

Basics of recreational volleyball, slightly longer version (semi lower and above)

This guide describes some of the basics you should know when playing volleyball in recreational leagues. Most of these relate to roles on the court and positioning in different situations; in short, what other players expect from you.

The purpose here is not to teach the rules of volleyball or the techniques of different plays. However, let's start with a couple of very important safety issues regarding playing at or near the net:

Do not step onto the opponent's side of the court. Do not touch the net.

Staying on your own side of the court is *much more important* than beginners usually realize. **Playing on the opponent's side poses a significant risk of injury.** If you are not confident in your movements, keep a safe distance from the net.

At first, net faults may seem like minor nitpicking. As you progress in the sport, you will realize that the net is "sacred" in volleyball, and everyone must admit/report if they have touched it. Usually, these two things go hand in hand, meaning that when you learn to play without making net faults, you also learn not to step on your neighbor's side.

Now let's get down to business, i.e., positions and roles in recreational volleyball. Of course, not all instructions apply directly to all situations or to higher-level games, where positions may be changed and the game adapted depending on the situation.

Playing positions

In volleyball, positions are generally numbered, with the player in the serving corner being number 1 and the numbers rotating counterclockwise up to six (see pictures). When it is your team's turn to serve (you win the ball that your opponent served), the positions rotate clockwise by one position. This means that the serve comes from position 2, position 1 moves to position 6, and so on.

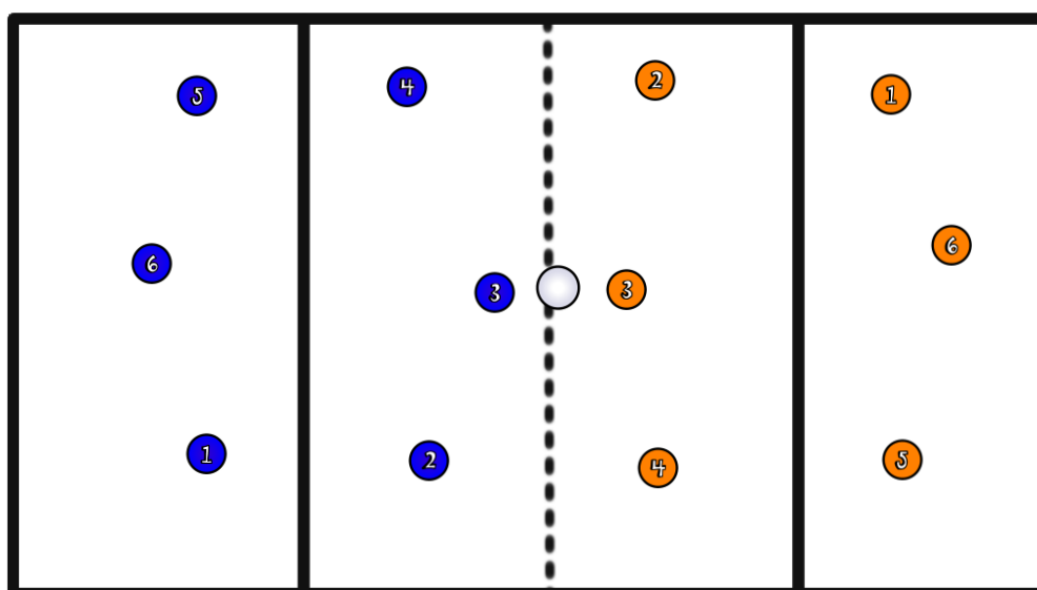


Figure1 Numbering of playing positions

Setter (position 3)

In Höntsy, the game is usually played with a "middle setter," meaning that the player who happens to be in position 3 acts as the setter. The setter usually plays the second of the team's three touches: the other players' task is to pass the ball to the setter, who with their second touch sets the ball to a teammate of their choice (usually 2 or 4) who attacks. Normally, the game proceeds in a cycle of pass-set-spike. When you are the passer, you **must remember that, as a rule, the team's second touch belongs to you.**

Of course, the ball will not always come to you, and sometimes you will have to pass it, i.e., be the first to touch the ball. These **exceptions to the norm require the use of your voice.** So, if you realize that you won't be able to get to the ball with your second touch, shout "**auta!**" ("**help**") (as early as possible). This lets the others know that someone else needs to pass.

Similarly, if another player decides that you will not be able to reach the ball in time, they can "help" on their own initiative. This also requires shouting, i.e., the player shouts "**minä!**" (**me!**) so that you, as the passer, know that they will take care of the second touch. Do not help the passer without one of these shouts (the passer's "help" or your "me") – and do not ask for help on behalf of the passer – it is their responsibility to ask for it themselves, and the passer's movement often stops when another person shouts.

If you, as the passer, have to make the first touch, shout "**passi!**" (**set!**) so that the others know they cannot wait for you to take care of the second touch.

Note that although the ball is usually passed to the front (to positions 2/4), you can just as well pass it to the back row. In this case, the attacker is not allowed to jump from the front of the 3-meter line. When passing to the back row, it is a good idea to give a hint in advance, for example by shouting the name of the player or agreeing on it before the ball is passed.

Front wing player (positions 2, 4)

The front wing player usually focuses on attacking and blocking. When the ball comes to the setter, they are ready to take a run-up and go for an attack. Similarly, when a pass from the other side of the net comes to their side, the wing player works with the setter to block the ball. (The wing player decides where to block, and the setter comes from the middle to fill in).

The wing player who is not currently attacking (whether it is their own attack or the opponent's) is **the** so-called **free net player**. He pulls away from the net and makes sure that when his own team is attacking, he is ready to pick up any balls that fall from the block. When the opponent is attacking, he is ready to take a short "drop shot" behind the setter.

Back row players (positions 1, 5)

The task of the back wing players is to defend against shots and also to retrieve short shots dropped in front of them. When the opponent's shot comes from the same wing, the wing player takes the "line", i.e. is ready to pass the ball if the attacker hits the ball past the block to the line. At the same time, they must also watch out for short shots coming behind the blocker on the line and be ready to pass them.

When the attack comes from a different side, the back player's task is to position themselves in the hitting zone so that the diagonal hit is most likely to come to them. In other words, they should not position themselves behind the block, but rather so that if the ball is hit past the block, they can pass the hit. Similarly, if this diagonal shot does come as a lob, the aim is to be ready for it and go for the ball.

When your team is attacking from positions 2 and 4, the back players' main task is to secure the ball, i.e., move up and be ready to pass the ball that bounces behind the attacker from the block.

"Bottom of the net" (6)

After the serve, the back player plays further back than the others, and their main task is to quickly retrieve balls that come from behind and, for example, balls thrown with the fingers to the back corner. The back player's task is also to retrieve balls if someone else's pass causes the ball to bounce to the back of the court.

When their own team is attacking, the 6 player also moves slightly forward to secure the ball, especially hard shots that bounce off the block. As soon as the attack is over and there is no rebound, they move back to their own position.

Situational considerations:

Serving and receiving

The player in position 1 serves. You can only serve when your opponent is ready. Serving is an individual performance that requires concentration. Serving errors, especially those made in haste, kill the rhythm of the game, so don't rush, but serve calmly.

The serve is made from behind the back line, from inside the side lines (i.e., you cannot serve from the "side" of the court). The serve does not have to be made from the exact back corner (although this is usually the case). In recreational volleyball, however, the server usually goes to play in position 1 after serving.

The front players 2, 3, and 4 of the serving team are at the net, ready to block the opponent's first attack. Back player 6 is slightly further forward than usual in case the ball comes back immediately to the server. After the serve, it is not a good idea to stay at the back line admiring your own performance, but to immediately rush a few steps forward to your own position.

The serve is usually received by three players (1, 6, 5) who are positioned in a line next to each other. When receiving the serve, the player in position 6 is not yet behind the others. Passing with three players is usually the clearest solution, with each player covering their own section of the court. If the opponent serves short, players 4 and 2 can help if necessary. The setter does not usually pass the serve, unless it falls within their reach from the net.

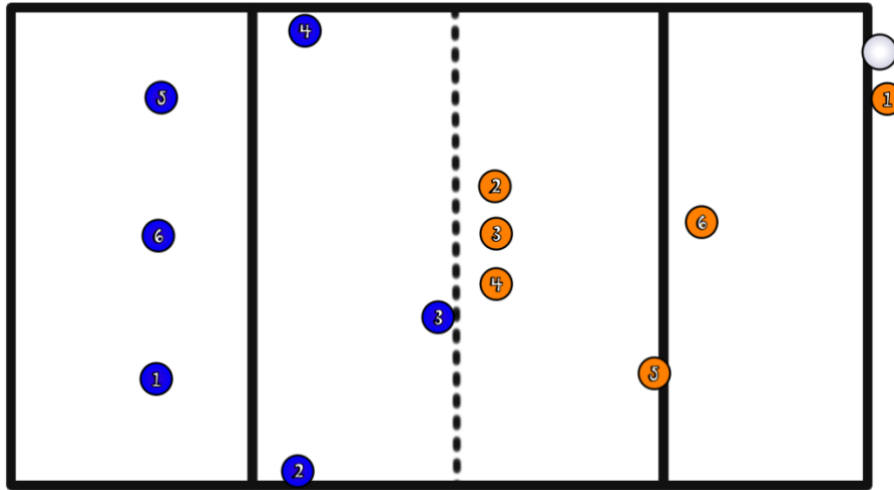


Figure2 Basic setup when the orange team serves.

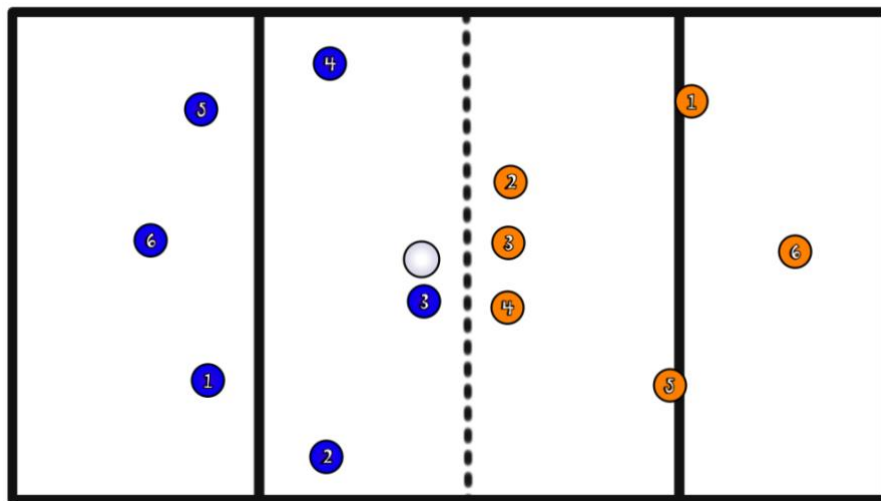


Figure3 Basic situation when the blue team has passed the ball to the setter. Situation before the set is made.

Start of the attack (good pass)

After the serve, the ball has been passed to the setter in picture 3. At least the players in positions 2 and 4 are waiting for the set, ready to attack. At this point, the opponent is usually in a neutral position and only moves into a defensive position once they see where the pass is going. In the next picture, the situation has progressed so that the setter has set to the player in position 4.

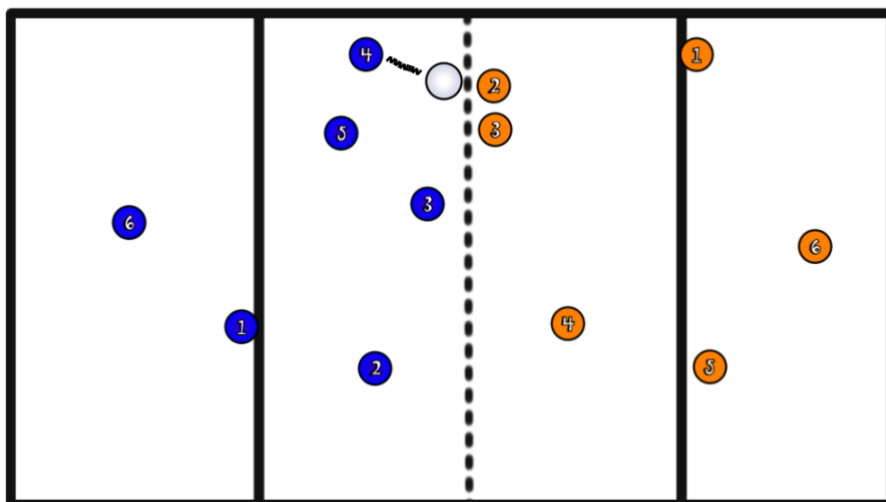


Figure 4 Basic setup when the setter in the previous picture has decided to set to the player in position 4.

Basic attack and defense

In Figure 4, the setter of the blue team has set to the player in position 4 after a good pass.

The player in position 4 gains momentum for the attack. The setter moves closer to the attack, ensuring that the ball will fall very close to the block. The other outside players (especially 5) also move forward, preparing to block the ball that will bounce off the block. The free net player (2) moves away from the net and toward the center.

On the opposite side, the wing player and setter (2, 3) move to block the attack. Player 1 moves to take the line, and player 5 moves to block the diagonal hit. The player in position 4 is on the orange side as a "free net player," so he backs away from the net and moves toward the center in case of a spike over the block. The player in position 6 prepares for backcourt throws, arcing balls, and rebounds.

What if the pass is poor?

Sometimes, or even often, the pass is poor, meaning that the first touch does not get the ball up nicely to the front court for the setter to handle calmly. In this case, the setter should usually ask for help (help!), and if the pass is really bad or low, the others should help anyway. If possible, a player other than the setter can try to make a set from this situation (usually to the opposite side wing player or back row). If this is not possible, the ball should be passed upwards calmly so that it remains clearly on your own side of the court.

Playing the ball upward gives the next player plenty of time to calmly think about how to deliver the ball to the opponent's half of the court. When such a "random set" is in the air – i.e., when the team has one touch left and cannot make a proper attack – it is mainly the responsibility of the player behind the ball to get the ball over the net. Here, too, using your voice helps ("I'll take care of it").

Rolling the game forward

Immediately after the opponent's attack, the game rolls forward at the same pace, which means that, as a rule, the setter prepares to move under the pass to make a set, and the players in positions 2 and 4 start to gather momentum for the attack. On the attacking side, the front players prepare for blocking and the back players prepare for other defensive plays. **After any play, you should not just stand there wondering what will happen next**, but continue the game – unless the ball is already on the floor.

"There is always something you can do."

The level of volleyball improves when all players are active, moving, reading the game, and anticipating what will happen next. When beginners play, it is common for one player to do something while the others watch. Gradually, players learn to move according to the situation, even when the ball is not coming or is not coming to them at that moment. In addition to preparing for the ball, movement also includes preparing for an attack, covering a teammate, etc.

When playing at the net, when the opponent attacks, the rule of thumb is that if you don't jump to block, back away from the net. If you don't do either, you won't be able to do anything right. So if you realize you don't have time to block, back away from the net and get ready to pass or dig the ball.

Remember to block, too!

As the level of play increases, other players will expect all front row players to jump to block. This may seem silly if you have never managed to block a ball before. **Jump anyway!**

The purpose of blocking **is not** (only) to block the ball, but also to narrow the hitting area and help your own defense position themselves. (The back players position themselves according to the block, assuming that no one can hit hard through the blockers in the middle of the court). It is always much more difficult for the opponent to hit when there is a blocker, even if the blockers are short dwarfs who jump at the wrong time. In addition to clean blocking, the blocker's job is also to dampen hard hits (so that the back players can pass them).

Use of voice

The use of voice is very helpful in volleyball. The most important shout is "**minä!**" ("**me**"), which means that the player who shouted will play the ball. In this case, **the others must move out of the way and the player who shouted must play the ball**. If two players shout "minä" at the same time and the other does not have time to repeat it louder, both must play the ball, but a little more cautiously than usual.

It doesn't matter if you shout "minä" every time you intend to play the ball. This only helps the game and significantly reduces situations where the ball falls between two players, as both assume the other will take it.

It is especially important to shout "minä" if a) you intend to play the second touch, even though you are not the passer, or b) you intend to play the ball and notice that someone else has the same intention. Other important shouts:

Yli! / Out! / Pitkä! / Leveä!

Help your teammate and call out if the ball is clearly going out of bounds. It is very difficult for the person who is going to play the ball to see where it is going to land. A clear call often earns the team a point.

Pelaa! (play on!)

The opposite of the previous call: this lets your teammate know that the ball is going to land on the court (even if it is close to the boundary). Either call (out / pelaa) helps, because players often hesitate when close to the boundary.

Auta! / Passi! :

See above, i.e., the setter shouts "help!" if they cannot reach the ball second, and "pass!" if they have to play the ball first.

Otti! (touch)

A player who has jumped to block the ball says this to indicate that the ball has hit them. This lets the others know that the ball should be played even if it is going outside the boundaries.

"Player's name!", "Itse!" etc.: when you are the setter, you can use these calls to warn the other players who you are going to set to. Calling "Itse" means that you are going to pass to the same player who passed the ball. Calling "kolme" (three) means that you are going to pass to the back player (on the three-meter line).

Cheering yourself and others on

Volleyball is typically a flow game, meaning that when things start going well, they keep going well, and conversely, a bad streak can easily repeat itself. Maintaining a good game feeling and team spirit is really important.

So remember to encourage and praise your teammates (for the right reasons), and why not your opponents too! It's important to keep trying until the end – nothing annoys your teammates more than giving up when the ball is still in the air. Even a desperate dive for the ball is usually better than nothing, because it gives the team the feeling that they are not giving up easily.

In recreational sports in general, and in the emotionally charged sport of volleyball in particular, it is best to keep negative comments to yourself. When the ball is lost, you may feel like making a nasty face at the person who made the mistake or commenting on it in some way. Don't do that. In practice, berating or complaining never improves the game. Of course, if someone clearly doesn't know their position, etc., you can kindly advise them between rallies, while staying away from the court.