

Second Referee Techniques for Rotation Recognition

by Steve Thorpe and Wally Hendricks

Fault Recognition

As second referees, one of our assigned responsibilities is to decide and whistle positional faults on the receiving team. As teams' serve receive patterns become more complex, the second referee's job takes on a corresponding level of complexity. Recent more liberal substitution rules throw another layer of complexity to the job of the referee. So, in the face of these challenges, what is a conscientious second referee to do?

One may ask, is this attention to positional faults really necessary? We all have (or should have) goals for our refereeing career. As you advance toward your next goal, you will reach a level where advancement will be difficult, if not impossible, unless you are able to consistently recognize positional faults. This is typically a weak point in many referees being rated to become USAV Junior National Referees.

In my informal research for this article, I talked, either directly or electronically, with some of the top referees in the country. Each one has a personal "technique" that they use to keep track of rotation. Each one also admits that when they started their careers, they were as lost as the rest of us have been (or maybe still are!). My point is that it takes a lot of hard work, concentration, and several attempts to find out what technique will work for each individual referee. The important thing is to make a personal commitment to get better at recognizing serve receive patterns, and therefore possible positional faults of the teams that we referee.

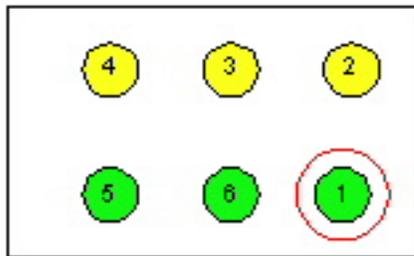
It is important for referees to stay abreast of current techniques taught by coaches. Serve receive patterns are constantly evolving, and each year we can count on seeing a new twist or two. Keeping up on these "coaching techniques" will help you avoid surprises in the middle of a match.

Primary Rotation Problems

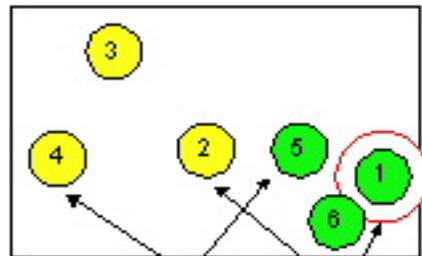
Most teams use two or three primary passers. These two or three players must cover the whole court. When they are in the front row, they must begin far enough back in the court to cover a deep serve. As a consequence, one of the rotation errors that occurs with the most frequency occurs between a primary passer and the person who stands just behind her. In two of the six rotations, two of these passers will be in the middle. In these two rotations, the R2 must be sure that the one who is front row is closer to the net. Very often one of the two will like to pass from deeper in the court. This will mean that they are often overlapped in this rotation.

We have tried to illustrate several of the problem areas in the pictures below. The pictures show six rotations for a single team. The alignments are fairly typical, but they

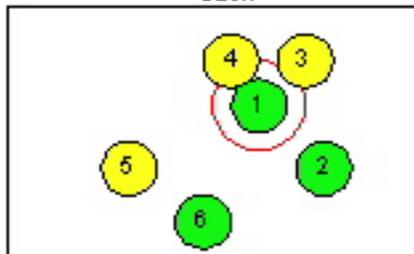
are only some of the many, many possibilities that are available. We will try to show which of these rotations are typically problem areas and which overlaps the R2 should especially concentrate on. In each rotation, the front row players are in yellow and the setter is circled in red. In the base position, the front row players are 4-3-2 (yellow) and the backrow players are 5-6-1 (green). They are shown in their positions in the base picture. The setter is always number 1. The two left-side hitters (2 and 5) are assumed to be primary passers. The opposite-hitter (4) is also a primary passer. The middle blockers (3 and 6) do not pass.



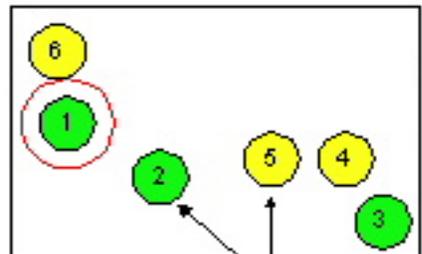
Base Position: Setter in right back



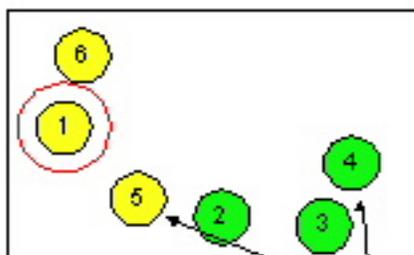
1: Base Position



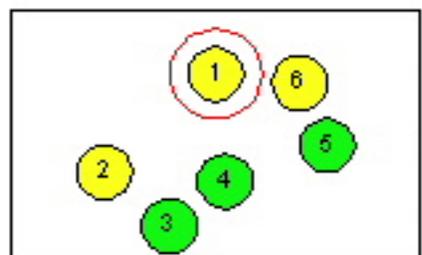
2: Setter middle back



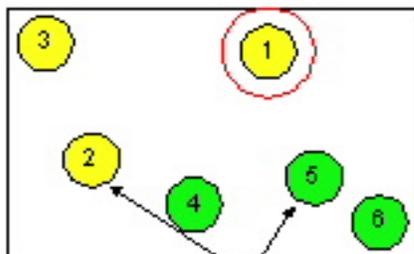
3: setter left back



4: Setter left front



5: setter middle front



6: setter right front

In rotation 1, the setter is right back. The team has stacked all their backrow players on the right side. Therefore, if the setter (1) is going to overlap, it is with #2, not #5 even though she appears to be behind #5. The overlap that occurs quite often in this rotation is between #4 and #5. The way that the diagram is drawn, #5 is overlapped with #4 and the R2 should make the call.

In rotation 2, the setter is middle back. There is very little chance for a rotational error unless there is a side to side error between the setter and #6 or #2.

In rotation 3, the setter is left back and the two primary passers are in the middle. This is again a rotation where there are many overlaps between these two passers (#2 and #5).

In rotation 4, the setter is left front and the rotation looks almost like rotation 3. One passer is right front. To get her to the left side quickly, all the front row players are stacked on the left. Many overlaps occur in this situation. The players to watch are #5 and #4, the right front player (although stacked on the left) and the right back player.

In rotation 5, the setter is middle front. There is little likelihood of a rotation error in this alignment.

In rotation 6, the setter is left front. In this rotation, like rotation 3, both primary passers are in the middle. The likely overlaps is therefore #2 and #5 again.

In the rotations that we've shown, only one has a likely overlap with the setter leaving early. Two involve the primary passers (#2 and #5) and two more involve one primary passer and one secondary passer (#5 and #4). The R2 must therefore be much more concerned with these rotation errors than was true in the past.

Should I call the overlap?

Many officials will indicate that they only call "significant" overlaps. They indicate that they call overlaps when it gives a team a competitive advantage. What does that mean? In fact, many officials only call overlaps when a player is very far out of position. But that is just the time when NO competitive advantage is trying to be made. The player has probably forgotten where he was in the line-up. The small overlaps that DO give a team an advantage are the ones that are often ignored. They shouldn't be. The rules require the teams to stay in rotation and they should follow these rules.

If a team is close to an overlap, it is perfectly acceptable to warn one of the coaching staff. It is not acceptable simply to continue to allow the overlap. Either the team must clean up the problem, or you must call the overlap. Calling the overlap immediately is probably appropriate early in a game or match. Giving a warning is appropriate later in a game or match if you have not called the overlap early. If you do give a warning, many coaches prefer that you communicate directly with one of their staff than with the players.

It is not appropriate to move away from your normal position to see an overlap more clearly. You should be able to see the players well enough from your normal position. If you are not certain that an overlap has occurred, then do not call the overlap. If you miss an overlap and then realize your mistake, it might be good practice to warn the team prior to that rotation occurring again. Calling an overlap late in a match that you have missed for the entire match is just as bad as calling a ball handling error late that you have allowed throughout the match.

Helpful Techniques

As I previously mentioned, each referee must find their own "bag of tricks" that helps them keep track of a team's rotation. Use these suggestions to get a start. Modify, improvise, and be sure to let me know if you find something that really works for you!

- The most basic, yet in my opinion the hardest to master, is to simply memorize the lineups in their proper order. Those that can do this still claim that it took a lot of work to sharpen this technique when they started out but believe that "anyone can do it".
- Most teams are lined up in the proper order when they are serving. Take a quick look before the serve to see where the serving team's players are, and remember where they should be after the sideout. The easiest for me is to look at the front row, but the same can be done with the back row.
- You still need to know the rest of the players' positions in relation to the front row. One way to do this is to remember which number is opposite the setter, and opposite the middle blocker. Some referees use characteristics other than their number to identify players. This can help when the numbers are not clearly visible.
- Take any other opportunity you can to check the actual lineup on the scoresheet. At each timeout, even if you have a good handle on the rotations, check for the positions of the next three servers on the receiving team. (they probably called the timeout)

Any technique you use must be started early in the match. During the warm-ups is a good time to identify the setters, middles, and possibly the primary passers. Do more than glance at the lineup sheets, and start to get a mental picture during introductions. If you find yourself losing focus during the match, concentrating on really nailing the teams' rotations can sharpen that focus.

Conclusion

As I mentioned at the outset, determining positional faults takes preparation and hard work. Just like an exercise program, though, the hardest part is to make the commitment to get started. To advance to the next level, it is a commitment a referee has to make. Good luck!