

Serve It Up!

How to prepare for a beach volleyball infiltration

• By Mary Helen Sprecher •

W

hile beach volleyball was added to the Olympics in 1996, there is plenty of evidence to suggest the sport originated in Hawaii in the early 1900s. Like surfing, the activity was carried to the United States, becoming a fixture in California—where it was noticed by the rest of the world.

At whatever point you want to specify as ground zero for the sport's meteoric rise, it achieved NCAA championship status in 2015, and that led to additional growth, resulting in a demand for courts in the USA not only at the collegiate level but at high school, junior, and recreational levels.

In fact, beach volleyball is known in many areas as sand volleyball because of desert climates, as well as landlocked areas like the Midwest. Even in coastal areas, some institutions are building courts on school property for the sake of convenience.

"I just spoke with a private high school in Calabasas that wants to have sand courts on campus to eliminate traveling to the beach," says Dale Hendrickson of Simi Valley-based TD Sports West.

Since parks are getting numerous requests for courts, it behooves managers to learn more about the sport—and why it is so important that courts be built correctly.





IT'S NOT A BIG SANDBOX

There are many considerations for beach volleyball courts, including available space, typical weather conditions, type of sand, maintenance issues, and more. Often, people without knowledge of how to construct or maintain such facilities mistakenly think of them as children's sandboxes on a large scale; however, the overall complexity of such facilities demands the use of a contractor skilled in sports construction.

There are several ways to find a contractor; one is through the American Sports Builders Association, the trade organization for design professionals, builders and manufacturers, and suppliers of equipment and materials used in sports facilities. The association's website, www.sportsbuilders.org, has an online directory that can be used to find industry members with the skillsets a project requires.

COURTS MAY TAKE UP MORE SPACE THAN YOU THINK

Considering the space required for a volleyball court? Think beyond the playing lines and consider safe overrun areas for players, space for officials and spectators, and necessary setbacks for light poles and maintenance or safety equipment.

Hendrickson notes the NCAA requires 5 to 6 meters around the perimeter of a court of 26.25 feet by 52.5 feet (8 meters by 16 meters), which is about 16.4 feet (5 meters minimum) around a court. This makes a total dimension of 85.3 feet by 59.1 feet (26 by 18 meters) of space needed for one NCAA court.

According to the *Official Beach Volleyball Rules 2019-2020*ⁱ, published by the International Federation of Volleyball (FIVB), the sport's major governing body, at the highest level of competition, a space 16 meters by 8 meters (about 52-1/2 feet by 26 feet) should be set aside for each singles court. The free zone, the overrun area outside the playing lines, is a minimum of 5 meters (16.4 feet) and a maximum of 6 meters (19.7 feet). A free zone is on each side of a court, including curbs.

Note, however, that beach volleyball courts are likely to host various levels of play. These include collegiate (using specifications set forth by the NCAA, although other organizations at the college level are offering beach volleyball) and high school (the National Federation of State High School Associations), as well as others. All playing lines are to be 5 centimeters (2 inches) wide. The lines must be of a color that contrasts sharply with the color of the sand. If building multiple courts, care must be taken to provide sufficient space between courts to accommodate safe overrun areas, as well as any dividers that are placed.

The height of the net depends on the age of the players. Exceptions also apply to seated volleyball play (for players with mobility limitations) in any setting.

The number of courts needed depends on the player population. If you have had interest from players in establishing leagues, or if a park or rec center expects to host play for local schools or colleges, you'll need to know how many players and how many teams will use the courts. A contractor skilled in building beach volleyball courts should be able to help determine the number.

“On the college level, schools are often looking for five to six courts, while high schools are usually looking for three,” adds Hendrickson.

ORIENTATION AND DRAINAGE CONSIDERATIONS

Outdoor beach courts run lengthwise from north to south; as with many sports facilities where players are watching a ball move through the air, one of the primary considerations in laying out a court is solar orientation. Courts should be laid out to minimize the need for players to look into the sun when following the flight of a ball.

Drainage is also critically important. The depth of any excavation often will depend upon the natural drainage of the site. Adding mechanisms that allow a court to drain following a weather event is perhaps the single-most important factor in the success of a facility. Many owners make the mistake of cutting back on investing in (or even not having) drainage capabilities, only to find that the sand remains sticky and unplayable, making it difficult to reschedule matches.





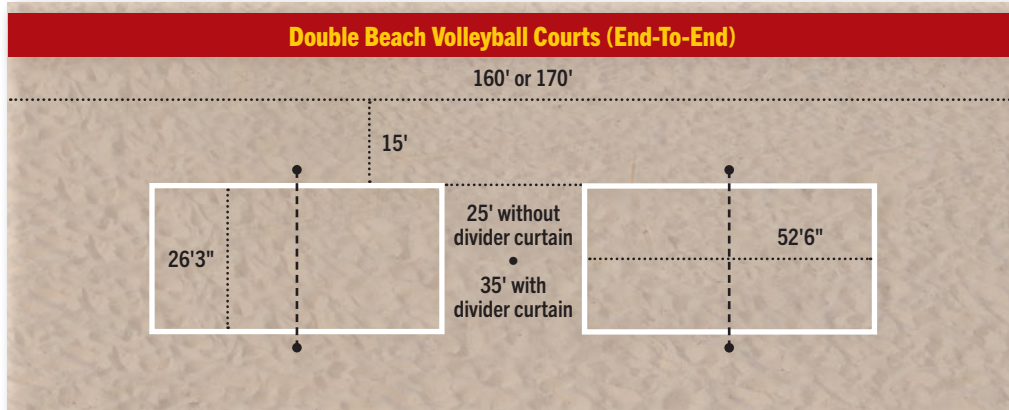
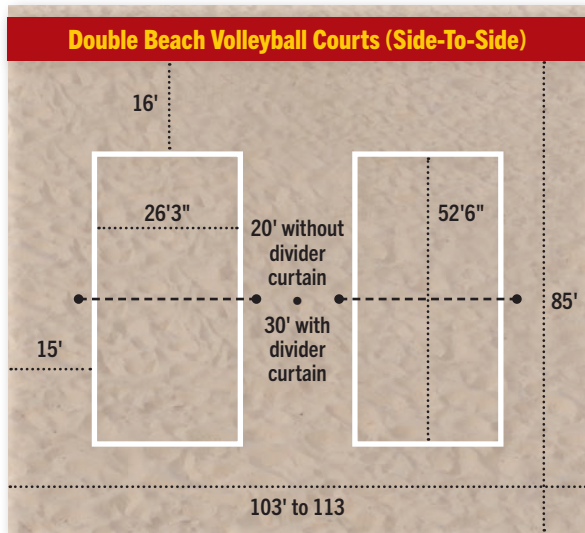
NOT ALL LOCATIONS ARE CREATED EQUAL

Courts and fields built near a public waterfront (a beach or lake, for example) will always be subject to tides, have ambient noise from the water, be subject to the prevailing winds, and the distraction of passersby. Landlocked areas may have fewer variables, but they present other challenges, including overhead lines and underground pipes. Prior to beginning any work on a site, have the area professionally checked and declared safe for digging.

TYPE OF SAND

The most satisfying part of building a beach volleyball facility is adding the sand. The 2021 NCAA Beach Volleyball Rules Modificationsⁱⁱ state: If the courts are constructed in a non-beach setting, it is recommended that the sand be washed, screened and clean, round, sub-round or sub-angular in shape, and intermediate in sizing, at least 45.7 centimeters (18 inches) deep on a court and at least 30 centimeters (12 inches) deep in the free space.

Granite-based sand (not calcium or limestone) remains more stable throughout the playing season, particularly in the face of precipitation and other adverse weather conditions. White sand resists heat better than those of darker colors. The American Volleyball Coaches Association notes that each court, on average, takes 220 to 250 tons of sand; the recommended depth is 30 to 38 centimeters (12 to 15 inches) for outdoor courts, 38 to 46 centimeters (15 to 18 inches) for indoor courts.



MAINTENANCE IS ESSENTIAL

The work doesn't stop when the sand goes down, however; in fact, to keep a court playing at its best, a regimen should be followed between matches to keep up with the sand that is displaced.

"Make sure regular, scheduled grooming and leveling takes place," says Hendrickson. "The sand will be kicked out and will be pushed away from the net in active play."

Sand should be routinely raked following each play session, or even between timeouts, if large quantities of sand have become displaced, or if the court looks particularly uneven. Tilling the sand weekly will also keep the court in optimal playing condition. **PRB**

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End Notes

i FIVB Official Beach Volleyball Rules, 2017-2020, approved by the 35th FIVB Congress, 2016: https://www.fivb.org/EN/Refereeing-Rules/Documents/FIVB-BeachVolleyball_Rules_2017-2020-EN-v05.pdf

ii FIVB Beach Volleyball Rules Modifications, 2021: https://ncaaorg.s3.amazonaws.com/championships/sports/volleyball/nc/beach/2021PRWSV_RulesModifications.pdf

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