

BALL HANDLING 2010: OHSBVA COMMITTEE REPORT

Guidance for Ball-Handling Judgment: Tightening Up on Hands

Overall, hands are expected to be called tighter for high school volleyball than for USA Volleyball and NCAA (college women's volleyball). Boys' high school volleyball has, in the past few years somewhat followed trends in how hands were called for men's college volleyball by moving in the direction of fewer hands calls. Most observers would agree that there has been a trickle-down effect felt in high school volleyball for the last few years, especially boys' volleyball. A study of registered OHSBVA referees seemingly shows that more officiate under USAV and PAVO rules compared with those who referee OHSAA matches only. This past college women's season has seen a continued "lightening up" in terms of hands calls on second contacts where there was an athletic play involved. In previous years, college volleyball referees were asked not to call a double-hit unless the R1 could tell which hand contacted the ball first and saw the double contact rather than just seeing the result (spin, for example).

OHSBVA has now provided clearer guidance than ever before to address the overall dissatisfaction with how hands are being called over the past few years. The coaches' association (OBSVCA) is asking referees to move toward tighter ball handling, especially in terms of second and third contacts but also on deep-dish/low-to-high hands on first-balls when there is prolonged contact. As PAVO does for college women's volleyball, the OBSVCA provides guidance for officials to apply in terms of how hands should be called. The following pages reflect that guidance.

Consistency

It is generally agreed that the primary goal of every volleyball referee is to call a consistent match and, at the end of the match, have both coaches feel that the officiating was fair. The key is to call hands as the coaches are instructing the skills, with less latitude given where the R1 can see the ball contact one hand and then the other in playing action. Even first-ball contacts where the initial contact is low and the ball is pushed up and released high are to be called more severely with the distinction of a clear double-hit from the ball that is pushed through in prolonged contact. We are also asking for more consistency in terms of second and third contacts where the contacts that are called prolonged contact on a first hit have been allowed on second and third contacts. Any ball that is prolonged contact on a first hit is also prolonged contact on a second or third hit to be consistent.

Below, we are taking some of the training points below that are taught for other rule sets but have general application for OHSBVA matches:

- When discussing ball handling, we start with the actual language of the rules. The OHSBVA Rules Book states that the ball may not be handled with prolonged contact which includes the ball being lifted, pushed, held against the net, carried, caught or thrown and rolling in the hands or on the body. These actions or any other prolonged contact result in an illegal hit/contact fault being called. The rules also state that successive or multiple contacts by one player are not legal except when blocking and making first contacts. Those actions result in a double contact fault (2-hits).

Referees should strive to be consistent. Allowing play to continue unless a clear fault has occurred does NOT mean not whistling faults. It typically means calling prolonged contact only when prolonged contact has actually occurred, not mixing it up with multiple contacts (especially on the first ball over the net) and not making up calls based on anything other than site and with possible partner help when the R1 is screened or otherwise doesn't have a good look at contact.

Multiple contacts versus prolonged contact

The OBSVCA requests that all first-ball contacts involving multiple contacts be permitted and that, when in doubt, the R1 should allow play to continue. The intent is to get a more advanced distinction between an "ugly" ball contact on the first ball over the net (one which typically involves multiple contacts with a single effort to play the ball) and those plays where the ball is truly contacted for a prolonged amount of time which are illegal on first, second and third contacts. What the R1 allows as "play on" as multiple contacts on a first ball over the net SHOULD BE CALLED double-hit faults on second and third ball contacts.

Technique

To make good decisions, referees need to sight in on the body part that will contact the ball and see that low receive, high release hands play and call it. If the R1 is calling prolonged contact on the first ball over the net (serve, attack, tip, deflection off a block, etc.), the R1 needs to be prepared to make the same call on a second or third contact since prolonged contact is a fault on 1st, 2nd OR 3rd contacts. This means that if the first contact was a double hit, referees should NOT whistle a prolonged contact fault. That's where some of the inconsistency comes in that confuses coaches and teams. Sighting the body part that will next contact the ball will help make for more accurate and more consistency ball-handling calls and non-calls.

Blocks and Power Tips

Boys' volleyball typically involves strong blocks and power tips. The challenge is to only call true throws (prolonged contact on a block, probably more toward caught and thrown on a power tip but that's still prolonged contact). Referees have to have their eyes set on the part of the player's body that will contact the ball to be able to accurately, reasonably discern whether the contact was legal or not.

Training Points

- Consistency is constantly focused on as a point of emphasis. Ball-handling decisions should be consistent from team to team, player to player, game to game, and skill to skill. The rules do not state that a tip should be allowed a longer duration than a set or a net recovery. The rules also do not stipulate that a one-handed set should be allowed less duration of contact than a two-handed set.
- In order to make consistent ball-handling decisions – the R1 must focus solely on the body part that is in contact with the ball. Referees must be trained to avoid being distracted by other factors such as which player is setting (setter, opposite, or a player who doesn't typically set the ball), a player's body position, or game score. Training emphasizes that the same calls should be made whether the score is 25-24 or 16-4 or 7-6.
- One very important point is that referees should never make a ball-handling call unless they are sure a fault was committed. By applying that philosophy from the first serve,

referees would hopefully be less likely to make a marginal call early in the match that cannot also be made at a critical point.

- Referees should not make decisions based on the sound of the contact or the result of the play after the contact. Referees should be instructed not to call a double hit just because the ball was spinning after a contact. Spin alone is not sufficient criteria to judge a double contact. If it were, every forearm pass that creates spin should also be called a double contact. Most coaches and fans expect referees to whistle a set that spins a bit, so there is great pressure to include spin as part of the decision. Highly-skilled setters can usually set the ball with little or no spin. However, a slightly less-skilled execution of a set may result in some spin, without the referee actually discerning two distinct contacts – should that be whistled as a double hit? We are training that it should not be. And, holding the ball by lowering it or catching it and waiting for the hitter to get there for a quick hit should probably be called more than it is – this is truly prolonged contact by the length of time the ball is in the setter’s hands.
- Referees are cautioned to recognize that anticipation and presumption are different. A good referee tries to anticipate by looking ahead of the ball to the next contact point in order to focus properly. And, it’s not appropriate to presume that there will be a ball-handling error based on factors such as spin, body position, and so forth.
- Clinicians discuss how players may over-control the ball (prolonged contact) or under-control the ball (multiple contacts), resulting in ball-handling faults. Over-control should result in a prolonged contact call (illegal hit/contact) and can be made on any player contact. Under-control should result in a double-hit call, but this call should **NOT** be made on a block or on a first contact (unless there is a second effort to play the ball) including first contact after a block.

All of the above add up to one clear thing: The R1 should call every clear fault including tightening up on sets and also not letting a team mangle the ball or throw it over the net on the second or third hit to the opponent’s side. These plays are faults and should be called.

- Officials really do want to get it right. The problem is, at the moment, “right” is very difficult to define. Besides the different philosophies that referees bring from their respective training and experience, an additional variant is how different the contact point might look from different locations and angles. There really are times when those on the bench actually have a better view of a contact than the R1 does. However, the R1 must make a decision regarding legality of that contact based only on what he/she can see, with partner help available in terms of informal signals.
- There is a great deal of pressure on referees to meet the expectations of coaches and fans, and even the best referee can succumb to that pressure at times. Hopefully, each time officials go to a training session, they take away a greater understanding of the role of the referee in minimizing intrusion into the players’ match. Coaches need to better understand the perspective from the R1 stand, not judging solely from their own angle on a play.
- Reviewing the document entitled “Establishing Standards for Calling Hands” is important, especially for referees for whom training in calling ball handling is not as extensive as others with significantly more TRAINING and experience.