

Are They Back Row? How to Track Volleyball Setters

By Pam Shively on November 19, 2015 [Officials](#)

[Share](#)



New volleyball officials are challenged to learn how to watch the play as an official. They often played the game or watched a child play and need to stop watching through those eyes. Ball handling, alignments and so much more take a critical eye and experience to make the correct calls and no-calls.

An often asked question from new officials is, “How do I track the setters?” Nearly every veteran will have a slightly different answer to that question based on their own experiences. There are some basic ideas that most, however, have found useful in following the setters around the six positions on the court.

One very important way to track setters during the match is to focus on them during the warm-up period. An official will be able to see the type of offense a team is most likely to run. He or she can watch to see if multiple setters are active in the warm up period, usually resulting in the team running a 6-2 offense. In a 6-2 offense, the setter will always come from the back row. If the team uses one setter, a 5-1 offense is being

used. In a 5-1 offense, the setter will be in the front row and back row, so officials must know when she is allowed to attack the ball.

Memorizing the player's number is a good idea but try to find some distinguishing characteristic about the player so there isn't confusion when vision is blocked from the number.

It isn't always easy. Years ago, one local team had twins that were outstanding players. One was No.12 and the other was No. 21.

Hair color and style can be keys. A ribbon or pins can help an official recognize a player, or it could also be something unique about socks, shoelaces or sweatbands.

Once the official has the setters identified, it's important to look at the line up sheet to identify their opposites. This gives an official a double check on their proper location on the floor. Listening to the players will also help track the setter. Key words like setter up (may attack) or setter down (back row) or using the thumb to indicate up or down may be used.

It is also important to fully understand the back row attack rule. Rule 9-5-5 states, "A back row player shall not: Participate in a completed block; attack a ball which is completely above the height of the net while positioned on or in front of the attack line or its out-of-bounds extension; or in the air having left the floor on or in front of the attack line or its out-of-bounds extension."

The R-1 is responsible for this call; however, the R-2 can assist with a discreet signal if needed. If an official loses track of the setter's position, he or she can watch to see if she retreats from the net or stays to block. This can assist in making a correct back row call. Remember, a libero is always a back row player and they have additional restrictions when setting the ball in front of the attack line. Their different colored uniform top makes them easier to track but present a continuing challenge to monitor all back-row players for legal action.

For years officials relied on a game card to track players on the court. Some used paper clips, pencils, rubber bands and other tricks to track the setters on the card. With the

encouragement for the R-1 to eliminate the game card, memorizing the setters and alignments is more important than ever. It may seem like a challenge today, but it feels like a great accomplishment when an official spots that back row attack and makes the call confidently.