by the libero positioned on or in front of the attack can be legally attacked, even if the ball is completely above the height of the net. Always be hypersensitive to any contact by the libero. Every time the libero contacts the ball, the official must be aware of the libero's position on the court and whether the libero contacted the ball with finger action or with a bump set. Any time a coach questions the legality of a back-row attack, use the informal Legal Back-row Attack signal to indicate either behind the line or below the height net.

Proper Alignment Awareness

There needs to be a fundamental understanding of pairs or opposites in a lineup. Position I is paired/opposite position IV, Position II is paired/opposite position V, Position III is paired/opposite position VI. This understanding is crucial when assessing alignment penalties.

Remembering the two players who are paired with the libero and the player(s) paired with the setter is one method to consider. If two pairs are in the correct position then all three pairs will be correct. This method usually results in remembering two to three numbered pairs for each team per match. For example, a team who plays a 5-1 and does not substitute will require remembering four numbers; the setter and the player paired/opposite her and the two players opposite the libero. (Remembering the libero's number is not necessary because she has a different jersey design from her teammates.) If the team substitutes for the setter's pair when she moves to the front row, it will require remembering five numbers. A team running a 6-2 or 2-

4 offense will require remembering six numbers; however, keep in mind the two pairs for the setter and her opposite usually remain the same throughout the match.

Knowing the pairs/opposites is also very helpful for quickly diagnosing illegal back row play. In a 5-1 offense, when a team substitutes a back row player for the player opposite the setter, the official knows the setter is now a front row player. If a team substitutes a front row player for the player opposite the setter, the official knows the setter is now a back row player. If at any time during play the official becomes confused as to the setter's front or back row status, a quick check of her opposite will inform the official of her position.

Another focus must be on who the player is ahead and behind the setter in the lineup. This is especially important when the setter moves to the back left on serve receive. The front row player ahead of the setter must be positioned in front of the setter. If a setter when positioned back left is standing alone, alarm bells need to go off in the official's mind. The front left must be positioned in front of the setter somewhere on the left side of the court. When the setter is in the back left, she may try to cheat toward her setting position and overlap the middle back. Knowing the player who is behind the setter in the rotation helps diagnose this error.

When the setter is in the middle back position, knowing who is ahead and behind the setter in the rotation, including whether or not the setter is leading or following the libero, is helpful in identifying rotation errors. Many times, if there is going to be an alignment issue, it will occur when the setter is middle back. Generally speaking, teams will either drop back their front right player or front left player during this serve receive rotation. This gives multiple opportunities for overlaps. Overlaps may occur with the front left and back left, the front right and the back right, and most commonly in this serve receive rotation the middle back with either the left back or the right back. Be careful if/when teams start changing sides of the court again because many times this rotation will be correct on one side of the court and incorrect on the other side. Knowing the pairs/opposites and the player in front of and behind the setter will give an official confidence and command of making the correct illegal alignment call.

Working with Scorekeepers and Clock/Scoreboard Operator

Every match must begin with the R2 conducting a pre-game discussion with the scorekeeper, libero tracker, and clock/scoreboard operator. The scorekeeper, libero tracker, and scoreboard operator are the R2's most important ally in keeping a match running smoothly. They must be a united team paying attention to every point scored as a bench team. If the scoreboard operator and scorekeeper have a discrepancy in score, the discrepancy must be resolved immediately. Waiting to correct it a few points later can be difficult, laborious, and time consuming. The table team must be in constant communication with each other and with the R2. The best scorekeepers will call out the subs as they approach and let the R2 know how many subs each team has used after each substitution. This would be a great habit to instill in every scorekeeper.

The R2 must instruct the scorekeeper to immediately communicate if an illegal substitute attempts to enter the set. This helps the R2 penalize with an unnecessary delay warning instead of having to potentially remove points from the board, correct the rotation, and/or put the correct player back into the set after the fact; this can be very messy and time consuming. The R2 must also instruct the scorekeeper to inform him/her when a team has used 15, 16, 17, and 18 substitutes so the R2 can inform the team's head coach. The scorekeeper should also communicate set point to the R2 so the R2 can signal the R1.

The R2 must instruct the libero tracker to immediately communicate an incorrect libero replacement. The R2 could also ask the libero tracker to help with identifying libero and replacements replacing outside the replacement zone. This can be difficult for the R2 to observe effectively and will help the R2 utilize preventative officiating to correct this error by communicating the issue to the head coach prior to penalizing. If the replacement error continues, the R2 should issue an unnecessary delay.

The R2 must instruct the scoreboard/clock operator concerning clock operation for starting and ending time-outs. The R2 should develop a signal that informs the clock operator when to begin the 60 second countdown. It could be when the arms drop after giving the preliminary time-outs taken signal to the R1, or after the arm comes down to indicate the team who called the timeout, or when the time-out signal is given. Whatever the signal is, it will help the clock operator be consistent starting the countdown clock for every time-out. The clock operator needs to understand, when play is on a single court, the R2 will always give the warning double whistle when both teams are back on the court ready to play or when 15 seconds remain in the time-out. The clock operator needs to wait for the R2's signal prior to sounding the horn. Make sure the horn is never sounded prior to the R2 signaling the clock operator to do so. When multiple courts are involved, the clock operator needs to understand the scoreboard horn will never be used. The clock operator also needs to be instructed to keep the clock running until it reaches zero or the R2 gives the signal to sound the horn. The clock operator should never stop the clock prior to it reaching zero or being instructed to sound the ready to play horn.