

# Team Offenses for Volleyball

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A simple definition to understand various team offenses in the sport would be to separate the number of designated hitters on the court with the number of designated setters. With that, there are a number of combinations that are available to coaches and these will have a great impact on the overall success of the team. The most common coaching error involves coaches deciding on systems of play that are overly complicated for the level of skill the athletes are performing at. Please note the many options available to teams:

## **6 – 0 Offense**

Essentially this means that a team (generally a very young team) will have no designated setter. This type of offense is associated with the "Triple-ball" format now commonly used in the 13U age class in Canada. The coach must decide if the team will set out of position three (middle front – International style) or out of position two (right front – North American style). When an athlete is in that position, they must assume the role of the setter.

**Advantages:** Many coaches will argue that having athletes specialize at a young age is detrimental to their overall development. This system of play is designed to ensure all athletes get to experience all positions.

**Disadvantages:** My experience in this area is consistent. Children want to do what they are good at. Forcing young players to set when they would rather not does nothing to develop their confidence. All athletes get to learn how to volley in practices but forcing them to assume the role of setting during competitions is misguided.

## **3 – 3 Offense**

This is a "triangle offense" designed for young teams to allow athletes to hit and set. Not commonly used, it is an ideal system of play for younger teams. To understand how this offense works simply think of a triangle on the court in terms of how the setters might be lined up in the rotation. For example, the starting rotation might have the assigned setters in position 6 (middle back), position 4 (left front) and position 2 (right front). That would create the "triangle formation." When an assigned setter is in position 4 they are an attacker and they assume the role of setter when they are in position 3 and 2.

**Advantages:** This offensive system allows for a better development of setters than a 6-0 offense while not forcing young players to specialize at an early age. It can also be introduced with no switching to assigned positions or with switching in the front row. A great way to introduce positional assignments.

**Disadvantages:** The system assumes that half the athletes on the team have an interest in setting. For this system to be accepted with enthusiasm at least half the team will need to set.

## **4 – 2 Offense**

This is another commonly used offensive system for young teams. In this system of play there are two assigned setters and they will start on opposite sides of the rotation to allow the setter in the front-row to be the assigned setter.

Although most teams will choose to have the front-row setter play out of position two (right front) a coach can decide to have the setter play out of position three (middle front).

**Advantages:** There are two primary advantages to this system. The first is that a front-row setter can always attack the ball and with younger teams struggling with passing this is a significant benefit. Another major advantage to this system is the opportunity for improved defense. The back-row setter will understand quickly they are not responsible for setting and will be better prepared to defend.

**Disadvantages:** The primary disadvantage to this offense is the lack of a right-side attack. This reduces the team's offensive options and allows opponents to key in on the only two front-row attackers.

## **6 – 2 Offense**

This offensive system is essentially the opposite of the 4-2 offense. Simply stated, rather than having the front-row setter set, the team has now opted for the back-row setter to set the attackers. The assigned setter generally plays defense out of position one (right-back) and will penetrate to set the three assigned front-row attackers.

That being said, the setter can defend out of position 6 (middle back) on a "six-up defense." In this system the setter defends tips and block deflections and runs in to set from the middle-back position.

**Advantages:** The reason this offense is most often used has to do with the benefit of having three available attackers in every rotation.

**Disadvantages:** There are significant disadvantages to this system of play. The first is the risk of weaker defense with back-row setters unwilling to play aggressive defense as they focus on coming in to set. Another problem with this offense is the loss of a setter attack to help disrupt the defensive rhythm of the opponent. Finally, I love the expression that 6-2 setters are generally half as good as 5-1 setters since they only set half as often. With that I would say there is often a loss of offensive rhythm on teams that adopt this offense as two setters regularly set very differently.

## **3-Middle Offense**

This offensive system is an advanced modification of the 3-3 offense. In simple terms, both middles and the RS attacker are designated with an assigned number. For example, your M1 (Middle one) is allocated #1 while your RS is allocated #2 and your M2 is allocated #3. When there are two of these athletes in the front row the athlete with the higher designated number chooses where he/she wants to play. This allows middles to switch with RS attackers to provide a fluid change to the nature of their offense.

**Advantages:** Allowing mature athletes the option to switch positions during play provides teams with the opportunity to change their offense on a rotational basis. It allows coaches the opportunity to have athletes decide on their own how to change offensive options during play.

**Disadvantages:** This offense is strictly for the mature athlete who understand read defense and can recognize the need for change in their attack options. Not for the young athlete.

## **5 – 1 Offense**

This offensive system is the most commonly used system in volleyball. For one thing it is generally quite difficult for a coach to find two equally talented setters so as to run a two-setter offense, so teams have relied on one-setter offenses almost by necessity.

In any case, a 5-1 offense means that the team has one setter on the court who is surrounded by his/her five attackers, unless a libero is being used. Working with one setter ensures the maximum development of that setter. No team can succeed without a setter who can efficiently deliver the ball so investing time in their development is time well spent.

Advantages: This is the most commonly used system for a simple reason. Finding two equally talented setters is difficult. Going with the stand-out setter is generally a safe bet.

Disadvantages: The front-row setter is not an attacker so there are fewer attack options when the setter is in the front-row. The risk of injury means that every coach should invest as much time and energy in making sure the back-up setter is ready to play. Remember, the best way to motivate a starting setter to work hard is to have a strong back-up setter.

Until next time,

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Posted April 26, 2019