

A 5/1 Volleyball Formation

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General

There are four different playing positions: setter (S), outside hitter (H), middle hitter (M), and opposite hitter (O).

There are six different starting positions, three in front and three in back. At the moment of the serve, each back row player must be behind his or her corresponding front row player. In addition, the left and right players in each row must have at least a toe outside the middle player in that row.

When serving, the team moves immediately from their starting positions to their playing positions. When receiving, the three receiving players generally wait until after the first play before moving to their playing positions.

(Why can't they all just start in their playing positions? It's an old rule. It persists because switching around, though confusing at first, adds to the fun and challenge of the game.)

After serving or receiving, the team continuously cycles between attack and defense positions.

One setter sets the whole game whether he or she starts in the front row or the back row.

The opposite hitter hits on the right side when in the front row, and can set when the main setter passes the ball (on defense).

Diagrams

The small grid shows starting positions for the rotation, with blue letters in the front row and red letters in the back row.

The serve and receive diagrams show position at the moment of the serve. Notice how the players must follow the starting position rules, front to back and left to right. A green dotted line helps show the tricky rules in each position.

Rotation 1

Serve. The setter starts in the back row, serving. At the moment of the serve, the front-row opposite and hitter switch places: this puts the hitter on the left side (which is generally stronger for right-handed players) and the opposite on the right side, available as a backup setter or right-side hitter. In the back row, the playing positions are the same as the starting positions.

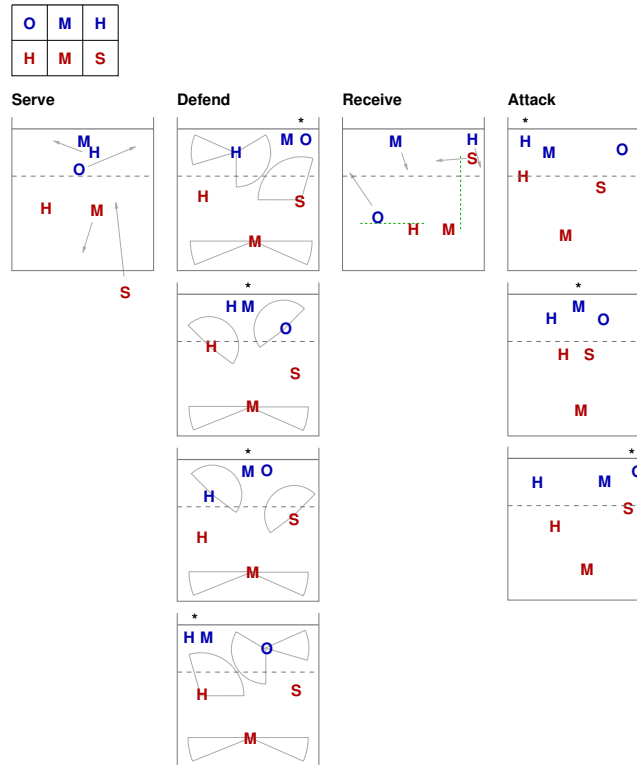


Figure 1: Rotation 1

Defend. The ball is on the other side of the net: the team gets ready to defend a hit on the left, right, or middle. The middle always blocks, along with whichever net player (O or H) is closest to the hitter; the block tries to cover the middle part of the court. The cross-court back-row player gets ready for hard cross-court hits. The middle back defender covers the back line all the way across. The front-row hitter who isn't blocking and the line back-row player cover tips. All passes go to the setting area (the right front of the court), and the team moves to attack.

Attack. The attack is going to be the same for pretty much every rotation.

Players who are nearby the attacker should place themselves in a little cup around the attacker, so if he or she is blocked, the team can recover the blocked ball and pass it back to the setter.

Receive. The receive in this rotation is a bit tricky. The opposite (O) comes back to help receive. (Due to starting position rules, the opposite must stay slightly in front of the back row hitter! See the green dotted line in the diagram.) The setter (S) moves forward out of the way—he or she won't be receiving—which pins the front-row hitter (H) up at the net. This is called “stack right,” named for the cluster of players on the right side of the court. The front-row middle can slide over near these two, to be out of the way of the receivers, or can just crouch down out of the way in the middle front (as shown in the diagram).

The tricky part is that on the first play, the opposite (O) stays on the left to hit, and the pinned hitter (H) stays on the right to hit. As soon as the ball goes over the net, they yell “switch” and trade to their normal places. (This switch isn't shown in the diagram.) So the team “stacks right” and the hitters “stay for one.” If this switch is too difficult or messy, some teams will skip it, and allow the opposite to stay on the left for the whole point. In this case, opposite and hitter would tell each other “stay all.”

Rotation 2

Serve. On the serve, in the front row, the middle (M) starts at his or her playing position, ready to block immediately if necessary. The opposite (O) switches to his or her position, moving behind the middle, after the serve.

In the back row, the starting positions are M-S-H, but the hitter (H) is serving, and there are no positional restrictions on the server during the serve. For that reason, it is common for the back-row setter and middle to start in their playing positions, and for the hitter to serve on the left side of the court. (This is shown in the diagram.) That said, the hitter can serve wherever he or she feels comfortable, and then switch immediately to his or her playing position on the left side of the back row.

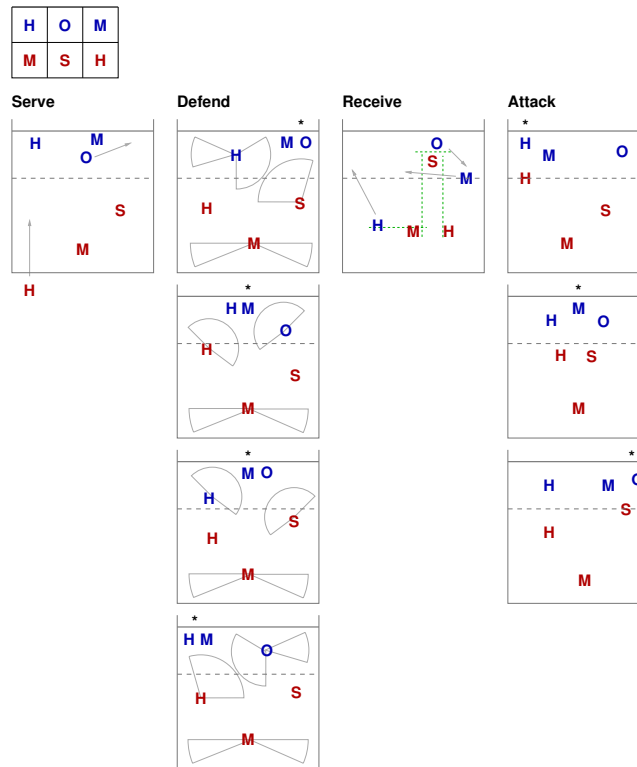


Figure 2: Rotation 2

Receive. This receive is called “stack middle”: the setter pins the opposite (O) up at the net, at the same time staying between the back-row middle (M) and hitter (H) receivers. (See all the dotted green lines on the diagram.) Meanwhile, the front-row hitter (H) comes back to help receive, making sure to stay slightly in front of the back-row middle.

In the front row, the middle and opposite usually switch immediately to their playing positions, saying to each other “switch right away” in preparation. During this switch, the middle must take special care to stay out of the way of the setter. Alternatives are to “stay for one” or “stay all.”

Rotation 3

Serve. Again, the front-row middle starts in position, ready to block; the front-row hitter switches behind on the serve. The back-row middle can serve whenever he or she wants, while the back-row setter and hitter switch places.



Figure 3: Rotation 3

Receive. The opposite (O) comes back to help receive, making sure to stay slightly in front of the back-row middle (M). The setter (S) is stuck way over on the left, which means it's convenient to put the front-row middle (M) and hitter (H) over there, too—a “stack left.” The setter needs time and space to get to the setting area: passes should be nice and high, and the front-row middle (M) should let the setter run first.

Rotation 4

Serve. Now the setter (S) is in the front row, so the team will have only two hitters (rather than three) for the remaining rotations. The setter is now a blocker on defense.

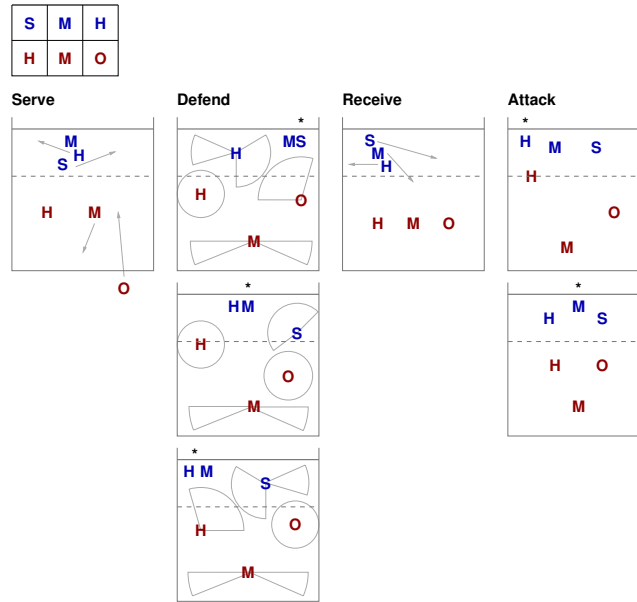


Figure 4: Rotation 4

Receive. The receive is fairly straightforward for the remaining rotations, because all back-row players are available to receive. In this rotation, the setter starts on the left. The front-row middle and hitter will stack with the setter. They can stack on the left if the setter feels like running; they can stack in the middle (or even on the right) to spare the setter and make the hitters run.

Rotation 5

Receive. Switching in the back row can be a bit messy. Usually the back-row players stay in their starting positions for the first attack, and then transition to their playing positions after the ball crosses the net. Alternately, the back-row players can agree to switch immediately on the first pass, or stay in place for the whole point.

In the front row, the middle (M) has the option to stay right as a right-side hitter for the first attack.

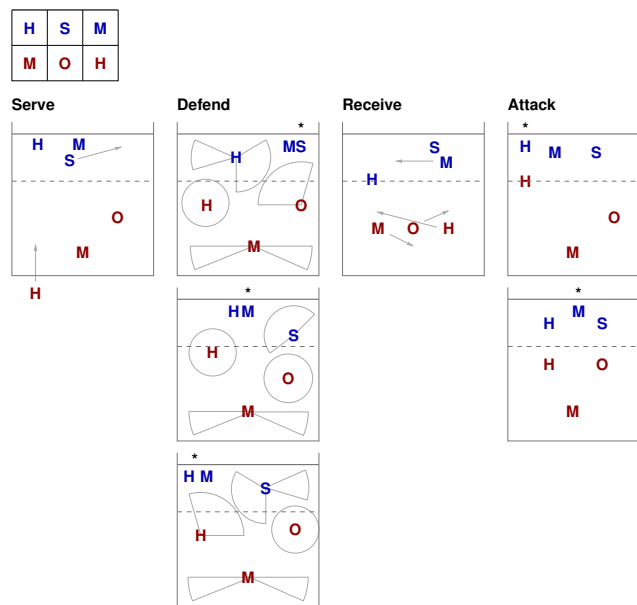


Figure 5: Rotation 5

Rotation 6

Receive. Like the last rotation, the switching in the back row can be messy, and is usually done after the first play is complete. In the front row, the middle and hitter start out of the way on the left, but move immediately to their playing positions on the serve.

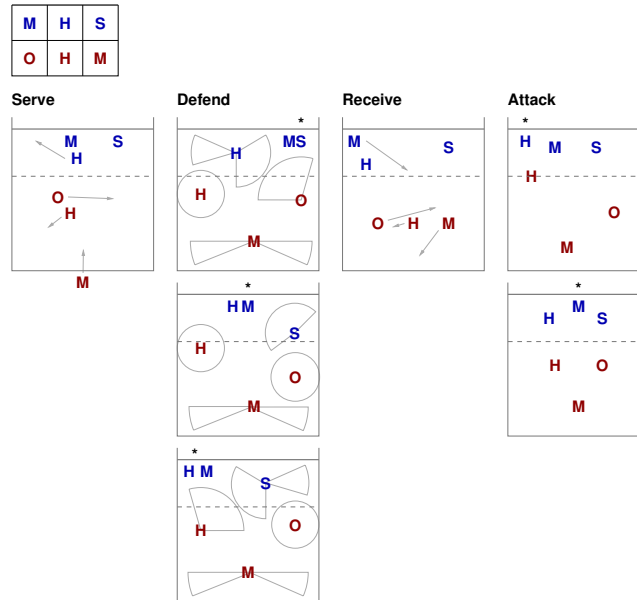


Figure 6: Rotation 6