Volleyball terminology

Basic Volleyball Terms Everyone Should Know

Free ball
A free ball is an easy ball that is returned over the net by a forearm or overhead pass. This ball is called free because it’s a free opportunity to pass, set, and attack the opponent.

Pepper
Pepper is a warming up drill between two players. The players hit the ball back and forth to one another using the main skills in volleyball – pass, set, and hit. This is a common warm up drill because all you need is a ball and two players. No volleyball net necessary.

Side out
The side out is one of the basic volleyball terms used in old school volleyball. Today, a side out is called a point on serve receive. In the olden days, when the team that receives the serve wins the rally, this is called a side out. When a team sides out, they must rotate and the right front player is now the new server.

Court Strong Side
The left side of the court is often referred to as strong side because it’s usually easier for right-handed players to attack for the left side.

Court Weak Side
The right side of the court is often referred to as weak side because it’s usually less effective for right handed players to attack for the right side.

Basic Volleyball Terms for Contacting the Ball

Spike
A volleyball spike is an offensive action a player makes by hitting the ball with the hand by using a one-arm overhead swinging motion, attempting to get a kill.

Here are more basic volleyball terms for attacking.

Dig
A defensive player makes a play on a ball that is attacked by the opponent. A dig is a defensive play made on a hard driven ball.

Double contact or Double
A double contact is when a player contacts the ball with two body parts consecutively.

Miss hit
A miss hit is when a player swings and hits the ball but doesn’t contact the ball as intended. The result of a miss hit is the ball is hit at a different speed, direction, or spin than was intended which results in an unpredictable hit placement.

Shank
A shank is when a player unintentionally passes a ball in a wild manner, making the ball unplayable for the setter to make a play on the shanked pass.

Dump
A dump is an attack that is used to surprise the opponent. This play is usually executed by a front row setter. The attack catches the opponent’s defense usually is ready for an attack from the setter because the setter’s main job is to set attackers. Be alert of when you are up against left handed setters because this is a play that left-handed players are in good position to make.
Pancake
The pancake is a desperate attempt to keep the ball in play. A pancake is done by extending the arm out in front the body after diving. The goal is to get the ball to bounce up off the hand to make it stay in play.

Sky ball
The sky ball is a unique underhand volleyball serve in which the ball is swung at and hit unusually high in the air above the opposing team's court. This is usually done in outdoor volleyball, attempting to make it difficult for the receiving players to pass.

Basic Terminology - Volleyball Terms for Attacking

Attacker
A volleyball attacker is also called a hitter or spiker. An attacker is a player who attempts to hit a ball towards the opponent’s court with the purpose of finishing the volley and scoring a point for his/her team.

Attack Hit
An attack is any ball that is sent over the net to the opponent. An attack is an offensive action of hitting the ball, attempting to terminate the play by hitting the ball to the floor on the opponent's side or off the opponent’s blockers.

Back Row Attack Hit
A back row attack is when a back row player attacks the ball by jumping from beyond the attack line. If the back row player steps on or in front of attack line during take-off and the ball is contacted when the ball is completely above the height of the net, the attack is illegal as soon as it is completely crosses the net or is contacted by the opponent.

Spike
Hitting the ball at a strong downward angle into the opponent’s court is called a spike.

Hard-driven Spike
A hard-driven spike is a hard hit ball that travels forcefully down towards the opponent’s court.

Off-speed Spike
An off-speed spike is a controlled spike ball placed in an open area of the court.

Standing Spike
A standing spike is attacking a ball from a standing position. A standing spike is also referred to as a down ball.

Open Hand Tip
Open hand tipping is directing the ball with the fingers when attacking.

Hitting with Finesse - Volleyball Terms for Attacking

Slide Attack
A volleyball approach that involves a one leg take-off similar to a basketball lay up.

Cross-Court Shot
An individual attack directed across the net at an angle from one side (left side) of the court to the other side (right side) of the court. This is also referred to as hitting angle.

Line Shot
A line shot is attacking the ball down an opponent's sideline. The ball is usually hit down the line just outside the outside blocker or over the top of the outside blocker.
Off-Speed Hit
A ball that is spiked with less force is an off-speed hit. Off-speed hits are a popular option for attacking if a
player is just trying to place the ball or just trying to keep the ball in play.

Cut Shot
A cut shot is a spike that’s hit from the hitter's strong side and travels at a sharp angle across the net. A cut
shot is like a cross-court hit except that the ball is hit at a much sharper angle. Cut shots are also a much
softer hit ball.

Basic Terminology - Volleyball Terms for Blocking

Block
A block is a defensive playing action at the net. A block may be performed by one front row player or a
combination of front row players jumping near the net in front of an opposing attacker. The goal is to block
the spiked ball with the hands or arms preventing the spiker from a successful attack.

Block Assist
A block assist is given when two or three players participate in a successful block at the same time. This is
also known as a collective block.

Double Block
A double block is when two players are working in unison to deflect an attacked ball at the net. It’s a good
strategy to put up a double block as often as possible to help prevent successful attacking.

Triple Block
A triple block is when three players jump up together at the net to block. A team putting up a triple block at
the net is often difficult to do successfully. Since each team has 3 players at the net that could possibly get a
set to attack, it can be difficult for blockers to get in correct position to put up a triple block because you
don't know who is going to be set.

Volleyball Terms for Blocking

Weak Side Blocker
The weak side blocker is the front player that blocks coming from the left side of the court.

Middle Blocker
The middle blocker is the blocker that moves from the middle of the net to block. This player is often very
quick and tall because they have the responsibility of defending against both the middle and outside hitters.

Strong Side Blocker
The strong side blocker is the blocker that blocks coming from the right side of the court. Usually an
opponent’s best hitter is hitting out of the strong side. Therefore, a team may decide to put their best
blocker on the strong side to help defend the strong hitter.

Offside Blocker
The offside blocker is the blocker at the net that’s away from the opponent's attack. The offside blocker
should pull off the net to help defend the attack or get in ready position to take an approach to hit.

Closing the Block
The responsibility of the assist blocker is to join the primary blocker to create an impenetrable block. This
is called closing the block or sealing the block because the ball can’t fit between the two individual
blockers.

Joust
A joust is when 2 opposing players contact the ball above the net at the same time. Play continues as if the
contact was instantaneous.
Penetrating the Net
Penetrating the net is when a player reaches over the net during a block or an attack.

Turning In
Turning in is the act of an outside blocker turning his/her body to face the opponent’s court to ensure the blocked ball is deflected into the court.

**Youth Terms - Volleyball Terms for Blocking**

Getting Stuffed
Getting stuffed is when a blocker blocks the ball straight down on to the floor just as hard as it was hit. Also, a stuff block is when a ball ricochets off the block into the attackers face or body. Stuff blocks are also called roofs.

Fish
A player is often called a fish when they get stuck in the net. The net violation is also called tuna or flounder.

**Basic Volleyball Serve Terminology**

Underhand Serve
An underhand serve is a serve in which the ball is given a slight under-hand toss from about waist high and then struck with a closed fist by the opposite hand. The underhand serve is usually the first type of serve taught to a beginning player in youth volleyball.

Overhand Serve
The overhand serve is done by tossing the ball up into the air then striking it with the opposite hand above the shoulder.

Float Serve
The flat serve is done by contacting the ball in such a way that the ball doesn’t spin which makes it more likely to float. A floater is much tougher to pass because the flight of the ball is much less predictable. The volleyball floating action is similar to a knuckle ball pitch in baseball.

Jump Serve
The jump serve is a serve in which the server tosses the ball, takes an approach and jumps to spike the ball. Because of the importance of timing the toss and jump, the jump serve can be very difficult to learn.

Roundhouse serve
A roundhouse serve is also known as a windmill, hook, or smash serve. The roundhouse is rarely used because it's so difficult to serve consistently. For this serve, the server faces the sideline being perpendicular to the end line.

The ball is tossed straight up in front of the body with both hands so that it will be directly over the serving shoulder. The serving arm is brought from against the side straight out and over the head with the elbow kept straight at all times.

Contact is made with the ball at a point directly over the shoulder and with the heel of the open hand. The ball is hit so it will slightly rise up and go over the net with a lot of topspin.

This serve can be difficult to pass because the ball drops over the net very quickly and comes very fast.
**Volleyball Serve Terminology for Youth Volleyball**

**Ace**
An ace serve is a serve that hits the floor or causes the passer to misplay the ball such that the ball isn’t returnable.

**Friendly Fire**
Friendly fire is being hit in the head by a teammate's serve.

**Lollipop Serve**
A lollipop serve is a very soft serve, often served high over the net with just putting the ball in play.

**Serving the Heat**
A server that serves the ball really hard is known as bringing the heat or bringing the thunder.

**Basic Volleyball Passing – Volleyball Terms**

**Bump Pass**
Bump pass is a slang term for forearm pass. A forearm pass is done by joining the forearms together to pass or set a ball in an underhand motion.

The forearm pass is a ball handling skill that players use to legally contact the ball at about waist level using the forearms as the contact surface. This pass is made on balls that are too low to take overhead with the hands.

**Overhead Pass**
An overhead pass is a ball handling skill used to direct the ball to the target by contacting the ball with both hands. The ball is played up overhead using a setting type motion.

Using the hands to play the ball is often preferred over passing with the forearms because the hands have greater ball control.

**Free Ball Pass**
A free ball pass is made on an easy ball that comes over the net to your side of the court. Because the ball is easy to play, the free ball is usually played with the hands using an overhead passing motion.

**Volleyball Passing Techniques – Volleyball Terms**

**Midline Passing**
Passing the ball through the midline of your body is probably the most popular passing technique. The goal is to get behind the ball and face in line to where you are trying to pass.

This is similar to linear passing where you take the ball close to the center of your body.

**Angle Right Passing**
Angle right passing is when the player tries to get behind the ball and pass it to a target to their right.

**Angle Left Passing**
Angle left passing is when the player tries to get behind the ball and pass it to a target to their left.

**Tandem passing**
Tandem passing is similar to midline passing. Basically the difference is with tandem passing you are trying to pass the ball much closer to the body than with a traditional midline pass. The idea is, the closer to your body you contact the ball, the more control you should have passing the ball.

**Overhand passing**
Overhand passing or overhead passing is commonly used to better control the ball when passing quickly to a target and then run a quicker offense.
Here are some more fun volleyball terms

Ace
A serve is an ace when the other team shanks the serve or the ball hits the floor without anyone touching it.

Stuff Block
A stuff block is when a player jumps above the net and blocks the ball back into the person that spiked the ball.

Kill
A kill is when a team spikes the ball and it is successfully put away.

Six Pack
A six pack occurs when a defensive player gets hit in the head or face by a spiked ball. Also called a facial.

Paint Brush
When the hitter swings and barely "brushes" the bottom of the ball. The ball often drops over the blockers for a kill.

Tool
A tool is when a player deliberately hits the ball off the block for a kill. This is also called using the block or a wipe.

Youth Players - Volleyball Terms

Roof
When a player jumps above the net to block, and blocks the ball straight down.

Lollipop
A lollipop is a very easy serve. This serve is often done with a high arc, which is easy to pass. When you serve a lollipop you will probably get licked.

Redwood
A redwood is a tall awkward blocker. Redwoods aren’t very mobile.

Chester
To be nailed in the chest by a hard serve or spike.

Tagged
A player gets tagged when they can’t get out of the way of a hard hit ball.

Swipe or Wipe
A swipe is when a hitter pushes the ball off of the opposing block so it lands out of bounds. Also called tooling the block.

Kong Block
A one-handed block like the move King Kong does on the biplanes in the original King Kong movie.

Tuna
A tuna is when a player commits a very obvious net violation. Also called a flounder.

Chowder
A really bad double contact on a hand set is often called chowder.