

## BALL HANDLING IN HIGH SCHOOL VOLLEYBALL

Of all the rules in Volleyball, ball handling is probably the most misunderstood. The ball is allowed to touch any part of the players' body from head to toe as long as the contact is legal. Yes, a player can kick the ball, which is a legal contact. The word JUDGEMENT is a word that officials use regularly and is a key factor when making ball handling. The word judgment is easy to say but more difficult to apply. How long can the ball rest when it makes contact? Regardless of the technique used to make contact with the ball, it is the length of time the ball is in contact with the player that determines an illegal hit. The first referee is the official on the stand and is responsible for ball handling violations.

There is no other sport that requires every touch of the ball to be judged whether or not the contact was legal except Volleyball, which makes it one of the most difficult games to officiate. Coaches, players, parents, and fans watch and play. In USAV and NCAA, the ball-handling directive specifically allows referees to be less severe in their judgment on a team's second and third contact when a player is making a challenging or spectacular play on the ball. High school volleyball follows the NFHS rules which do not provide that allowance. NFHS rules state that the contact must be hit cleanly, cannot be caught, thrown, visibly come to rest or involve prolonged contact. Consistency is the most important factor when making these judgment calls. The referee must set a level of ball handling that they can maintain throughout the match.

Multiple contacts are permitted on the team's first contact, regardless if the ball coming over the net was attacked, tipped, set, served, or a forearm pass. This includes a ball rebounding from one body part to another as long as that is part of a single effort to play the ball. The referee has a difficult job as they have to allow a ball to hit the right hand followed by the left hand and hold their whistle with a no call, on a first ball over contact. Then the very next play by another player trying to set the ball does the same exact action resulting in a double hit fault. This is difficult for the officials and has to be confusing to parents and fans.

If the player contacts the ball behind her head and brings the ball forward, it is most likely illegal. Another criterion that helps officials with illegal contact of the ball is if the player contacts the ball on one side of the body and the ball is released on the other side. This contact is illegal.

If only this game was a black and white game, illegal or legal, it would be much easier to call. However, some contacts fall into the "gray area" that requires the first referee to make a decision of whether to call or not to call. That is the question the official must answer and act within seconds. Officials always strive to call the game fairly and consistently for the teams that are playing.

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