



September 10, 2025

NFHS Volleyball Weekly Rule Interpretations

Illegal Libero Replacement

The penalty administration for the first referee (R1) and second referee (R2) when the libero exchanges after the whistle for serve was adjusted to make it more consistent with other unnecessary delay penalties. It is important to remember that either the receiving or serving team can commit this fault. Both the R1 and R2 must be ready to make the call.

Officials Mechanics – Unnecessary Delay (Officials Manual 5.7.1)

Unnecessary Delay – Administrative Cards: *The first referee shall administer the administrative cards for unnecessary delay and assess penalties when required.* The mechanics for signaling are as follows:

First Referee initiates call (Signal 20): When the R1 initiates the unnecessary delay call for a late libero replacement (serving team), the R1 whistles and raises the hand on the side of the offending team beside head, palm facing in and holds the appropriate card on the wrist of the raised hand. *The second referee does not repeat the procedure.*



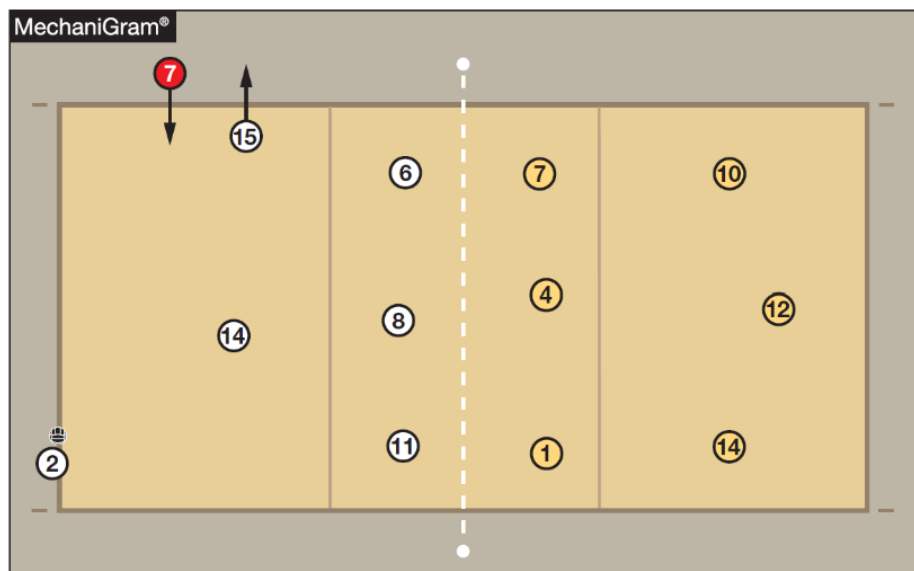
Second Referee initiates call: When the R2 initiates the unnecessary delay call for a late libero replacement (receiving team), the R2 (already on the receiving/offending team side of the net) whistles and holds up the appropriate card in the hand closest to the non-offending team, placed against the back of the wrist of the other hand, which is held at head height, palm facing in on the side of the offending team. *The first referee administers the card in the same manner.*



CORRECTION: CASE BOOK PART I – Interpretations on the 2025-26 Rules Changes, pg. 5

SITUATION 1: The R2 identifies an illegal libero replacement on Team A: (a) prior to Team A's contact for serve; (b) after Team A's contact for serve. **RULING:** (a) unnecessary delay; (b) illegal alignment. **COMMENT:** An illegal libero replacement identified before contact for serve is an unnecessary delay (administrative yellow card for the first offense or administrative red card for subsequent offense in that set), which is administered immediately. If the R1 has already authorized the serve, the R1 will whistle to prevent the serve, ~~administer and issue a replay after administering~~ the unnecessary delay, correct the alignment and resume play with the same server. If the illegal libero replacement is not identified until after contact for serve the result is illegal alignment (loss of rally/point) for Team A. (10-4 PENALTIES 1)

Rationale: There is no contact for serve, only the authorization of service when the violation occurs, so play resumes with a re-authorization of service – **not a replay or re-serve**.



SITUATION 2: Team A's libero No. 3 replaces No. 19 in the center back position. Team A wins the rally. Team A's No. 19 replaces libero No. 3 in the back row and libero No. 3 moves to the serving position, without leaving the court, replacing No. 6 who was the right front and would be the next server. This will be Libero No. 3's second serving position. The referee whistles before contact for serve, issues an unnecessary delay, and corrects the illegal replacement. **RULING:** Correct procedure. **COMMENT:** Although the libero is allowed to replace any back row player, the referees realize this will be an illegal replacement as the libero can only serve in one position. If identified prior to the serve, the referees may correct the illegal replacement and issue the unnecessary delay. If not noticed until after the service contact, the result is illegal alignment. (10-4 PENALTIES 1)

SITUATION 3: No. 12 for Team A is serving, and Team A loses the rally. No. 12 stays in the right back position on the receiving team when the R1 whistles and signals for serve by Team B. Before contact for serve, the libero for Team A runs; (a) onto the court to replace No. 12 in the right back position; (b) toward the court but stops and returns to the bench. **RULING:** (a) Unnecessary delay; (b) no penalty. **COMMENT:** In (a), the second referee will initiate the unnecessary delay call since the violation occurs on the receiving team. The first referee will repeat the signal. In (b), the libero and No. 12 did not complete an illegal libero exchange since the libero never entered the court.