

SCREENING

Ohio High School Boys' Volleyball (OHSBVA) rules match that of NFHS/OHSAA and are in line with how screening is defined and interpreted for other basic rule sets (USA Volleyball and PAVO/NCAA Volleyball). The OHSBVA Rules Book defines screening and the penalty for screening under Rule 6, The Team: Composition and Positions, Section D, Screening.

1. Players on the serving team shall not take action to prevent receivers from seeing the contact of the serve or the path of the served ball. Potential screens exist, but are not limited to:
 - a. When a player(s) on the serving team waves arms, jumps, moves sideways or stands close to the server, and the ball is served over the player(s).
 - b. When a group of two or more teammates stand close together, and the ball is served directly over them.

PENALTIES:

1. A loss of rally/point is awarded to the opponent.

Other volleyball rule sets address screening and offer guidance for OHSBVA. Screening is addressed very clearly in the NCAA Rule Book, and this information offers excellent guidance for OHSBVA. NCAA rules state: "Players on the serving team must not take action to prevent receiving team players from seeing the contact of the serve and/or the path of the ball. Potentially, screens exist when the ball is served over a player on the serving team who raises or waves arms, jumps, or moves sideways when the service is being executed." This addresses individual screens which are less frequent than group screening. NCAA rules address this: "Potentially, screens exist when a group of two or more teammates stand in close proximity and the ball is served over them." The factors to be weighed when judging whether a screen has been committed are:

1. Relative positions of the players on the serving team;
2. Path of the serve;
3. Speed of the serve; or
4. Trajectory of the serve.

If the serving team players are positioned close to each other and a serve that is fast and has a low trajectory passes over these players, the probability is greater that a screen has been committed. There is a lower probability that a screen has been committed if the players are not positioned close to each other or are attempting to prevent the screen (e.g., bending over); the path of the serve is not over the players; the speed of the serve is slow; or the trajectory of the serve is high." Other ways of avoiding potential screening are for front-row players to separate and not fill the space with back-row players.

Although no player is entitled to any spot on the floor, the serving team must not take action to prevent the receiving team from seeing the contact or flight of the serve. Being unable to see the contact or flight of the serve does not, in and of itself, constitute screening. This means that receiving team players should first make reasonable attempts to position themselves to see the ball. If a receiving team player has trouble seeing the server to see the service contact and/or flight of the serve, the receiving team player is expected to adjust position but is not expected to move dramatically to be able to see the serve. If the receiving team player is blocked by one serving team player, the receiving team player is expected to move a step or so to either side to be able to see the serve. If a serving team player moves sideways to prevent a receiving team player from seeing the serve [even if the ball is not served over that player], OHSBVA rules consider screening to have occurred. NCAA rules consider this unsportsmanlike conduct and subject to sanction but, for OHSBVA – using the definition of screening in the NFHS Rules Book – the result is a screening call regardless of whether the ball is served over the player. Group screening is a different matter in terms of receiving team players ability to adjust positions to see the serve.

Group Screening

Most screening situations involve a group of players taking a position close to each other and blocking the view of the serve for receiving team passers. The receiving team is still expected to adjust positions to try to see the serve but is not required to move beyond a step or so in each direction. Some group screens involve back-row players filling in open

spaces left by front-row players at the net. This tends to be a taught screen which makes this an ethical issue in the view of the OSBVCA/OHSBVA leadership.

Ethical Commentary from OSBVCA/OHSBVA Leadership: Screening is not something that coaches are supposed to be teaching their players in high school volleyball. Taught screens are considered teaching players to try to get away with an action that is illegal and subject to penalty. Screening does sometimes occur unintentionally in terms of the coaching staff, but players are not unaware that they are forming a group screen to prevent the receiving team from seeing the serve. Because screening is a periodic issue, USAV Volleyball and NCAA/PAVO teach officials not to ignore screening, to try to deal with it by warning a team that is in a screening formation prior to service authorization (where possible) and to not wait for the receiving team to complain before addressing the issue. If the serving team is in a formation where a served ball passing over a player or grouping of players could be considered a screen, the referee is expected to observe whether the receiving team is attempting to adjust positions to see the serve. At times, the opportunity to warn the serving team may not occur until a screen has actually occurred. **In some situations, the screen may be called without warning.**

Although no player is entitled to any spot on the floor, the serving team must not take action to prevent the receiving team from seeing the contact or flight of the serve. Being unable to see the contact or flight of the serve does not, in and of itself, constitute screening, and – as noted above – the receiving team should first make reasonable attempts to position themselves to see the ball. The receiving team that attempts to adjust positions to see the serve does have a right to be able to see the serve and/or the path of the serve, and the serving team may need to take steps to avoid interfering with this right. Having said this, the referee (and umpire) should fulfill their responsibility to look at the positions of the serving team before the serve to see if a potential screen exists. The referee is responsible for following the path of the serve to see whether it went over a possible screen and, if so, determining if the serve met the conditions for a screen to be called by virtue of the ball traveling low and fast over the screen or if the serve was low and short.

What can be done to prevent screening from occurring and how concerned should officials be in terms of identifying possible screens and preventing screens through a warning before screening actually occurs? Last season, the NCAA Volleyball Rules Book strongly advised match officials to take pre-emptive action to avoid screening occurring. Under **Changes and Points of Emphasis**, officials were told to be more demonstrative in warning about screening and were advised that multiple warnings were not warranted. The “first referee” in the following section is the referee, and the “second referee” is the umpire for OHSBVA matches: “If a potential screen is noted by the first referee prior to authorization of the service, the first referee will direct the captain to approach the stand and warn the captain that a served ball over that group of players of the appropriate speed and trajectory will be called a screen. The second referee will notify the coach that the screen warning has been given.” This section works for OHSBVA. The referee should use the screening signal to alert the umpire to inform the head coach that the referee is warning the captain about screening and that the team can prevent a call by separating or bending to allow the receiving team to see the serve/path of the serve. Again, while prevention of screens is recommended, no warning is required prior to calling a screen.

FURTHER GUIDANCE TO OFFICIALS, COACHES AND PLAYERS

A couple of NFHS Case Book Situations apply to OHSBVA and offer some guidance:

NFHS CASEBOOK SITUATIONS RELATED TO SCREENING

INDIVIDUAL SCREENING

6.4.1 SITUATION A: CF on Team R claims RF on Team S, who is standing close to the net but not jumping or waving arms, is screening the CF's view of the server. **RULING:** No screening. **COMMENT:** No player on the receiving team is entitled to a specific position on the floor. If a player on the receiving team cannot see the server, the receiving team player should move. If, after the receiving team player moves, the serving team's player moves to take another position which blocks the receiving team player's view of the server, the referee shall call screening.

GROUP SCREENING

6.4.1 SITUATION B: During service, the three front-row players on the serving team are grouped together. The ball is served: (a) in a high looping trajectory; (b) over the CB and CF, who are bent at the waist; (c) fast and hard, but the referee believes the receivers could see the contact of the serve (and the path of the ball); (d) fast and hard, and the referee believes the receivers could not see the contact of the serve (or the path of the ball). **RULING:** (a), (b) and (c) are all legal, no screen, play continues; (d) is the only instance where it is judged that a screen took place. **COMMENT:** If the served ball is high and easy to react to, no screen is called, regardless of the position of the players on the serving team. If the serving team players attempt to give the receivers a visual path (by bending at the waist) to see the contact of the serve (or the path of the serve), no screen is called. When the serve is low and fast and the receivers were prevented from seeing the contact of the serve (or the path of the serve), or if a player on the serving team moves to get between the server and the receiver after the receiver has moved to see contact of the serve, the potential for calling a screen is greatest.

Additional Guidance

- C. Just prior to the serve, S-3 – a front-row player on the serving team – takes up a position at the net directly in front of R-3 who is a passer for the receiving team. R-3 has difficulty seeing the server. **Commentary:** R-3 must move. The only one-player screen that is typically called is where S-3 steps in front of R-3 after the referee's whistle for serve and after R-3 has moved. In addition, if a player is directly in front of the server and is not bent over to allow the receiving team to see service contact or the path of the serve, a low trajectory serve may result in a screen occurring. Until the ball is served, the official does not know whether screening has actually occurred. Situation D addresses the second type of individual screen.
- D. The middle blocker/hitter for the serving team playing back row is 6'4" and stands directly in front of a 5'6" defensive specialist who is serving. The receiving team cannot see the server or react quickly to a serve that is hit directly over the MB/MH unless the serve is hit with a high trajectory. **Commentary:** Screening is likely to have occurred, and officials should warn the serving team captain prior to service contact to get the MB/MH to bend over to prevent screening from occurring and from having to make the screening call. The referee should use the screening signal to show the umpire what is being discussed with the captain, so the umpire can advise the head coach in the interest of good communication and prevention. Again, until the ball is served, the referee does not know whether screening has occurred.

- E. The serving team has staggered its front-row players and filled in the spaces with two back-row players so that a group screen has been formed. The server is hidden behind the screen in such a manner that the passers for the receiving team cannot see the contact of the serve or clearly see the path of the serve from the point of service contact. The ability of any of the passers on the receiving team to take a step or two out of their preferred receiving position to see the service contact or the path of the serve is extremely limited. **Commentary:** If the serve passes low and fast or short over the screen, a screen is likely to have occurred and should be called. While a receiving team player who is passing may be required to take a step to see the server if blocked visually (initially) by a serving team player, logically this does not apply to a group screen of this type since this would essentially force all passers practically to the sidelines to see the serve.
- F. S-2, S-3 and S-4 (front-row players on the serving team) form a group in front of R-2 and R-3 (two of the primary passers for the receiving team). Team R's captain asks the referee to have the players move apart so that his players can see the server. **RULING:** It is not mandatory for the referee to ask Team S to separate but, if it doesn't delay the game, the referee may motion to the Team S players to move apart. The referee is responsible for noting a possible screen may exist and being alert to the receiving team's effort and ability to see the service path, then calling a screen if one occurs based on the direction, speed and trajectory of the serve.

GUIDE FOR OFFICIALS AND INSTRUCTIONS TO COACHES REGARDING SCREENING

Officials: Both the referee and the umpire should be aware of possible screening. Warn where possible and call where necessary. Warning when there is a screening formation prior to a screening fault occurring puts the officiating crew in a proactive position. If the referee waits for a complaint from the receiving team before issuing a warning, this gives the impression that one team can influence the decisions of the official which is something that should never occur.

Ball height, direction of the serve, trajectory and speed are all factors in calling a screen. This means the referee has to look not just to determine that the serving team is in proper position prior to authorizing the serve but also as to whether a screening formation may exist. If so, the referee may choose to warn but it is not mandatory. This leaves the referee flexibility to avoid being overly officious and introducing a problem where none may exist. If the receiving team is able to pass the ball without difficulty, the passers for the receiving team may have a sufficient view of the path of the serve. However, teams typically change positions of the players on the court for each service and each service rotation so a determination of possible screening has to occur on every serve. Regardless, the referee has to determine if the ball passed over a possible screen before screening is called. A short float up the middle may involve a screen as much as a low, fast serve that has some angle to it. A jump float that barely clears the net may also involve screening.

The "art of officiating" involves how the referee determines when to warn and when to avoid introducing a problem that might not exist. The referee not only has to determine whether a possible screen exists, but also whether the serve passed over a screen. When the receiving team's passers appear to have difficulty tracking the ball, this can help confirm that screening is occurring, but screening is not screening unless all of the conditions for a screen exist. While the referee has primary responsibility for being aware of screening, the umpire has a role, too. The umpire has a different angle to view serving team formations and can show a screening signal to the referee to alert the referee to possible screening existing, again before the receiving team complains. Partnering is the best way to go to avoid problems with screening. The umpire is not permitted to call a screen but may signal information to the referee to alert the referee to possible screening.

Coaches: You know if your team is screening. If you don't want your team called for screening, your players can separate, bend at the waist or do something to show that the serving team is respecting the right of the receiving team to see the serve. If your captain is called to the stand about screening, he should tell your players what to do to comply or risk being called for screening. When coaches become aware that screening is at issue, this is a good time to tell your team what to do to avoid the call rather than whining after a screening call is made.

Concluding Comments: The above information is intended to provide guidance to everyone regarding screening. It does not represent a directive for officials to be calling screening except where they are convinced that screening is occurring or because teams start complaining. In the best of all worlds, the match officials are aware of possible

screening before anyone complains and issue a warning that results in the serving team taking steps to prevent screening. A complaint alone should not result in screening being called. The serving team is typically capable of taking steps to prevent screening from occurring and being called.

The following is a commentary on screening from a national group of officials who blend of high-level NFHS, USAV, NCAA/PAVO and even International (FIVB) experience. Their commentary on screening is enlightening. When we were putting together a screening document that weighed and balanced the responsibilities of the serving team and the receiving team, we were trying balance the “don't wait until the receiving team complains about screening if you observe a screening formation because doing so means that you look like you're being influenced in making calls” with “don't be overly obtrusive and introduce screening if the receiving team doesn't seem to be having trouble passing the ball.” The composite response received was as follows:

“It seems like screening is pretty wide-spread at the various levels of play. That balancing act is tough, especially if you feel like addressing it and others either never look for a screen or wouldn't know a screen even if five players lined up in a wall like they were defending a free kick in soccer. I think our problems as officials are at least threefold: (a) we are at a terrible angle to judge how effective or complete the screen is; (b) the rules are vague and lend themselves to a massive amount of subjectivity; and (c) some amount of screening seems to have become an accepted part of play. I think until some sort of rule change happens (very unlikely) or an edict comes down from the governing body(ies) (still not likely), we are going to be in a difficult spot.”

With this in mind, it is incumbent upon all of us to work together to promote consistency and to try to warn where possible. On the coaching front, please be prepared to do what is necessary to avoid screening and to avoid officials having to make the call. But we will call it when screening occurs.