Volleyball scoring cheat sheet

Rally scoring, set and match formats, and the calls that change the score. By Ryan Walker

The basics

- **Every rally scores.** The team that wins the rally gets the point, whoever served.
- **Win the rally on their serve** and you also take the serve and rotate one spot clockwise (a side-out).
- **Sets go to 25, win by 2.** No cap: 24-24 carries on until someone leads by 2. A deciding set goes to 15, also by 2.

Formats by level

Level	Match	Points per set	Deciding set	Switch sides in deciding set
International (FIVB)	Best of 5	25	15	Yes, when a team reaches 8
College (NCAA women)	Best of 5	25	15	No
High school (NFHS)	Best of 5	25	15	No (state may change)
High school, best of 3	Best of 3	25	25	No
Club (USA Volleyball)	Usually best of 3	25	15	At 8, only if teams switch between sets
Beach (FIVB)	Best of 3	21	15	Every 7 points (every 5 in set 3)

Points scored without the ball landing (point to the opponent)

- **Overlap at the serve:** a player out of order with a neighbour when the server contacts the ball.
- **Net touch** between the antennae while playing the ball.
- **Four hits:** a team touches the ball four times. A block touch does not count as one of the three.
- **Back-row attack:** a back-row player completes an attack above net height from in front of the 3 m line.
- **Libero attack:** the libero completes an attack hit with the ball entirely above the net, from anywhere.
- **Service faults:** 8 seconds to serve (5 in US high school), foot on the end line, serve into the net or out.
- **Screening:** the serving team hides the server or the ball's path (FIVB also bans raised hands during the serve).

Not a fault (play on)

- **A serve that clips the net** and lands in the court is in play.
- **Blocked ball, then three more touches:** legal, because the block does not count as a team hit.
- **Any body part,** feet included, can play the ball.

Quick answers

- **21 or 25?** 25 indoors, 21 on the beach. Deciding sets go to 15.
- **Best of 3 or 5?** Best of 5 in college, international and most high school. Best of 3 in club, beach and many youth events.
- **Who serves first in the next set?** The serve alternates between sets. A new coin toss decides the deciding set.

Cards, delays and a running score

Which sanctions give a point, plus a tracker for keeping score yourself.

Cards and delays (FIVB 2025-2028, Rules 16 and 21)

Sanction	Card	Score effect
Warning	Verbal, then yellow card	No point
Penalty	Red card	Point and serve to the opponent
Expulsion	Red + yellow together	No point; player leaves for the rest of the set
Disqualification	Red + yellow separately	No point; player leaves for the rest of the match
Delay warning	Yellow card on the wrist	No point (first delay in the match)
Delay penalty	Red card on the wrist	Point and serve to the opponent

Sanctions stay in force for the whole match. US rulebooks use the same card colours; check your level for details.

Running score: slash a number each time a team scores

Set 1	**A**	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
	B	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
Set 2	**A**	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
	B	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
Set 3	**A**	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
	B	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
Set 4	**A**	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
	B	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
Set 5	**A**	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
	B	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30

Set point, match point and the end of a set

- **Set point:** the leading team is one point from winning the set (24-22, or 26-25 after a tie).
- **Match point:** set point in a set that would also win the match.
- **25-24 is not over.** Neither is 15-14 in a deciding set. The set ends only with a 2-point lead.

Coach's tip: after every rally, ask two questions. Who scored? Who serves next?
Under rally scoring the answer to both is always the same team.