



HIGH SCHOOL vs. CLUB RULES

2026–2027 season – only the parts that change; everything else plays the same

Why this sheet? Most of volleyball is identical everywhere – rally scoring, three touches, the net rules you already know. But some things **do** change when you go between your California high school season (CIF, which uses NFHS rules) and club season (USAV rules, NCVA region). Here are the real differences for 2026–2027, so nothing surprises you at your first tournament.

1. THE SERVE – CAN I DROP OR CATCH MY TOSS?

High School: Yes. After the toss you may **catch it or let it drop** and get a re-serve – once per player, each time you go back to serve. You get 5 seconds per attempt, and the ball doesn't even have to be tossed before you hit it.

Club: No. You get **one toss – and you must hit it**. Catching it or letting it drop is a fault: point and serve to the other team. You get 8 seconds. **Exception: 14-and-under divisions get 2 tosses** (and 5 seconds per attempt).

Why it matters: the freebie re-serve you had in school ball is gone in club (unless you're 14U). Commit to your toss!

2. HOW LONG A MATCH IS

High School: Matches are **best of 5 sets** – first team to win 3. Sets to 25 (win by 2), deciding 5th set to 15.

Club: Tournament matches are usually **best of 3 sets** – two sets to 25, deciding 3rd set to 15. Pool play may use a fixed number of sets or capped sets to keep the day on schedule.

Why it matters: club matches are shorter – but you play several of them in one tournament day.

3. SUBSTITUTIONS

High School: Each team gets **18 substitutions** per set, and several subs may enter the substitution zone at once.

Club: Each team gets **12 substitutions** per set, one incoming sub in the zone at a time.

Why it matters: club coaches have fewer subs to spend, so rotations and roles are planned more tightly.

4. THE LIBERO – NEW HIGH SCHOOL RULE THIS YEAR

 **High School:** New for 2026–27: teams may designate **zero, one, or two liberos per set** – a fresh choice on every set’s lineup sheet (only one plays at a time).

Club: Teams may designate **up to two liberos per match**. If you list two in set 1, those two are your liberos for the whole match; if you list one, you may swap the designation between sets.

Why it matters: both now allow two liberos – but high school picks per SET while club locks them in per MATCH.

5. LIBERO JERSEY, SHORTS & NUMBERS

 **High School:** The libero’s jersey must clearly contrast with the team’s, but the **shorts must match** the teammates’ – and a libero **may use two different uniform numbers** (one as libero, another when playing as a regular player).

Club: The libero’s jersey must clearly contrast with the team’s, the **shorts may be different** – and the libero keeps **one number** all match. Only an emergency re-designated libero may throw on a numbered bib or vest.

Why it matters: pack the right shorts for the right season – and don’t be surprised by a two-number libero at a school match.

6. THE CHASE – CAN I RUN ONTO THEIR SIDE TO SAVE A BALL?

 **High School:** **No.** The moment the ball completely crosses the plane of the net outside the antenna, it’s **dead**. You may only chase a ball outside the poles that hasn’t fully crossed yet.

Club: **Yes – the “pursuit rule.”** If the ball flies over or outside the antenna into the other team’s free zone, you may **run around the poles** (never under the net), play it, and send it back **outside the antenna** to your side – all within your team’s three contacts. (The facility needs ~2 m of clearance for pursuit to be on.)

Why it matters: in club, that crazy wrap-around save is legal and it brings the crowd to its feet. In school ball, let it go.

7. CROSSING UNDER THE NET (THE CENTER LINE)

 **High School:** A foot or hand may touch the other side only if **part of it stays on or above the center line** – touching the floor across the line with **any other body part is illegal**.

Club: Same foot/hand rule – but an **entire foot, hand, or even another body part may land on their side legally**, as long as it doesn’t interfere with the opponents, isn’t a safety hazard, and some part of you is on or above the center line.

Why it matters: a dive that ends with your knee across the line can be a fault at school and play-on at club.

8. JEWELRY

 **High School:** Only **small, secured studs or posts worn above the chin**. Nothing below the chin – no necklaces, bracelets, or body jewelry – and taping over jewelry is not allowed.

Club: Jewelry may be worn as long as it isn't a safety concern – no extremely long necklaces, big medallions, or large hoop earrings.

Why it matters: what's fine at a club tournament may have to come off on your school court.

9. TIME-OUTS

 **High School:** Two per set, **60 seconds** each, with a warning whistle at 15 seconds – and they can end early if both teams are ready.

Club: Two per set, **30 seconds** – no warning whistle, and they never end early. Quick huddle, back on the court.

Why it matters: have your water close – club time-outs go fast.

10. PLAYING SHORT-HANDED

 **High School:** If a player is hurt, ill, or disqualified and there's no sub, the team **may keep playing with fewer than six**.

Club: A team **must have six eligible players** to continue – if you can't field six, the set is forfeited (declared incomplete).

Why it matters: club rosters need depth – another reason attendance matters!

11. WHO RUNS THE MATCH

 **High School:** The school provides adult officials, scorers, and line judges.

Club: **Teams share the work.** When your team isn't playing, you're the work crew – players line judge, keep score, flip the scoreboard, and track liberos.

Why it matters: that's exactly why we learn the Line Judging guide, the Score Sheet, and the Libero Tracking Sheet – it's part of playing club!

12. THE SEASON & THE SCHEDULE (CALIFORNIA)

 **High School:** CIF school season – girls play in the **fall**, boys in the **spring** – single matches on school nights against local schools.

Club: Club season (NCVA region) runs roughly **December through May**, built around weekend **tournaments**: several matches in one day, with waves of pool play, playoff brackets – and your work-crew assignments between them.

Why it matters: plan for full tournament days – snacks, water, and something to do between matches.

THE SAME IN BOTH – DON'T LET ANYONE TELL YOU OTHERWISE

The libero and the 10-foot line (this one confuses everyone): if the libero is standing **on or in front of the 10-foot (attack) line** and sets the ball **overhand with fingers**, a teammate may **not** attack that ball above net height. Three easy outs: the libero **bump-sets with forearms** (legal from anywhere), the libero steps fully **behind the 10-foot line** before finger-setting, or the hitter takes the ball **below net height**. And the libero can never attack above net height or block – anywhere, in either rule set.

Catching or throwing the ball during a rally is a fault everywhere – the ball must always be hit, never caught, lifted, or thrown.

A serve that hits the net and goes over (a “let serve”) is live in both – play it!

The libero still can’t attack from above net height, block, or rotate to the front row – in either rule set.

Rally scoring – every rally scores a point in both.

2026–2027 quick reference, based on the NFHS/USAV published rules and comparison charts. Rule books get updated every season and event rules can vary by tournament – your coach and the officials always have the final word. Revised July 1, 2026.