

# What to know about Volleying

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Volleying, as the name suggests, is the most important skill in the game of volleyball. With that, it is surprisingly misunderstood. Many coaches believe the key to setting a ball is “soft hands.” Simply put, there are three levers in the skill of volleyball. Wrists are for quick release and are used for quick sets and back sets; elbows are engaged when needing to set high; and hips are utilized when needing to set a ball long distances. These levers must be used interchangeably. Therefore, an athlete setting long distance and engaging their wrists will have a “quiet” release but risks spraying the ball. There are a number of things to know about volleying and we will review these here.

## Overhead Pass

Let’s start by understanding that a volley is a “second contact” designed to assist a teammate in attacking the ball. An overhead pass is not a volley. These are first-contact situations in which an athlete decides to pass the initial contact to their setter with their hands.

Furthermore, the technique in overhead passing is very different. Whereas players can set a ball with loose wrists, caulked back with thumbs inside, the overhead pass will require the player to stiffen their wrists/hands and contact the ball further from their forehead. An overhead pass can be used on serve-receive, free or down-ball, tip, or defensively against an attack. These are generally referred to as an overhead dig, however, the technique is the same.

## Footwork

Although it is generally understood that a player must be balanced when they set, here to, we find a general misunderstanding of what constitutes a balanced athlete when volleying a ball. For example, an athlete who is jump setting is perfectly balanced. She is in the air. An athlete who is spin setting may not be square to her target, but she also is perfectly balanced.

Many coaches prefer a two-step finish when volleying; that is a left-right footwork pattern to square to target. Generally speaking, one of the most common technical errors when volleying is the athlete’s inability to plant both feet in a balanced position. For that reason, we have our athletes spin to volley. This ensures they will remain balanced. Their only challenge after this is the need to square to their target before making contact with the ball.

## Upper Body

A “late draw” is another common mistake when volleying. The cue word for hands coming up quickly to volley is “quick draw” and hands must be up as the ball begins its descent. Arms should rise in a consistent manner so as to keep the forearms at a 45-degree angle. A common mistake with young athletes involves the thumb pointing upwards rather than downwards prior to contact. This is a result of the elbows being too high, leaving the athlete’s forearm at 90 degrees. If coaches focus on the angle of the arms rather than the thumbs they will be more successful at breaking this bad habit.

## Contact

Simply put, all volleying is "linear passing." That means the passer must be facing his/her target when executing an effective set. By the way, the term volley and set are interchangeable.

The ball must be played with a player's chin down and eyes up with ball contact made at the hair line above the forehead. Tilting one's head back will result in the athlete setting above their head and must be avoided. Hands must also be up quickly with contact coming from the pads of the fingers. The firmness of the contact is determined by the type of set. Quick sets should be initiated with loose wrists while high-outside sets require firmer contact.

Another bad habit to look for is the temptation among younger athletes to drop their wrists and set off their chins. Often referred to as "Deep Dish Setting" in honour of beach volleyball which permits a slight lift of the ball for cleaner contact, this technique is not permitted in the indoor game.

## Keys to Success

1. **Beat the ball.** Arrive to the ball early so you might turn and square to target effectively.
2. **Stay balanced.** As you approach the ball, shorten your steps and spin to face your target.
3. **Play the ball at your hair line.** Keep your chin down and look up at the ball. Do not tilt your head back.
4. **Volley from your midline.** Play the ball in the mid-point of your body. Try not to "tilt set" off your shoulder, especially for longer distances.
5. **Cup hands.** Make contact with the balls of your fingers and elbows pointing downward. This can only be achieved with arms up at 45 degrees.
6. **Push and freeze.** To ensure each hand completes the follow through at the same time push fully and freeze.

## CUE WORDS

- Get there Early
- Quick Draw
- Square to Target
- Thumbs In
- Follow-Through
- Freeze

## CONCLUSION

Unlike many sport skills, the volley is used exclusively in the sport of volleyball. Whereas playing baseball will help a volleyball player improve her arm swing mechanics and thereby hit harder, the skill of volleying a ball is unique to the sport of volleyball.

Finally, coaches must make an effort to understand the technique and how to correct bad habits. Volleying a ball accurately begins by getting to the ball quickly. That is best achieved by making larger steps and closing in with smaller steps. Hands must then come up quickly and be ready to volley prior to getting to the ball. The athlete must turn to face the target in a balanced position so they may execute the volley correctly. When volleying, the athlete must push the ball and freeze to target. If any of these elements is inconsistent, the entire sequence breaks down.

Now coach the sport you love and have some fun!

Until next time,

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