



Sport for Life

Ontario Volleyball Association
Youth Club Competition Review
Final Report

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1.0 Executive Summary

1.1 Project Description and Deliverables

In 2024, Sport for Life (S4L) was engaged by the Ontario Volleyball Association (OVA) to conduct a thorough review of youth club indoor volleyball for ages 12U to 18U in light of recent extraordinary increases in registrations and the accompanying pressures on staff capacity, facilities, and competition delivery. The key deliverable of the project is to propose adjustments to OVA’s competition structures and systems that accommodate growth, improve efficiency, address affordability, and enhance the participant experience—aligned with Long-Term Development principles.

The OVA Competition Review followed a detailed work plan that was developed in collaboration with the OVA staff and the Indoor Volleyball Development Committee (IVDC). A member survey was distributed to OVA members, including athletes, parents, coaches, referees, and club leaders, which generated over 1700 responses. Based on themes gathered from survey responses and consultation with the IVDC, Sport for Life conducted focus groups to generate and refine recommendations, which were outlined in an Interim Report. Remaining steps include presentation of final recommendations to OVA staff and the IVDC, development of implementation plans and specific resources/training to support the launch of the new OVA competition structure, and completion of the Final Report.

1.2 Recommendations

The OVA competition structure has many strong attributes and is well supported by the majority of participants. To better support athlete development, club sustainability, and organizational capacity, Sport for Life recommends that OVA adopt a new two-stream competition structure. This approach distinguishes athlete aspirations and competition intensity while preserving inclusivity and scalability across the province.

Core Recommendation: Two-Stream Competition Structure

Establish two distinct divisions with clear developmental and structural alignment:

- **Provincial Division/Stream (ages 14–18):**
For athletes motivated by social engagement, sport-for-life values, and multi-sport participation. Season to run from December to May with 1–3 practices/week and 2–4 tournaments/year. This Provincial Division/Stream approach aligns with the *Competitive for Life* stage of Long-Term Development (LTD).
- **National Division/Stream (ages 14–18):**
For athletes on performance pathways aiming for post-secondary, national, or professional volleyball. Season to run from November to May with 2–4+ training sessions/week and 4–8 competitions/year. This National Division/Stream approach aligns with *Train to Train* and *Learn to Compete* LTD stages.

Naming Note: To avoid misperceptions, terms like “high performance” and “recreational” are replaced with “National” and “Provincial” divisions or streams to more accurately reflect the intended competitive objectives of each stream.

Structural Enhancements to Support Two-Stream Model

The new competition model will be supported through:

- **Optimized scheduling:** More efficient facility use and resource allocation.
- **Age-appropriate season lengths:** Shorter seasons for younger athletes to improve retention, recovery, and multi-sport balance.
- **Tiering refinement:** Better reflection of team skill levels and recognition at all stages.
- **Rule modifications:** Align rules and formats with LTD stages (e.g., Smashball, best-of-5 matches).
- **Differentiated pricing:** Reflecting service levels and venue quality.
- **Staffing restructure:** Regional competition coordinators to support delivery.
- **Key performance indicators (KPIs):** Tracking of competition quality, participation, satisfaction, and staff optimization.

Additional Internal & External Recommendations

Internal Focus:

A. OVA Operations:

- a. Review and redefine OVA’s role and target audience.
- b. Streamline operations through an integrated digital competition system.
- c. Create an ‘innovation working group’.
- d. Improve communication and transparency with members.
- e. Support climate action via team travel analysis.

B. Coaching:

- a. Invest in coach development, recruitment, and feedback systems.
- b. Consider free introductory certifications.

C. Athletes

- a. Seek to stage more regional events to lessen travel and costs
- b. Avoid play on Sundays for teams with significant travel distances, where possible
- c. Continue holding events in good quality venues (space, atmosphere, seating, floor, lighting)

External Focus:

● Events & Scheduling:

- Balance one- and two-day events.
- Increase large venue usage and regional rotations.
- Advocate for moving OFSAA girls' volleyball to the fall.

- Pilot mini-leagues and festival formats.
- **Facilities:**
 - Enhance venue booking processes and prioritize top-tier sites for the National stream.
- **Resources:**
 - Create a Youth Competition Manual (YCM) for parents.
 - Expand mental health supports, skill-building resources, and regional camps.
 - Facilitate mutual understanding between referees and coaches.
- **Officiating:**
 - Standardize referee development and expectations.
 - Provide notice of referee assignment in a more timely manner
 - Improve communication and information sharing with officials
 - Further support the development and protection of young referees
 - Focus on recruitment of new officials (parents, students)
 - Provide more feedback and ongoing education/evaluation of referees
- **Behavioural Expectations:**
 - Update and enforce code of conduct policies through diverse formats.
 - Partner with Volleyball Canada to produce standardized parent behaviour videos.
- **Competition Format & Delivery:**
 - Continue to allow older teams to “play up” as appropriate.
 - Introduce diverse tournament and league formats.
 - Tailor Ontario Championships formats by division and LTD alignment.
 - Enhance recognition efforts across all levels.
 - Further explore best practices from other provinces and U.S. volleyball models.
 - Encourage clubs to operate **House Leagues** (culminating in ‘regional festivals’) and to host more local competitions

These recommendations position OVA to deliver a modern, flexible, and developmentally aligned competition structure. The proposed two-stream model honors both competitive excellence and lifelong sport participation while enabling more effective resource management, athlete support, and organizational growth. These recommendations focus on maintaining quality and reducing barriers (e.g., cost, travel), and should be introduced purposefully and coordinated with a comprehensive communication strategy.

2.0 Competition Review - Background and Process

Competition Definitions

The following are definitions to ensure that readers and implementers of this report have a consistent understanding of key terms.

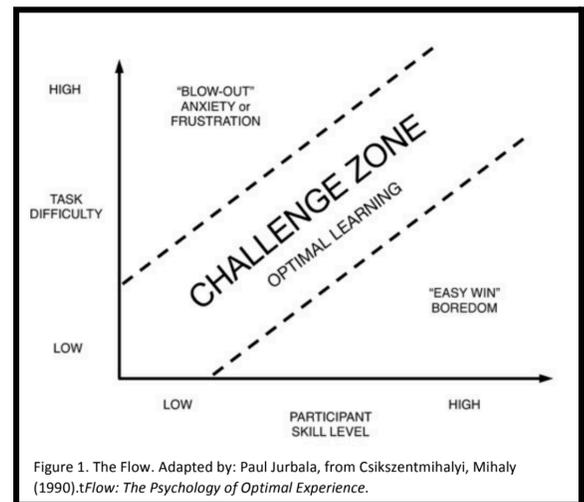
Competition Review is the analysis of competition experience, structure, rules, and calendar to determine whether they support the athlete development pathway outlined in the Long-Term Development framework.

Competition Restructuring is the process of selectively changing the competition experience, structure, rules and calendar to address the issues and optimize the role of competition in serving athlete development. A primary goal of review and restructuring is to make competitions meaningful for more athletes.

Meaningful competition provides values-based competition experiences that support learning, reinforce the development of stage-specific skills and abilities, and match competitors so results are relatively close and unpredictable (limit blow-outs).

Meaningful Competition

- **Meaningful Competition is aligned with shared and agreed-upon values.** Values-based sport is the foundation of meaningful competition. Culture, belonging, and safety are embedded and intentional.
- **Meaningful Competition provides experiences that support learning for competitors.** It supports a “we can get better” attitude that encourages athletes to improve during and after the event.
- **Meaningful competitions are structured to reinforce the development of LTD stage-specific skills and abilities. The expected level of performance matches the competitor's skill level.** Competitors are able to perform and test the skills they have learned and practised in the training environment.
- **Meaningful competitions** lead to relatively close and unpredictable results. Competitors are matched with others of a similar level of ability and challenged to be the best they can be at that moment in time. They believe they have a chance for success and remain fully engaged throughout the competition.
- **Meaningful competition is holistically athlete-centred, coach-led, and system-supported.** Competition contributes to the positive holistic development of all athletes. Coaches are responsible for maximizing the value of the competition by intentionally selecting competitions and setting appropriate competition goals matched to the stage and ability of the athlete. The sport system, including sport organizations, event organizers, coaches, and officials, is responsible for defining competition formats, rules, schedules, and eligibility to support the objectives of meaningful competition.



3.0 Current OVA Competition Structure

The current competition structure of the Ontario Volleyball Association (OVA) is designed to support athlete development across various stages of Long-Term Development (LTD). Key features of the existing environment include:

Tournament Volume:

The OVA stages over 750 regular-season events each year, tailored to 7 age groups and competitive levels. These tournaments provide over 14,000 athletes with opportunities to develop skills, compete meaningfully, and engage with the volleyball community. The tiered system in place is to manage competitive balance (e.g., Premier, Select, Championship, Trillium Green, Trillium White divisions for regular season events to avoid blowouts, and using the regional-based model for the Trillium level teams helps keep travel and costs minimized for the teams in these 2 development divisions).

Tournament Formats:

- **One-Day tournament format**
Most tournaments follow a streamlined one-day '9 teams on 3 courts' format, which is valued for its cost-efficiency and family-friendliness. Teams typically participate in round-robin matches followed by playoffs, which, along with the promotion and relegation system in each of 7 age classes and genders, helps ensure meaningful competitive opportunities for all in the regular season.
- **Two-Day tournament format**
Two-day tournaments allow for more matches and a greater competitive balance. With a more structured schedule and spaced match play, this format helps teams test their level, refine their performance, and improve over the course of the year.
- **Provincial Championships**
The OVA Provincial Championships bring together teams from across Ontario to compete in a multi-day event that determines National rankings as well as competition opportunities for athletes of all ages and motivations. These championships feature multiple divisions and tiers in each division to ensure fair competition and a memorable experience for all participants.
- **Grand Prix tournaments**
Grand Prix (GP) events are designed for top-tier 16U to 18U teams seeking elite competition. These tournaments feature a select number of teams and follow a structured format, ensuring high-intensity matchups that contribute to provincial seeding and rankings. The OVA has 2-day Grand Prix Qualifiers (GPQ) for the top 12 teams. The top 8 finishers of GPQ's make the GP. The goal of these events are to expose teams to a highly competitive environment and place emphasis on rest and recovery, as well as scouting and planning. Only the top 8 Ontario teams for boys and girls make these events.

Competition Formats:

- **Smashball:**

Aimed at introducing children aged 6 -12 to the sport of volleyball, Smashball uses low nets, simplified rules (bounce, catch, and throw), and various competition formats (1v1, 2v2, etc) and events (festivals) at local levels to maximize fun and instill a love of the game.
- **4v4 Rallyball format:**

For athletes aged 12 or under, the 4v4 format enhances skill development, maximizes touches, and encourages teamwork. This smaller court format allows for more meaningful gameplay experiences while reinforcing fundamental volleyball techniques in a fun, engaging way.
- **Triple ball for younger age groups:**

Triple Ball is employed at the younger age levels (e.g., 13U) to prioritize skill development and gameplay understanding—this modified format alternates between coach-served and athlete-served balls, creating longer rallies and more game-like situations. This format has been shown to result in more touches by players; therefore, it uses the time available to increase skills more efficiently.
- **Fair play rules:**

Younger age groups follow "Fair Play" rules to ensure equitable court time for all athletes, promoting inclusion and well-rounded skill development. Specifically, 4v4, 6v6, and TLS Girls and boys all season, 15U Boys and girls for pool play only, including Ontario Championships and 16U boys and girls for pool play matches only in the Trillium divisions at regular season tournaments only/not including OCs.
- **Volleyball Canada rules for 14U to 18U age groups:**

As athletes progress, tournaments transition to traditional volleyball rules, following Volleyball Canada (VC) regulations. The standard 6v6 format is used from U14 through U18, emphasizing competitive play, tactical development, and advanced skill refinement.

Performance Rankings

- **Seeding process:**

A seeding system ensures balanced competition. Teams, in their gender and age group, are ranked initially based on their performance in the previous Ontario Championships, and adjustments are made throughout the season to reflect changes in skill levels, physical development, and team performance. There are 14 rankings for different ages/genders, which rank over 1200 teams.
- **Ranking and tiering divisions:**

To maintain fairness and ensure that teams compete at the appropriate level, they are placed in tiers or divisions based on their performance rankings. There are regular opportunities for promotion or relegation between divisions, which maintains fairness and maximizes meaningful competition as teams compete at the appropriate level.

- **Playing Up:**

Teams at all levels are currently allowed to "play up" in higher age divisions, enabling them to seek more competition, face increased challenges, and enhance their development. However, guidelines are in place to ensure that this practice does not compromise the integrity of competition.

- **Community and inclusivity:**

The OVA fosters a supportive environment by promoting sportsmanship and respect among players, coaches, and spectators. Efforts are made to ensure accessibility for all, including policies that support the participation of lower-ranked teams (e.g., Trillium events that are regionally based and ensure that teams aren't travelling as far to limit travel costs where possible and reduce barriers of entry into the sport).

Developmental Pathways:

Tournaments are structured according to LTD principles, encouraging athletes to develop technical, tactical, and interpersonal skills.

Work Plan and Process

The OVA Competition Review project followed a detailed work plan with defined steps and timelines:

1. Working Group Formation & Plan Validation
 - a. Establish a dedicated working group to guide the review.
 - b. Confirm the project scope, objectives, and timelines.
2. Consultation & Environmental Scan
 - a. Engage stakeholders for initial feedback.
 - b. Examine the environment of club volleyball in Ontario and other jurisdictions.
3. Data Gathering & Analysis
 - a. Develop and circulate surveys to collect community input.
 - b. Hold focus group discussions and perform a gap analysis.
4. Recommendation Development
 - a. Synthesize findings into short-term and long-term proposals.
 - b. Present recommendations to the Board.
5. Implementation Strategy
 - a. Create a phased plan with clear timelines, milestones, and budgets.
 - b. Train OVA staff to oversee and manage the new competition structure.
6. Ongoing Evaluation
 - a. Conduct additional surveys or interviews if needed.
 - b. Refine and action long-term implementation plans.

Committees/Stakeholders

The OVA Competition Review process involves multiple committees and stakeholders, each playing a specific role in supporting and guiding the project. Sport for Life met with OVA staff to identify key background documents and to understand the context in which the competition review will take place. A small Working Group consisting of key OVA staff and a Board member was formed to review and validate the project work plan, provide ongoing advice, and map out the timelines and plans ahead.

OVA Working Group

This committee is responsible for providing valuable background information and context, collaborating closely with Sport for Life (S4L) staff throughout the review process, and presenting the OVA Competition Review to other committees. Their efforts focus on ensuring alignment and communication between all involved parties.

Indoor Volleyball Development Committee (IVDC)

The IVDC has 11 members representing various indoor volleyball clubs across the province. This committee acts as a key advisory body, providing input and guidance to ensure the competition model aligns with the needs of athletes, coaches, and clubs.

Board of Directors

The Board of Directors has been regularly informed about the competition review process and its outcomes to maintain awareness and oversight at the organizational level.

Members and Stakeholders

Feedback from members (athletes, coaches, referees, parents) and stakeholders was gathered through surveys and focus groups to provide data for analysis and inform decision-making. This collaborative approach ensures that diverse perspectives are considered in shaping the future of OVA competitions.

4.0 Environment and Engagement

During the initiation phase of this competition review, an environmental scan of other sports and formats took place. See [Appendix C](#).

Key findings from the Environmental Scan of other sports and formats are below:

The environmental scan of Ontario Soccer, Tennis, Hockey, and Basketball provided valuable insights into how other sports structure their development pathways, high-performance programs, and competition models. It is worth noting that while there are some takeaways, this scan confirms that OVA's current format is largely in line with what other sports are doing.

1. Development Pathways and Competition Structure

- Ontario Soccer and Tennis Ontario use tiered competition structures, ensuring that players compete at the appropriate skill level.
 - Ontario Soccer and Tennis Ontario uses modified small-sided games and equipment for younger players to encourage skill development.
 - Ontario Soccer and Tennis Ontario use "no standings, no scores" for younger age groups to focus on learning rather than winning.
2. High-Performance Programs and Athlete Development
 - League1 Ontario (Soccer), OSBA (Basketball), and the OHL (Hockey) provide clear bridges between provincial and national/international play.
 - Ontario Basketball and Ontario Soccer have structured academy systems for elite player identification and development.
 - Ontario Basketball and Hockey Ontario have player development guidelines to limit early specialization and promote multi-sport play for younger athletes.
 3. Competition Delivery and Scheduling
 - Ontario Soccer and Hockey Ontario have regional leagues and tournaments to lower costs and travel time for families.
 - Ontario Basketball and Hockey Ontario offer one-day and multi-day event structures based on competition level and travel constraints.
 - Tennis Ontario and Hockey Ontario use year-round training facilities and school partnerships to address facility shortages.
 4. Policies and Player Wellness
 - Hockey Ontario and Ontario Basketball have mandatory coaching certifications and structured coach education programs.
 - Hockey Ontario mandates rest periods to prevent athlete burnout.
 - Soccer Ontario enforces equal playing time at younger ages to promote skill development.

The learnings from Ontario's other sports reinforce the importance of structured competition tiers, accessible regional play, early skill development, coach education, and player well-being.

Community Engagement

The Working Group created an Engagement Plan to identify key themes and issues for inquiry and compiled a list of stakeholders to receive an initial survey to gather feedback and insights from major participant groups in the OVA community. The survey was created, tested, and made available to the public in November/December 2024.

Survey Distribution:

- **Recipients:**
The survey targeted athletes, parents, coaches, club leaders, and referees, ensuring that a wide range of perspectives were captured.
- **Circulation Channels:**

- The survey was promoted through the OVA website and OVA events during November and December 2024.
- QR codes were publicized on social media and an email blast to maximize survey participation.

Focus Groups

To build on the preliminary themes and findings, specific focus groups and targeted sessions were conducted with Club Directors, Club Presidents, coaches, referees, and athletes. These focus groups sought to ensure that all voices are represented, providing a comprehensive understanding of the community's perspectives and needs.

By combining broad survey distribution with targeted consultations and focus groups, the OVA and Sport for Life aimed to create an inclusive and comprehensive competition review approach.

Consultation with the IVDC

The IVDC was engaged throughout the survey development process to provide expert input and ensure that critical aspects of Ontario competition were addressed.

Survey Results

1,767 people responded to Survey 1. Of these survey results, 1,000 were partially completed and 767 were fully completed. Preliminary analysis and observations informed the development of this report. See [Appendix D](#) for findings about the survey.

Below are areas that OVA is performing well and should continue to implement and focus on. For example, survey responses indicated high satisfaction with:

- Provision of competitions for thousands of players,
- Various competition formats (e.g., 4v4, Triple ball, Fair play, etc.)
- Events at large-scale facilities (i.e., convention centres)
- Provincial Championships being a festival-like setting
- Allowing teams to “play up”
- Offering multiple tiers and divisions to meet the developmental needs of all participating athletes
- Providing social and team camaraderie aspects of volleyball

Note: Feedback in the survey included responses that are out of the scope of this competition review, such as coach recruitment and training, and the system of tryouts.

The breakdown of roles for all survey respondents is as follows:

- Parent: 865 (60%)
- Coach: 239 (16%)
- Athlete: 223 (15%)
- Referee: 70 (5%)
- Club leader: 29 (2%)

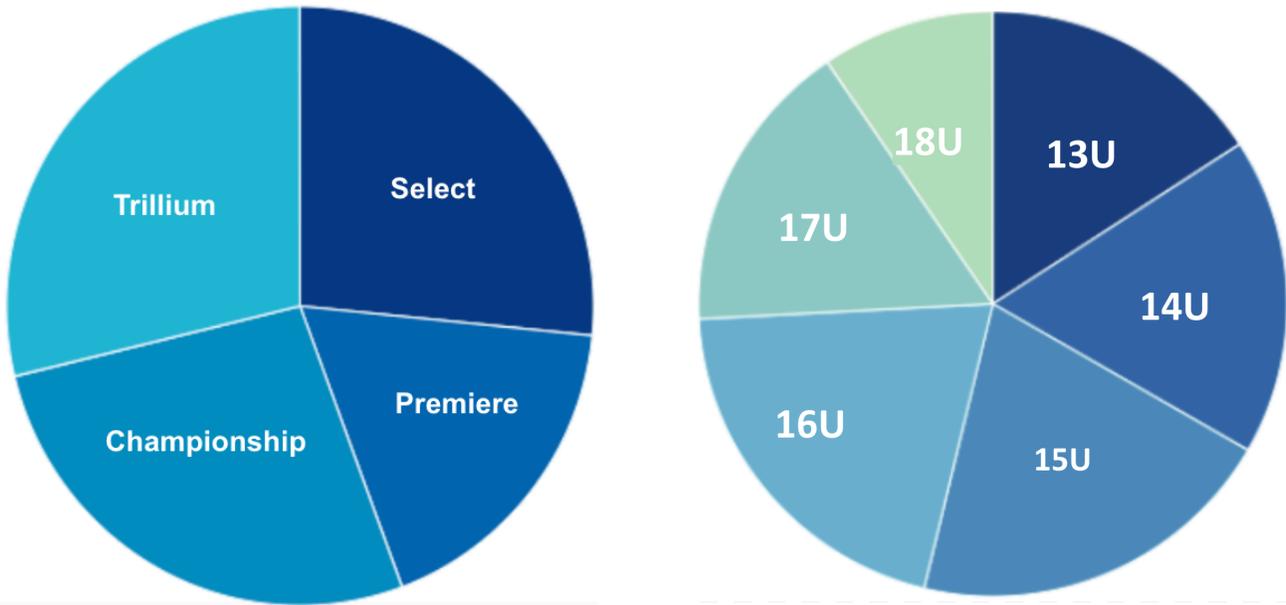
As seen below the survey attracted responses representing a good range of experiences:

- Less than 1 year: 149 responses (10%)
- 1 year: 120 responses (8%)
- 2 years: 245 responses (17%)
- 3 years: 252 responses (17%)
- 4 years: 158 responses (11%)
- 5 years: 83 responses (6%)
- More than 5 years: 446 responses (31%)

The gender breakout of athletes (as reported by themselves or their parents) was 78% Girls and 22% Boys.

The responses regarding the level of competition and age were fairly evenly distributed:

Level of Competition and Age



Key Insights

The following key insights were identified during the comprehensive survey analysis. While these insights do not have associated recommendations, they provide valuable and informative data.

1. Factors contributing to growth

- Cost-effectiveness
 - Volleyball is perceived as a more affordable option compared to many other sports, making it accessible to a wider range of participants.
- Accessibility and inclusivity
 - The sport accommodates players of all skill levels and backgrounds, fostering a positive environment that emphasizes respect, teamwork, and camaraderie.
- Player development and team dynamics
 - Volleyball attracts participants due to its strong emphasis on both individual skill development and teamwork, creating a balanced, competitive, and social experience.
- Increased visibility
 - Through targeted promotion and rising popularity, the sport has gained greater exposure in schools and communities, leading to increased participation.
- Reduced injury risk

- Compared to contact-heavy sports, volleyball is considered a safer option with a lower risk of injuries, making it an appealing choice for athletes and parents.

Attractiveness of volleyball

- Family influence
 - Many respondents were drawn to volleyball due to family history or relatives actively involved in the sport.
- School and community exposure
 - Many individuals were exposed to volleyball through school programs and community leagues, which has played a significant role in joining a club team.
- Positive environment
 - Respondents appreciated the sense of teamwork and connection fostered in volleyball.
 - The sport’s inclusive, supportive culture was appealing to families.
- Accessibility and low barrier to entry
 - Volleyball is seen as accessible, with fewer financial or logistical barriers compared to other sports.

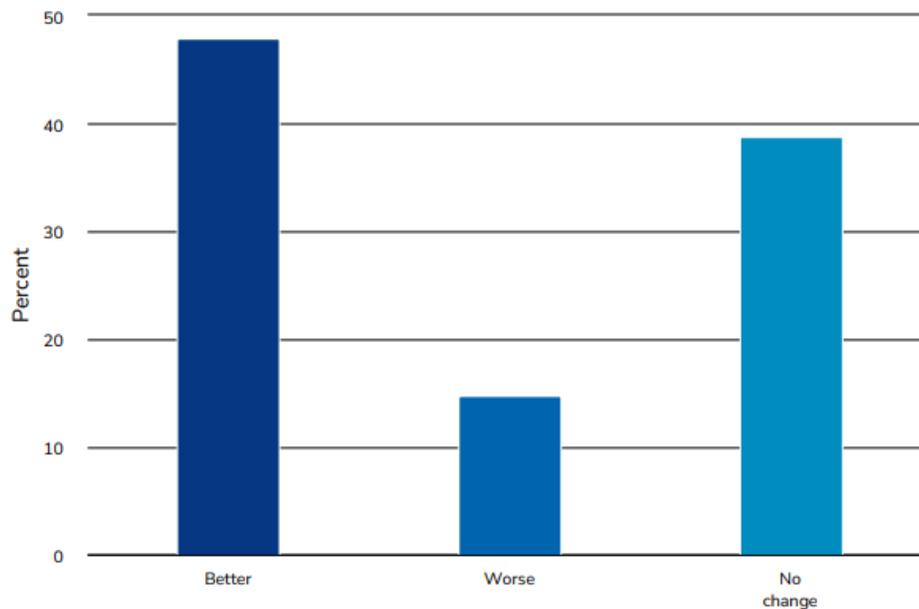
Overall enjoyment of competing at OVA competitions

Athletes expressed high levels of enjoyment competing in OVA competitions, with the majority of responses providing top ratings of 4 and 5 (where 1 is poor and 5 is excellent), reflecting a very strong overall positive experience.

Value	Percent	Responses
2	1.2%	1
3	9.3%	8
4	46.5%	40
5	43.0%	37
Totals: 86		

2. Competition delivery

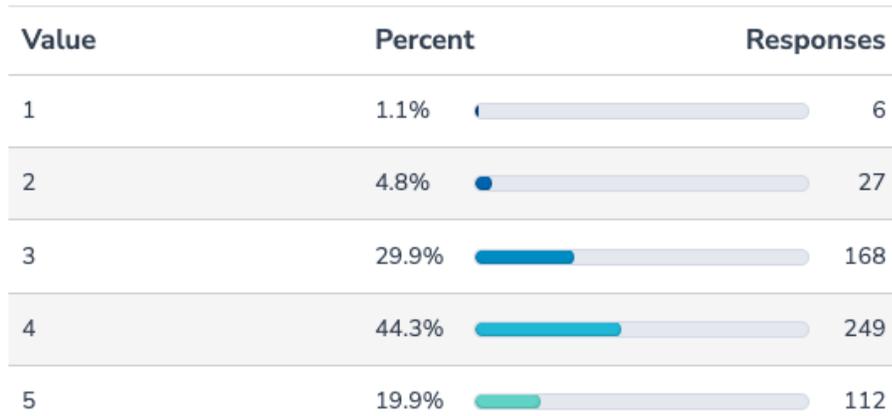
Coaches and Club Leaders expressed positive feelings about the quality of OVA competition delivery. When asked if the quality of OVA competition delivery has changed in recent years, the majority agreed that it has changed for the better or remained the same.



The experience at major events like the Ontario Championships and Convention Center events was rated very positive (where 1 is poor and 5 is excellent).

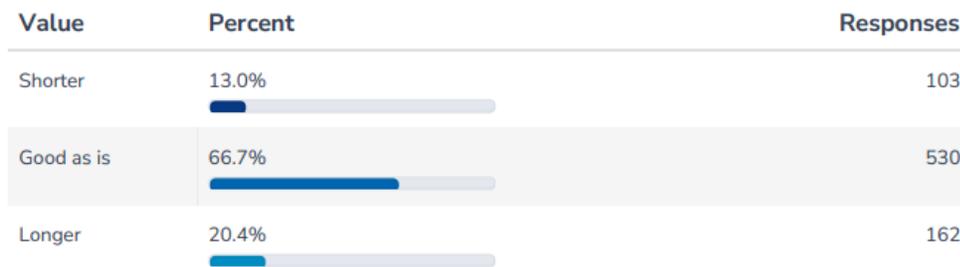
Value	Percent	Responses
1	1.5%	12
2	1.3%	11
3	17.4%	144
4	46.7%	386
5	33.1%	273

The quality of regular-season events delivered by host clubs was fairly high (where 1 is poor and 5 is excellent).



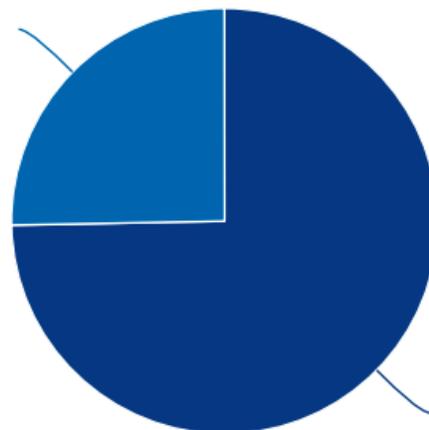
3. Length of season

Current length of OVA’s indoor season is supported by a majority of respondents; however, survey responses showed concern for burnout, injury, and retention.



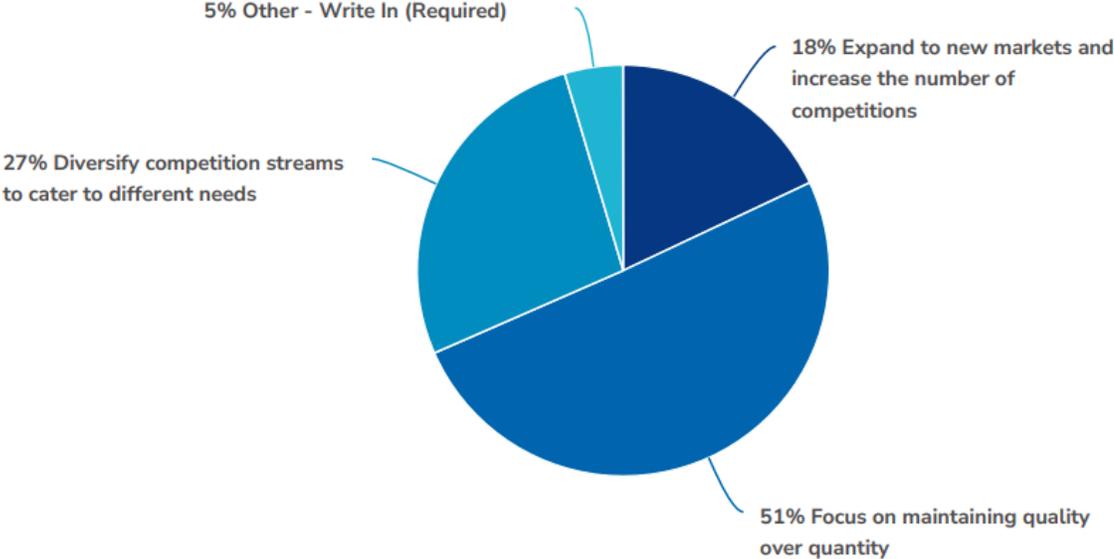
4. Distinct Streams of Competition

25% No, the current structure is adequate.



75% Yes, creating more distinct pathways or competition streams would help manage growth and maintain quality.

5. Areas of focus in the next five years (competition)



4.0 Summary of Recommendations

The principal purpose of this Competition Review was to address the rapid growth of the OVA and determine how to scale competitions effectively to meet the needs of participants. As a result, the primary recommendations focus principally on the scalability of competition structures/formats, followed by secondary recommendations that support the overall structure.

An overarching recommendation validated by survey data is an increased emphasis on the quality of competitions for athletes and their families, coaches, and officials by: providing effective and timely communications to allow for adequate planning, making use of quality venues, and, to the extent possible, focusing on competition that reduces or optimizes travel and still allows for meaningful competition.

4.1 Recommendations:

4.1.1 Creation of Separate Competition Streams

The central recommendation is to establish two distinct competition streams, each with its own rules and structure. This will allow OVA to develop appropriate competition opportunities for teams and athletes with different goals and aspirations while improving capacity management.¹ In naming these competition streams, we emphasize that care must be taken and advise against nomenclature that has been used in the recent past, such as 'high performance' and 'recreational', as those terms have come to indicate, respectively, 'elite' and 'less/not competitive' competition. Instead, we recommend naming the streams Provincial and National.

1. 'Provincial' Division/Stream (for ages 14-18)

- Designed for teams;
 - that aim to conclude their season at the provincial championships
 - with a training frequency of 1-3 practices per week
 - seeking participation in 2-4 tournaments per year (OVA would offer 4 per age group, but some teams would choose to play in only 2)
 - season runs from December to May (6 months) for younger athletes
- Designed for athletes
 - who compete for the healthy, active social aspect of volleyball without aspirations for varsity
 - to provide the opportunity for multisport athletes to play volleyball
- These athletes' program design is based on the Competitive for Life LTD stage.

2. 'National' Division/Stream (for ages 14-18)

- Designed for teams;
 - that aim to conclude their season at the National championships or the post-Regionals US tournament
 - with a training frequency of 2-4+ sessions per week
 - seeking to participate in 4-8 tournaments (OVA would offer 4 per age group, but some teams would play up for another 4 events)
 - 2+ other tournaments (depending on how many OVA tournaments they play)

¹ There will need to be consideration in the competition restructuring of the difference between girls and boys due to the difference in the numbers of participants.

Recommended Structural Changes to Support the Two-Stream Model

This two-stream competition structure will serve as the foundation for additional recommendations aimed at improving scalability and optimizing the competition framework. It will allow for:

1. **Optimized Scheduling:** Exploring different competition schedules to maximize venue availability and efficiency.
 - a. Later start of the season for some groups (green above)²
 - b. Earlier end of the season for 4v4
2. **Shorter season length for Younger Age Groups:** Younger athletes play shorter competitive seasons, allowing for more preseason training time, better ability to play other sports, more recovery time, and better retention of coaches (less competition/travel time)³
3. **Timing Adjustments for Provincial Championships:** Allowing flexibility in provincial championship scheduling to accommodate both divisions.
4. **Differentiated Price Points:** Reflecting variations in service levels, including venue quality, number of competition days, and referee provisions.
5. **Rule and Format Adjustments Aligned with Long-Term Development (LTD):** Modified competition rules to align with athletes' developmental stages (e.g. Early stages: Smashball, TLS) and introducing 5-set matches (e.g. Train to Compete) in accordance with developmental level of teams/athletes - refer to the Volleyball Canada Development Matrix.
6. **Staffing Restructure:** Adjusting staffing models to provide support for the new competition structure. OVA should consider placing staff representatives/coordinators in the OVA regions of the province.
7. **Maintaining Meaningful Competition:** Preserving the promotion and relegation system within each division to ensure competitive integrity.
8. **Developing a set of Key Indicators:** Identify and track key indicators to determine the success of the competition restructuring, including rates of meaningful competition, development of skills, participation rates, member satisfaction, as well as staff optimization and satisfaction.

4.1.2. Additional Recommendations

In addition to the primary recommendations, Sport for Life recommends that the OVA empower clubs to enhance their development. As a facilitator, OVA could set overarching structure and guidelines and encourage clubs to: operate **House Leagues** (including regional festivals for these leagues as emphasized during focus groups), promote clubs hosting competition, support coach and referee development and training, and share

² Note, for LT player development - younger players need to develop skills through enjoyable practices without the pressure of hiding their lack of particular skills in order to win tournaments and rise up in the team ranking.

³ Logistically, if the OVA are looking to keep 4 tournaments in their season for the TLS to 16U provincial divisions, the OVA have to run some events prior to January annually as that would be creating more of the facility shortage. Based on survey feedback, participants want more events, not less. The OVA has to evaluate what they want. Less events the OVA deliver/the clubs deliver more preseason tournaments on their own or still trying to deliver 4 events for these provincial stream teams. This would also put pressure on the referees if the OVA is trying to stage more events in the Jan to March timeframe. The OVA would be looking at 50+ events per Saturday and/or Sunday to make this attainable.

best practices among clubs with similar profiles and demographics. Other specific competitions to promote: Smashball, including regional festivals, mini-tournaments with prizes, as a means of instilling the love of volleyball at an early age.

The following internal and external recommendations provide a roadmap for enhancing the athlete experience, competition fairness, and administrative efficiency while ensuring volleyball in Ontario remains accessible and sustainable for all participants, with continued growth.

Internal

1. OVA Operations

- a. Define OVA's role and its target customer profile, and focus on meeting their needs
- b. Implement a fully integrated Digital Competition Management System for registration, scheduling, scoring, ranking, and data analysis to streamline operations.
- c. Enrich OVA communication strategy to ensure members and stakeholders are well informed of ongoing plans, timelines, and developments regarding OVA youth competition.
- d. Improve club management practices with 'best practice' resources and transparent governance structures.
- e. Establish an ongoing 'innovation or structural and working group' to explore new formats and monitor advancements in OVA youth volleyball competition (IVDC or new entity).
- f. Address climate action by providing guidance to hosts as well as an analysis of reducing carbon emissions through the analysis of travel by teams.

2. Coaching

- a. Enhance coaching development to better support club programming
- b. Provide appropriate resources for coaches to learn and grow (e.g., certification and training program, hosting clinics and sessions), and support clubs to recruit/train more coaches.
- c. Explore making the introductory certification free to remove barriers
- d. Establish a more effective feedback mechanism for addressing coach-related concerns.

3. Athletes

- a. Seek to stage more regional events to lessen the costs associated with travel, food and accommodation, and the travel time required to attend events
- b. Avoid play on Sundays for teams with significant travel distances, where possible
- c. Continue holding events in quality venues (with considerations of court space, event atmosphere, spectator seating, quality of flooring, appropriate lighting, and team/spectator parking)

External

1. Events

- a. Where appropriate, increase the number of convention center events, expanding access to large-scale venues for tournaments.
- b. Encourage and support clubs to host events, providing necessary expertise and resources
- c. Continue to refine travel accessibility by rotating event locations and the provision of financial assistance for remote teams.
- d. Travel and Targeted Age Groups for Two-Day Events: Identifying a process to determine which specific age groups and divisions would benefit from longer event formats.
- e. Continue to offer a balance of single-day and two-day events, retaining single-day events for accessibility and cost-effectiveness while using two-day formats where appropriate.
- f. Advocate to Ontario School Sport for moving the OFSAA championships for girls into the fall period to better align the annual competition calendar, and improve seasonal planning and facility allocation.
- g. Pilot new competition formats such as mini-leagues and festival-style events, including House Leagues.

2. Facilities

- a. Refine the facility identification and booking process to ensure that facility availability/quality meets OVA competition needs.
- b. Continue the venue ranking system and prioritize top-ranked large-scale venues based on older age groups and national stream competition.

3. Resources

- a. Create opportunities for match officials and coaches to understand each other's roles and responsibilities so they can support each other to provide positive volleyball experiences.
- b. Create a comprehensive parent guide (Youth Competition Manual - YCM) covering athlete development pathways, rules, and team selection processes. AI tools may be helpful here.
- c. Improve communication with parents and stakeholders through regular webinars, infographics, and Q&A sessions. (See club intake video resource in 5.c below)
- d. Expand mental health and wellness support for athletes through expert-led workshops and online resources.
- e. Provide more skill-building and training opportunities for athletes at all levels, including online resources and regional development camps.
- f. Consider resources and practices that optimize the balance of training, competition, and season length to support long-term athlete development (LTD).

4. Officiating

- a. Standardize refereeing and line-keeping through improved training (both technical and social-emotional) along with published expectations.

- b. Conduct further analysis on officiating, including (1) whether and how many are needed at the 4v4 level, (2) their continued development through training and leagues, especially at the provincial level, and (3) their opportunities for earning more in nearby US markets.
- c. Ensure clear and frequent communication with the referee community to inform of rule changes, protocols, assignments/schedules, training opportunities, issues, and concerns
- d. Provide notice of referee assignment in a more timely manner
- e. Support the development and protection of young referees through guidelines provided to athletes, parents, and spectators
- f. Recruit new officials through a variety of sources, including parents, high school students, seniors, and returning university students
- g. Provide more feedback and ongoing education/evaluation of referees

5. Behaviour and Expectations

- a. Review the current 'code of conduct' and sanctions to ensure they clearly outline the consequences of inappropriate behavior.
- b. Make any necessary revisions and distribute the code and sanctions to appropriate parties in multiple formats (e.g., signage, email distribution, QR Code, and an 'I Agree (to these terms)' radio button when purchasing tickets online, etc.).
- c. Partner with Volleyball Canada to create/distribute a standardized video resource regarding appropriate roles and behaviors of parents, coaches and athletes for use at initial club intake meetings.

6. Competition Delivery, Structure, and Format

- a. Introduce distinct competition **formats**:
 - i. In addition to the standard 9 team on 3 court events, keep offering a variety of formats which could best meet the needs or provide variety for players, such as: Fall Classic, Grand Prix Qualifiers, Grand Prixs, and a 2-day format.
 - ii. Consider where 'league play' could be a better competition format than traditional tournament play. League play is generally supported, especially in high-density areas, such as the Greater Toronto area (*more advice needed through discussion with IVDC*). Leagues could be run by operators other than OVA.
 - iii. Implement unique formats for Ontario Championships depending on the development stream (Excellence pathway towards Train to Compete vs Competition for Life):
 - 1. The difference between qualifications and competition formats would be based on VC's Volleyball Development Matrix's stage-based objectives and structural tolerances. The details of the qualifications and competition formats will need to be articulated, shared, and posted on the OVA website.
 - iv. Offer some best-of-five set tournaments for Learn to Compete athletes.
 - v. Prioritize competition quality over competition quantity

- vi. Broaden the forms of athlete and team recognition across the spectrum of competition levels (social media, team coverage, highlighting ‘V4L’ teams).
- vii. Analyze alternate examples of competition streams and opportunities (e.g., UCVA in Alberta, and JVA & AAU in the US) for best practices and elements.
- b. Continue to allow teams to “play up”, particularly for older and ‘performance-focused’ teams, keeping an eye on occurrences to maintain fairness and manage numbers.
- c. Address gaps in the competition structure (e.g., transition from Learn to Compete to Train to Compete) with innovative approaches.

4.2. Additional Considerations

4.2.1 Considerations to Address Gaps in Competition Structure

As part of the final report development, the following areas require further discussion to address gaps in the competition structure with new opportunities:

1. 18U Athletes Transitioning to University: Explore the feasibility of an All Ontario event with best on best to support the development of many university-bound athletes who typically struggle in their first year due to limited playing time. To prepare them for a higher level of play, the OVA could host some tournaments for 20U players. They would be open to varsity or other players (university and college). There would be a game or a minute limit on players who can participate. In other words, if a 20U player is a starter on their varsity team, they would not be eligible.⁴
2. Encourage the study of meaningful competition at the university/college level. While the OVA doesn’t oversee the post-secondary competition structure, USports competition is an important development opportunity in an aspiring athlete’s pathway. We suggest that the OVA work with (or encourage) the OUA to do a meaningful competition review to propose recommendations that help increase meaningful competition, along with related development improvements.
3. Train to Compete Athletes: To support T2C athletes, a ‘best on best competition’ could be created; an OVA-hosted all-star tourney. This would be designed to give players just off the national programs another development opportunity. Details of this recommendation to be determined. *It could be four teams (40 players) round robin combined with national team coaches invited in a camp-like environment. Similar to bullet one, this would target the 23U Ontario players regardless of where they are playing (USport, Club, or NCAA). Note: currently, at this age group, on average, 4 to 5 Ontario players are in the junior national program (generally 3 3-week programs culminating in NORCECAs)*
4. Explore the creation of an Ontario-based women’s professional league, in line with the recent development of professional leagues in women’s soccer (NSL), basketball (WNBA), hockey (PWHL) and women’s volleyball in the US (LOVB/PVF) to take advantage of the explosion of interest in women’s sport and to lay groundwork for a men’s league in Ontario and national leagues in Canada. Franchises could be an extension of existing OVA clubs, and compete either in a new Ontario league or in existing leagues in the US.

⁴ This featured event could be similar to Basketball’s Biosteel event. See link. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/All-Canadian_Basketball_Game

5. Conduct further study into line-judging and scorekeeping policy, specifically considering the level of play, age of athletes, costs, and the role/ability of the referee in managing the lining and scoring functions
6. Increase cost transparency through detailed breakdowns of tournament expenses.

Further details related to the Recommendations are outlined in Appendix E of the document.

5.0 Appendices

Appendix A - Detailed Survey Results

 OVA survey 1 results (full).pdf - Full survey results

 OVA survey 1 results (no text).pdf - Survey results without long-answer text

Appendix B - Filtered long-answer text results

 OVA survey 1 - full results.xlsx - Filtered long-answer text results (removing answers like 'n/a')

Appendix C - Environmental Scan of Other Sports

 OVA environmental scan on other sports

Appendix D - Survey 1 Key Findings

 OVA survey 1 - key findings

Appendix E - Competition Restructuring Recommendation (detailed)

 Ontario Volleyball Association - Competition Restructuring Recommendations (detailed)