



**USA Volleyball**  
**2009-10 Rules Interpretation Bulletin #1**  
**February 16, 2010**

Statement regarding regional rule modifications which allow the Libero to serve:

The Rules Testing Commission is aware that there are several regions using a rule modification that allows the Libero to serve. These regions are required to fully inform all teams involved in an event where a rule modification, such as this, will be used. Since the USAV/FIVB rules do not allow for the Libero to serve, no interpretations shall be issued from USA Volleyball or the USA Volleyball National Rules Interpreter on related situations. Regions that have implemented this rule may consider adopting rules or interpretations of other organizations that use this rule (NCAA women or NFHS)

PLEASE NOTE: The "Libero serve" rule modification will not be utilized at any USAV national tournaments, including National Qualifiers and Bid Tournaments, or National Championship events.

- *Steve Thorpe, USA Volleyball Rules Interpreter*



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**Interpretations for “Completed Rally”**  
**Rules 6.1.3, Rule 15, USAV 17.1.1, Rule 19.3.2.1**

1. The Libero is legally replaced at the conclusion of a rally. During the next rally, a back row player is injured and the referee whistles to stop play, necessitating a replay. Rule 19.3.2.1 says the Libero must stay off the court for a completed rally. In this situation, there has not been a completed rally. HOWEVER, USAV 17.1.1 allows a Libero to replace an injured (back row) player if the Libero wasn't on the court at the time of the injury. What is the correct way to handle this situation?

**RULING:** A Libero replacement is one of the allowable outcomes in this situation. Rule 19.3.2.1 allows a Libero replacement due to injury/illness without an intervening completed rally.

2. The referees stop the rally when a Team A player is injured. After 25 seconds, the coach for Team A says that the player can continue to play. As the first referee prepares to beckon for the next serve, the coach for Team A requests a time-out and the second referee whistles the request. Should Team A be allowed this regular game interruption?

**RULING:** Since there has not been a completed rally in this situation, and the coach has already indicated the player is ready to play, there can be no regular game interruption request. Since the time-out request was acknowledged, a delay sanction would be assessed.

3. In the above situation, assume Team A had been assessed a delay warning earlier in the match. As a result, Team A must now be sanctioned with a delay penalty, resulting in a point and the service being awarded to Team B. Team B would now like to make a regular substitution for their defensive specialist who is rotating to position 4 in the front row. Since there has not been a completed rally, can this substitution occur?

**RULING:** The spirit of Rule 15, which requires a completed rally for there to be a regular game interruption, is to prevent delay of play, and to provide an orderly and fair environment for teams and officials in the administration of the match. It is not to offer one team an advantage, or to put the other team at a disadvantage. The team, in this case Team B, which did nothing wrong, is being put at a disadvantage by their forced rotation of the defensive specialist to position 4. The Libero replacement rule, Rule 19.3.2.1, provides a remedy in this situation, allowing a replacement without an intervening completed rally if the replacement is, "*...due to injury/illness or there is a forced rotation caused by a penalty.*" The same remedy should be allowed for Team B in this situation.

4. If a rally-in-progress is stopped due to an (extreme) unsporting act, and a team member is immediately sanctioned with a yellow card is this considered a completed rally? If this penalty forces a rotation, can the rotating team make a substitution?

**RULING:** As in question #3 above, the rotating team should be allowed a substitution, even though there has not been a completed rally.



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5. If a rally-in-progress is stopped due to an (extreme) unsporting act, and a team member is expelled or disqualified, would this constitute a completed rally? If not a completed rally, should we still allow for the substitution that would need to occur if the penalized team member was one of the players on the court?

**RULING:** While not a completed rally, in order for the team to remain complete, they must be allowed a substitution.

6. USAV Rule 17.1.1 states: *“If the injured player cannot continue playing within 30 seconds, the player must be replaced by substitution, a legal Libero replacement (if the Libero is not on the court at the time of the injury), or the team must take a legal time-out if the player is to remain in the set.”*

- a. If we stop play to handle the injury, we will have a replay. How can we allow a time-out if a completed rally has not occurred?

**RULING:** USAV 17.1.1 modifies the "regular" rule by allowing a time-out as one of the options for the injured player's team in this situation.

- b. Since we have a rule interpretation that allows for the time-out even if a completed rally has not occurred, why does USAV 17.1.1 state *“if the player is to remain in the set”*? At the time of the injury, it is difficult to assess whether the player will remain in the set. What if the coach asks for the time-out thinking the player will be ready to play after the time-out; then after the time-out, it is decided the player should NOT continue to play? Is there a penalty for this?

**RULING:** First, it is not the referees' role to determine the extent of a player's injury. When referees stop play for what they deem an injured player, and subsequently the coach of that player wants to call time-out, this is allowed under the DCR. The option in USAV 17.1.1, *“...or the team must take a legal time-out if the player is to remain in the set”*, should be read to mean that if the first two options (substitution or Libero replacement) are not taken, and the coach wants more than the allowed 30 seconds to assess the player's injury, a time-out must be taken in order for the player to remain in the set.



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**Interpretations for Net Contact Rules and Penetration Rules**  
**Rules 11.2, 11.3 and 11.4**

7. While playing the ball outside the antenna, a player contacts the top band of the net.

**RULING:** Rule 11.3.2 takes precedence in this case. It states, "*Players may touch the post, ropes, or any other object outside the antennae, including the net itself, provided that it does not interfere with play.*" The intent of this rule is to allow the same contact with the entire net outside the antenna as the contact we previously allowed with the net cables, ropes or post. Consequently, it is not a fault to contact **any** part of the net outside the antenna (including the top tape).

8. In order for a penetration fault, as outlined by Rules 11.2.2.1 and 11.2.2.2, to be whistled, must there always be actual contact between opponents?

**RULING:** No, it is not always necessary for there to be contact for a centerline penetration fault to be whistled. The common scenario involving penetration into the opponent's court involves a blocker's or attacker's foot/feet coming down partially on the opponent's court, possibly contacting the opponent as well. Previously, a penetration fault could only have been whistled if there was contact with an opponent, and this contact, in the referee's judgment, prevented the opponent from making a play on a ball.

While that situation has not changed, the new provisions of 11.2.2.2 create the need to now consider additional parts of the body as well. If the penetration of other body parts is very near the centerline, it is the actual contact with the opponent that must cause interference with the opponent's play, the same as we previously ruled regarding the foot/feet. The mere apprehension of contact in this case should not be judged as interference.

While certainly a possible consideration in these situations, "safety" is not mentioned in the rule. With the new provisions of this rule, however, there will be situations where a player penetrates a significant distance into the opponent's court. In this case, interference with the opponent's play may take place, even if there is no contact between the opponents. The referee must decide whether the opponent's legitimate attempt to play the ball was impeded as the opponent tried to "get out of the way" of the penetrating player.

In explaining a penetration fault call or no-call, we must use the language of the rule, "The player interfered (or did not interfere) with the opponent's play." Remember, in USAV competition, if some part of the penetrating foot/feet (that touches the opponent's court) does not remain in contact with or directly above the centerline, it should be whistled immediately as a fault, no matter if there was interference or not.



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**Interpretations for Substitution Procedures and Substitution/Time-out Requests**  
**Rules 5.1.2.3, Rule 5.2.3.3, Rule 15.2.1, Rule 15.10.3a, b and c**

9. Rule 5.2.3.3 says "... *the coach may request time-outs and substitutions*", and Rule 5.1.2.3 says the captain may act "... *in the absence of the coach to request time-outs and substitutions*". But Rule 15.10.3a says "*the actual request for substitution is the entrance of the substitute player(s) into the substitution zone, ready to play, during a regular interruption.*" Don't these rules contradict one another?

**RULING:** No, there is no contradiction here. Rule 15.2.1 refers specifically to "regular interruptions". Rule 5.2.3.3 is intended to allow the coach to request a substitution only in the case of unusual or exceptional situations – substitution prior to the start of a set, an injured/ill player, a disqualified or expelled player, or a situation in which a forced rotation after a replay results in a scenario as described in Cases 3, 4, 5 and 6 above. Rule 5.1.2.3 affords the game captain this same authority to request a substitution in unusual or exceptional situations in the absence of the coach.

10. Rule 15.2.1 says that regular game interruptions (i.e., substitutions and time-outs) may be requested by the coach or game captain by showing the corresponding hand signal. Doesn't this also contradict Rule 15.10.3a with regard to substitution requests?

**RULING:** The hand signal described in 15.2.1 is only recognized in the unusual or exceptional cases as described in the previous example.

11. A coach calls, "Hey ref, sub!" while the ball is out of play. How should the referee respond if there is no player approaching, or even near, the substitution zone?

**RULING:** The referee needs to be in an "educational" mode in this case. Technically, this can be treated (as long as the coach is not rude) the same as if the coach had said, "Great weather we're having, eh?" But, ignoring the coach will not help the situation. So, respectfully inform the coach that the only way to make a substitution request is for the player to "enter the zone", and that a verbal request, while not illegal, will be ignored.

There is some confusion as to the meaning of Rule 15.10.3b, which states, "*If that is not the case, the substitution is not granted and the team is sanctioned for delay.*" This should not be applied in the situation above! This sentence applies to the "*ready to play, during a regular interruption*" portion of Rule 15.10.3a; for example, a player entering the substitution zone wearing warm-ups, or an earring in their earlobe, etc. If a referee is alert and proactive and sees an incoming substitute entering the zone wearing warm-ups, it is appropriate to quickly wave the incoming substitution out of the zone and continue play without whistling the "request", avoiding a delay sanction. In this case, an improper request is recorded at the end of the rally. If the second referee is able to wave the incoming substitute back before he/she enters the substitution zone, the improper request is avoided as well. If the coach calls for a sub, remember, there really has not been a request. So, if there is no player approaching the sub zone, play should continue with the first referee authorizing the next service.



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**Other Rulings**

12. A team would like to put players' last names on the back of their jerseys. Is this legal?

**RULING:** Yes, in the spirit of promoting fan interest, the name of the player may be placed on the back of the jersey.