

Volleyball England Policy for Transgender Participation

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Introduction

Volleyball England is the recognised National Governing Body for volleyball, beach volleyball and sitting volleyball in England and is responsible for the development, promotion, and delivery of volleyball across England. Inclusion is a core value of Volleyball England, recognising diversity and valuing everyone's individual differences. Volleyball England is committed to ensuring that we provide services fairly and without discrimination to all who want to participate in the sport of volleyball.

Following guidance from the Equality Group of the five UK Sports Councils, we reviewed the options for considering the participation of transgender people in English volleyball based on inclusion, fairness, and safety. For competitions in particular, we have considered the gender-affected nature of volleyball and the provisions that Volleyball England will make for a fair, safe, and inclusive competition structure for all players. This policy aims to facilitate the participation in England of transgender and gender diverse people as players, coaches, officials, and volunteers in volleyball.

We will review this policy on a regular basis.

Policy Summary

Volleyball is a gender-affected sport with different categories of competition to ensure fairness and, to some extent, safety. As a result, fairness cannot be reconciled in female competitions with self-identification in the female category. Therefore:

A transgender woman can still play in the male category of competition.

A transgender woman cannot play in the female category of competition.

A transgender man can continue to play in female competition, unless testosterone hormone treatment has commenced.

A transgender man can play in male competition as there is no physical advantage that would make the competition unfair.

Volleyball England welcomes and supports all coaches, officials and volunteers who identify as transgender and does not tolerate transphobic behaviour.

Volleyball Competition

The fair play principle is long established in sport. Grouping people into different competition categories such as male, female, junior and adult has ensured fairness and, to some extent, safety. While sports can be inclusive, fairness determines that individuals in many cases cannot choose the category in which to play.

Our sport is organised with specific competition categories and features rules designed to ensure fairness and to attract more people to play and continue to play. In volleyball, height gives players an advantage in activities near the net. The height of the net is therefore modified according to the height and physical prowess of players and the different categories of competition. Without this, competition would be uneven because of the disparity between the relative strength, stamina and physique of male and female competitors and adult and junior players.

Participation in Volleyball England Competitions

Regarding gender, the segregation of volleyball by biological sex does not account for transgender persons whose gender identity differs from their sex recorded at birth. However, there are significant differences in physical capacity between male and female players. The biological sex determines inherent differences in athletic advantage, with the performance gap and general height advantage between males and females becoming significant at puberty and have lifelong effects.

In volleyball, a spike is the most efficient way of scoring a point. The success of this action depends on height of contact, ball direction, and ball speed. The main factors that determine the height of contact are standing height reach (body height and arm length), and the ability of a player to jump and reach to perform technical elements in the most efficient way using explosive muscular power. Male players are taller, heavier, leaner, have greater standing reach height, speed, agility, and muscular power, than female players. Therefore the net is 19cm higher than in the women's game. In its review of available research, Sport England found that, with or without testosterone suppression, there was no appreciable loss of mass, muscle mass, or strength in transitioning males. Therefore, based on the current volleyball competition formats, fairness cannot be reconciled with self-identification in the female category.

Volleyball England, recognising male advantage, will therefore continue with its current competition structure to protect women's volleyball and maintain fairness and safety. This policy applies at all ages for official competitive volleyball. For non-competitive and social volleyball where fairness is not the main component, the competition-specific elements of this policy do not apply.

A transgender woman during the process of transitioning can still play in the male category of competition. A transgender man can continue to play in female competition, unless testosterone hormone treatment has commenced. A transgender man can play in male competition as there is no physical advantage that would make the competition unfair.

In terms of self-disclosure of sex, the approach must be that of trust until there is further requirement to change the approach in response to publication of this policy. We expect that players will follow the provisions of this policy and enter the appropriate competition.

Mixed Competition

Competition rules are often adapted to include men and women in some competitions, particularly local and regional volleyball and in sitting volleyball. In these competitions, it is accepted that the net height is set at the appropriate men's height. The Sport England guidance proposes that modified versions of a sport could be created to allow for inclusion. Volleyball is fortunate in that we already have such a version in mixed

volleyball. If the rules of the relevant competition permit, then transgender players will be able to compete in mixed volleyball as the gender that they identify.

Players in the Performance Pathway

All players in the Performance Pathway must register and play in international competition based on their sex registered at birth, as per the FIVB regulations.

Coaches, Officials, and Volunteers

Volleyball England welcomes and supports all coaches, officials and volunteers who identify as transgender and does not tolerate transphobic behaviour.

If the behaviour and/or actions of any Volleyball England employee, member or Club are inappropriate and/or offensive towards any trans person, Volleyball England will investigate that matter and, where appropriate, discipline the Club or relevant individual according to the Code of Conduct and disciplinary policies.

Useful Terms

- **Gender Identity**
A person's innate sense of their own gender, whether male, female, or something else (see nonbinary below), which may or may not correspond to the sex registered at birth.
- **Gender Expression**
How a person chooses to outwardly express their gender, within the context of societal expectations of gender. A person who does not conform to societal expectations of gender may not, however, identify as trans.
- **Non-Binary Gender** This term is used to describe people who don't see themselves as being part of the binary gender (male or female). Non-binary identifying can also be defined as identifying as either having a gender which is in-between or beyond the two categories 'man' and 'woman', as fluctuating between 'man' and 'woman', or as having no gender, either permanently or some of the time.
- **Sex**
Refers to the biological characteristics that define humans as female or male as registered at birth.
- **Transgender or Trans**
An umbrella term to describe people whose gender is not the same as, or does not sit comfortably with, the sex they were registered with at birth. Trans people may describe themselves using one or more of a wide variety of terms, including (but not limited to) transgender, transsexual, genderqueer (GQ), gender-fluid, non-binary, gender-variant, crossdresser, genderless, agender, nongender, third gender, bi-gender, trans man, trans woman, trans masculine, trans feminine and neutrois.
- **Transgender Man/Male or Trans Man/Male**
A term used to describe someone who is registered female at birth but identifies and lives as a man. This may be shortened to trans man, or FTM, an abbreviation for female-to-male.
- **Transgender Woman/Female or Trans Woman/Female**
A term used to describe someone who is assigned male at birth but identifies and lives as a woman. This may be shortened to trans woman, or MTF, an abbreviation for male-to-female.
- **Transitioning**

The steps a trans person may take to live in the gender with which they identify. Each person's transition will involve different things. For some this involves medical intervention, such as hormone treatment and surgeries, but not all trans people want or are able to have this. Transitioning can also take the form of social gender role transition which might involve things such as telling friends and family, dressing differently, asking people to use the right pronoun, and changing official documents.

FAQs

1. What is a gender-affected sport?

A gender-affected activity is a sport, game or other activity of a competitive nature in circumstances in which the physical strength, stamina or physique of average persons of one sex would put them at a disadvantage compared to average persons of the other sex as competitors in events involving the activity.

2. How should I welcome a transgender player to a session?

Inclusive venues, and coaches who take proactive steps that enable everyone to access volleyball, provide a positive experience and the opportunity to achieve their potential, and trans people are no exception to this. Please take on board these tips and be mindful that for many people (particularly trans people), they may have been on a considerable social and emotional journey even to reach your venue or session and we want to ensure that their first experience is a positive one.

We therefore recommend to:

- Welcome the player just as you would any other new attendee or member.
- Treat the individual with dignity and respect.
- Respect the private and confidential nature of the individual's situation.
- Take your lead from the person attending your session, ask their name and use it.
- Encourage the individual to feedback any inappropriate language or behaviour from other members or spectators so that it can be dealt with.
- Agree with them how and what information is to be shared with others if this is necessary; this may include a change of name and title, and this should be accommodated without prejudice or aggravation.
- Adopt a zero-tolerance stance to transphobic language or jokes, whether the trans person is present or not. Language that degrades trans people creates a hostile environment and must be stopped. Sometimes these behaviours appear trivial and are overlooked. They must not be, because if allowed to continue, they become the norm, and behaviour and language, not only towards trans people, but towards other minority groups is also likely to escalate.

Things to avoid:

- Please don't make assumptions about the player, either in terms of their sexual orientation or their medical background, take your lead from the information they may, or may not, offer you.
- Don't be uncomfortable or awkward in the language you use, the trans player should be referred to as the sex that they tell you are, i.e., use 'he' or 'she' as you would with anyone else.

3. What language should I use?

We would expect everyone in volleyball to use the following preferred terms.

Preferred terms
Trans
Trans person

Transgender
Transgender Man
Transgender Woman
He/Him/His
She/Her/Hers
They/Them/Theirs

4. What is the process for challenging a player's sex during competition?

The challenge should only be made through a formal enquiry to Volleyball England and not at the game or the event. Volleyball England will examine the complaint according to the Code of Conduct.

5. What happens if a player does not disclose their gender?

For participation or non-competitive volleyball, a player does not need to disclose their gender. For official competition, if a player does not disclose their sex as registered at birth, the player will be assumed to be male, on the grounds of safety.

6. What happens if someone wants to change their gender or identify as a different gender during a competitive season?

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A transgender woman cannot play in the female category of competition.

A transgender man can continue to play in female competition unless testosterone hormone treatment has commenced.

A transgender man can play in male competition as there is no physical advantage that would make the competition unfair.

7. Can female players that do not identify as transgender play for a male team and compete in male volleyball competition?

As this policy has determined that there is no unfair advantage to female players competing in male competition, the answer is yes.

Additional Resources

1. Sport Councils Equality Group - [Guidance for Transgender Inclusion in Domestic Sport](#).
2. Fair Play for Women - <https://fairplayforwomen.com/>
3. Women in Sport - <https://www.womeninsport.org/>
4. Pride Sports- Sport development organisation for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people. www.pridesports.org.uk
5. Stonewall- Campaigns for the equality of lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people across Britain. www.stonewall.org.uk
6. Mermaids- Raises awareness about gender nonconformity in children and young people amongst professionals and the public. It also supports children, young people, and their families) <https://mermaidsuk.org.uk/>