

Briefing Note on 4-a-side schools volleyball in Suffolk

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Intended audience

- PE teachers / volleyball coaches at schools participating in Suffolk PE & Sports Network volleyball events (SPESN)
- Suffolk Volleyball Association clubs

Background

Published rules in Suffolk & notes on implementation

- Suffolk VA currently has resources for schools [published](#), including
 - 4-a-side positional rules based on the FIVB 6-a-side rules from 2021-22 and earlier
 - A slide showing how a team could play with a single dedicated setter (positional options)
 - No restrictions on back-court players (briefing notes)
 - Teams could elect to use “official volleyball substitutions” (like 6-a-side) or roll-on, roll-off
- Some teams have been playing with players in specialist positions and staying in those positions after winning back serve; they’ve only been taking it in turns to serve but standing where they like the rest of the time.
- In light of FIVB relaxation of six-a-side positional rules, no positional faults were called in 2025 SPESN inter-school events, despite the above.
- When explaining how to officiate:
 - Tracking rotation has never been explained as a role for any of the officials
 - For squads of four players, we’d designate first ref plus two line-judges with a single person acting as scorer/second ref

National context

- In 2023 Volleyball England (VE) launched Volley3s (for school Years 7 & 8) and [Volley4s](#) (for school Years 9 & 10).
 - The rules for both include:
 - The server is a backcourt player
 - For squads with more than four players: Compulsory rotating substitutions when a team wins back the right to serve
 - Serving team rotates after winning three consecutive points but continues serving
 - Serving team gives the ball to the opposition, after winning six consecutive points but the score doesn't change
 - No time outs
 - The officiating signals listed include positional / rotational fault for Volley4s, but not for Volley3s
 - There is no clarity regarding:
 - What it means to be a backcourt player when receiving – can they be in line or in front of any of the other players when ball is tossed for serve?
 - What constitutes a positional fault
- In 2025 [Volley4s "Court Diagrams"](#) were added to VE's online learning platform covering a range of scenarios and tactics. They don't cover switching but show options where player at front-right is setter and scenarios where player at front-middle is setter. These appear to be designed to encourage teams to problem solve, think about different situations and develop volleyball brains rather than just have one fixed area to defend throughout each point.

Factors to consider when deciding rules to apply

- Few schools in Suffolk have specialist volleyball teachers. Therefore, to keep things simple, in the past we have chosen to run 4-a-side events for all high school / VI form / college students.
- Most events operate over four badminton courts simultaneously.
 - There is insufficient space for score tables; where possible we use [BOARDEE wearable scoreboards](#)
 - A single visiting teacher may bring up to four teams and they could all be playing / officiating simultaneously; a host teacher could have six teams; there's therefore often little adult supervision for each team
- Many high-performance coaches do not want players to specialise prematurely; the regular rotation specified for Volley3s & 4s appears encourage players to play in all areas of the court.
- However, for those who select volleyball at GCSE, there is some encouragement to have specialised positions and some exam boards accept 4-a-side for "full context" component of assessment

Future developments from Volleyball England

- In September 2025, Volleyball England launched a "Regional Junior Competitions Development - 5 Year Plan 2025-2030" and a consultation on the vision.
 - The proposed action plan for year 3, i.e. 2027-28 included:
 - Each region to run a minimum of four U15 4v4 competitions annually
 - At least one county level event per year will decentralise access and reduce travel time.
- To seek clarity on rules:
 - Andrew responded to the consultation asking whether there will be reception line-up rules and acknowledging some teams want to play with a dedicated setter.
 - Andrew followed-up asking VE whether the vision had been refined:

Feedback received through the consultation has helped inform the ongoing development of the vision and its implementation priorities. While the overall strategic direction remains unchanged, a number of areas have been refined to reflect stakeholder feedback and emerging priorities.

One area currently under development is the proposed Regional Junior Development Network, which is intended to support greater collaboration between regions through regular meetings, shared resources, development updates, and the sharing of best practice. We had originally hoped to progress this work sooner; however, timelines have been adjusted while we await the outcome of a CEV Solidarity Funding application. If successful, this funding would provide additional resource to support delivery and allow greater focus on identified priority areas.

As work progresses, further updates on refinements to the vision and implementation plans will be shared with stakeholders.

- In response to a separate question:

Some initiatives are already underway, while others, including the proposed Regional Junior Development Network, are dependent on additional resource and external funding decisions before they can be fully implemented.

- Specifically, regarding clarity for rules:

As part of the ongoing review and implementation process, we will consider whether further guidance, clarification, or rule refinements are required to support consistent understanding and application across the game.

Any proposed changes would be developed in consultation with relevant stakeholders and communicated through the appropriate competition and development channels.

Given: "We had originally hoped to progress this work sooner; however, timelines have been adjusted while we await the outcome of a CEV Solidarity Funding application", we shouldn't assume the "year 3 competitions" will commence in 2027-28.

Rules for SPESN inter-school events 2026-27 & beyond

Context and aims

- We do not anticipate receiving clarity from VE regarding 4-a-side rules ahead of 2026-27 season
- Moving closer to Volley4s rules ahead of introduction of VE competitions is desirable
- We cannot make rules too complex; our events are largely officiated by inexperienced officials (players refereeing their peers during a game off)
- If it enables novice officials to apply the rules correctly, rules with tighter positioning requirements than the current FIVB 6-a-side rules should be prioritised over encouraging flexibility to aid specialisation

Proposal

This will be considered at the Suffolk VA AGM on Monday 13th July, online via Webex from 8:15pm. It will be considered at the start of the meeting to allow those involved in schools volleyball but not the rest of the association's activities to join for just this item.

The following Volley4s rules which have not previously been applied will be adopted for the 2026-27 academic year:

- The server is a backcourt player
- For squads with five or six players: Compulsory rotating substitutions when a team wins back the right to serve
- Serving team rotates after winning three consecutive points but continues serving
- Serving team gives the ball to the opposition, after winning six consecutive points but the score doesn't change
- No time outs

In addition, since positional faults should be indicated by officials, the following will be used to explain positional faults:

One player in each team is considered backcourt in each rotation

- The serving team's server is backcourt.
- The receiving team's most recent server is backcourt, except when that team has not yet served. In that case, the player who will be last in their rotational order to serve is backcourt.

Backcourt players cannot block or attack the ball above the height of the net from inside the front court.

Rotation determines permitted court positions at the moment the server tosses the ball

- Each team must maintain a fixed rotation order throughout a set/game and rotate clockwise when it is a new player's turn to serve
- The receiving team's most recent server must start further from the net than the player two places ahead of them in the rotation.

After the serve is contacted, players may move freely.

To aid application

- We will no longer prioritise line judges over a dedicated second-ref, but squads of five will still have line judges
- Scorer will be asked to keep track of how many consecutive serves a player has won
- Teams will be required to hand an ordered list of their players to second ref prior to each set / game. Clipboards will be provided to clip these to. Second ref to hold thumb against player's name who has served most recently until a new server is due. At that point they should tell serving team who it is to serve.