



## CORNY'S CORNER

### *Think Fast At The Net*

*Corny Galdones, May 2009*

Ball handling judgment is Officiating 101. A more demanding area of concentration concerns playing situations where a passed ball might or might not enter the vertical plane above the net. The ensuing “bang-bang” action requires a snap decision in the blink of an eye after running through a quick series of crucial questions in our minds.

Is the setter in the front row or back row? The player pursuing the pass probably will be the setter. Know where the setter is because a back row setter can commit several faults in playing the ball. Before each serve, note the location of the setter on both teams. Violations can and will be missed by skipping this key step.

Are we looking in the right direction? Don't track the flight of the ball. Beat the players to the play to identify and anticipate who might be playing the ball and how. Will it be athletic, *i.e.*, extraordinary effort to somehow make something out of a stray pass? Will a blocker reach over for the ball? Will the setter dump the ball to catch the defense off guard? Will a blocker dunk, attack or chuck an overpass? Is a net fault likely? This list goes on and on. Expect the unexpected. Lock our eyes in position focused on the upcoming activity and be on our toes for myriad scenarios. Doing so slows the action down. That's major.

Where is the ball going? A ball directed by intent or accident toward the other side is fair game to be blocked (not attacked) by the defensive team even before it gets to the net plane provided no one on the attacking team can play the ball. If the ball is blocked legally or goes on over, did it come from a back row player in front of the attack line who contacted the ball while all of it was higher than the net? If so, it's an illegal back row attack.

Has the ball entered the net plane? Be alert for an overeager blocker reaching across the net and interfering with a ball being played that is still in whole on the attacking team's side. Whistle the blocker for reaching over. Once a teeny tiny bit of the ball enters the plane, it's up for grabs. A team begging to differ is plain out of luck. If the setter reaches past the plane to retrieve the ball for a teammate, it's a “reaching over” violation in USAV play. If both sides touch the ball at this point, only front row players can be involved. A back row setter caught in this mix is toast. Who made contact first? Was it the setter? Then it's an illegal back row attack. Else, it's an illegal back row block with one exception. If all body parts of the setter were lower than the net's height at contact, play on.

Was the ball handled properly? Bodies and arms will be flying around at the net. Sort them out then zoom in on the players' hands contacting the ball. Often, a ball near the top of the net is being set at about the same time a blocker intercepts the ball. First off, did the setter botch the set? Was the setter back row? Where was the ball? Where did it go? Did the blocker trespass? If both players are at fault, who erred first? Be swift with the right call and sell it.

A ton of factors has to be processed in a split second when an imprecise pass could be contested for at the net. Think fast. There's no other option.