

# USA Pickleball Association (USAPA) Official Tournament Rules:

## Excerpt Listing Rules That Have Changed Recently or Are Changing Significantly As of November 1, 2007

The complete rules of pickleball are available on the USAPA web site (<http://usapa.org>). A version of the entire rules with highlighted sections showing the same rules that will be changing significantly is also available there. For those who wish to see ONLY the specific rules that are changing significantly, however, this excerpted version may be useful. Also included in this excerpt are a few rules that are often overlooked and should be noted.

### Section 2 – Court and Equipment

#### 2.E. **Paddle Specifications.**

2.E.1. **Material.** The paddle may be made of any material judged safe.

2.E.2.a. **Paint.** The surface may be painted but must otherwise adhere to the general surface requirements.

2.E.2.b. **Depictions.** Any writing or pictures on the paddle must be in good taste.

2.E.3. **Size.** The combined length and width including any edge guard and butt cap shall not exceed 23¾ inches (60.3 cm). The most common paddle measurement is approximately 8 inches (20.32 cm) wide by 15¾ inches (40 cm) long. There is no restriction on paddle thickness.

2.E.6. **Violation.** If a paddle violates the above rules, the Tournament Director has the authority to enforce a paddle change. If the player in violation refuses to change the paddle, the Director may declare a forfeiture of the match.

#### 2.F. **Clothing.**

2.F.2. **Safety/Distracting.** A player may be required to change wet, extremely loose-fitting, or otherwise distracting garments.

2.F.3. **Depictions.** Insignias, pictures, and writing on the clothing must be in good taste.

2.F.5. **Violation.** If a player's clothing violates these rules, the Tournament Director has the authority to enforce clothing changes. If the player refuses, the Director may declare a forfeiture of the match.

## **Section 4 – Service Rules**

Revised 1/1/07

- 4.A. **Serve Motion.** The serve must be made with an underhand stroke so that contact with the ball is made below waist level.
  - 4.A.1. **Underhand Defined.** The arm must be moving in an upward arc and the paddle head shall be below the wrist when it strikes the ball.
- 4.B. **Server Position.** The server must keep both feet behind the baseline during the serve with at least one foot on the court surface or ground at the time the ball is struck. The serve must be made while the server's feet are within the confines of the serving area. These confines lie behind the serving court baseline and on or between the imaginary lines extended from the court centerline and each sideline.
- 4.C. **The Serve.** The ball must be struck before it hits the court surface. The ball must land in the opponent's crosscourt (diagonally opposite court) service court.
  - 4.C.1. **Placement.** The serve must clear the net and the non-volley line and land in the opponent's service court. The serve may land on any service court line except the non-volley line.
  - 4.C.2. **Interference.** If the serve clears the net and the receiver or the receiver's partner interferes with the flight of the ball on the serve, it is a point for the serving team.
- 4.D. **Service Foot Fault.** During the serve, when the ball is struck, the server's feet shall not:
  - 4.D.1. Touch the area outside the imaginary extension of the sideline.
  - 4.D.2. Touch the area outside the imaginary extension of the centerline.
  - 4.D.3. Touch the court, including the baseline.
- 4.E. **Service Faults.** During the service, it is a fault if:
  - 4.E.1. The server misses the ball when trying to hit it. If the ball lands on the ground without the server swinging at the ball, it is not a fault.
  - 4.E.2. The served ball touches any permanent object before it hits the ground. Permanent objects include the ceiling, walls, fencing, lighting fixtures, net posts, the stands and seats for spectators, the referee, line judges, spectators (when in their recognized positions) and all other objects around and above the court.
  - 4.E.3. The served ball touches the server or server's partner, or anything the server or server's partner is wearing or holding.

- 4.F. **Service Lets.** The serve is a let and will be replayed if:
- 4.F.2. The ball is served when the receiver is not ready.
  - 4.F.3. The served ball hits the net and strikes the receiver or the receiver's partner.
  - 4.F.5. The referee or a player may call a let. If the serve is appealed to the referee and the referee clearly saw that the serve did not touch the net, then a point is awarded to the serving team.
- 4.I. **Readiness.** Serves shall not be made until the receiver is ready and the score has been called. The score shall be called after both the server and the receiver have returned to their respective positions.
- 4.I.1. **Not Ready Signals.** The receiver must use one of the following to signal that he or she is not ready to receive the serve: 1) raising the paddle above his or her head, 2) raising the non-paddle hand above his or her head, or 3) completely turning his or her back to the server.
  - 4.I.2. **Doubles.** When calling the score in doubles, the referee does not have to wait for the receiver's partner or the server's partner to be ready. It is the receiver's responsibility to signal not ready for his or her partner.
  - 4.I.3. **In Motion.** Once the server starts the serving motion, the receiver cannot become not ready or call a time-out.
- 4.J. **The 10-Second Rule.** The "10-second rule" applies to both server and receiver, each of whom is allowed up to 10 seconds after the score is called to serve or be ready to receive. It is the server's responsibility to look and be certain that the receiver is ready to receive serve.

**USAPA Comment.** A receiver who attempts to return the service shall be considered to have been ready. If the receiver has signaled not ready, the service must be replayed.

## **Section 5 – Service Sequence Rules**

Revised 5/1/07

### **5.B. Doubles.**

- 5.B.6. If the ball is served by the wrong team member or from the wrong court, the service is a fault. If the fault was by the first server, then the first service is lost and the correct second server serves from the correct service position. If the fault was by the second server, then it is a side out. A point made from an incorrect service position or an incorrect server will not be retained unless play has continued and another point has been scored or the opposing team has served.
- 5.B.8. The receiver is the only player who may return the ball. If the wrong player returns the ball, it is a point for the serving team.
- 5.B.9. The receiver's partner may stand anywhere on or off the court.
- 5.B.10. The receiving team does not alternate positions when a point is scored by the serving team. The receiving team may switch positions after the return of serve, but after the rally is over, the players must return back to their original positions, which correspond to the team's score and the players' starting positions.

### **USAPA Comments.**

When an incorrect serve is recognized immediately after the rally, the point does not count.

When an incorrect serve is not recognized until the server has lost the serve, the most recent point scored by that server on an illegal serve, if any, does not count.

When an incorrect serve is not recognized until the server has lost the serve and the partner has scored a point on the serve, the point of the first server counts. If the point scored by the partner is also the result of an illegal serve, that point does not count.

When an incorrect serve is not recognized until after the opposing team has served, points scored on the previous serves count.

## **Section 6 – Line Call Rules**

Revised 5/1/07

- 6.C. A ball contacting the floor outside of the baseline or sideline, even though the edge of the ball overlaps the line, is considered out of bounds.
- 6.D. **Code of Ethics for Line-Calling.**
- 6.D.7. All “let” or “out” calls must be made “instantly”; otherwise the ball is presumed good and still in play. “Instantly” is defined as calling “let” or “out” prior to the ball being hit by the opponent or before it has gone out of play.
- 6.D.12. If, while the ball is in the air, a player yells "out," "no," "bounce it," or any other word to communicate to his or her partner that the ball may be out, it shall be considered player communication. If the ball lands in, play will continue. If the out call is made after the ball has hit the court surface, it shall be considered a line call and play shall stop.

## **Section 7 – Fault Rules**

Revised 11/01/07

A fault is any action that stops play or creates a violation of the rules. A fault will be declared for the following:

- 7.D. Violation of a service rule (See Section 4).
- 7.E. A player, player's clothing, or any part of a player's paddle touches the net or the net post when the ball is in play.
- 7.F. The ball in play strikes a player or anything the player is wearing or carrying. There is one exception to this rule: if the ball strikes the player's paddle hand below the wrist, the ball is still in play. If the ball strikes a player standing out of bounds, that player loses the rally. In doubles, if the serve strikes the receiver's partner, it is a point for the serving team, providing it is not a let serve. This rule also includes balls that appear to be hit out of bounds: during play, if you catch the ball or try to stop it from heading out of bounds, you lose the rally.
- USAPA Comment.** If the player is in the process of changing hands with both hands on the paddle, or is attempting a two-handed stroke and either hand is hit below the wrist, then the ball is considered in play.
- 7.G. A ball in play strikes any permanent object before bouncing on the court.

**USAPA Comment.** If the ball in play hits a permanent object after it has bounced on the court, the player who hit the ball wins the point. If the ball in play hits a permanent object before it bounces on the court, the player who hit the ball loses the point.

- 7.H. Violation of non-volley zone rules (See Section 9).
- 7.I. Violation of the other rules (See Section 12).
- 7.K. A player hits the ball before it passes the plane of the net.

## **Section 9 – Non-Volley Zone Rules**

Revised 11/01/07

- 9.C. A fault will be declared if, in the act of volleying the ball, the player's momentum causes the player or anything the player is wearing or carrying to touch the non-volley zone or touch any non-volley line. It is a fault even if the ball is declared dead before the player touches the non-volley zone.
- 9.E. A player may step on the non-volley line or enter the non-volley zone at any time except when that player is volleying the ball. There is no violation if your partner returns the ball while you are standing in the non-volley zone. A player may enter the non-volley zone before or after returning any ball that bounces.
- 9.F. A player may stay inside the non-volley zone to return balls that bounce. That is, there is no violation if a player does not exit the non-volley zone after hitting a ball that bounces.

## **Section 11 – Time-Out Rules**

Revised 11/01/07

- 11.A. **Normal Time-Outs.** A player or team is entitled to 2 time-outs per game; each time-out period shall last only 1 minute. Then play must be resumed or another time-out must be called by either side. Time-outs may never be called once the ball is in play or the server has started the serving motion. For games to 21 points, each team is allowed 3 time-outs per game.
- 11.B. **Injury Time-Outs.** If a player is injured during a match, that player may call an injury time-out. The referee must agree that an injury did take place and that the player is not just stalling to rest or recuperate. If the referee agrees, then that player will be allowed no more than 15 minutes of rest during the injury time-out. If the player cannot resume play after the 15-minute injury time-out period, the match shall be awarded to the opponents.

- 11.C. **Equipment Time-Outs.** Players are expected to keep all clothing and equipment in good playable condition and are expected to use regular time-outs and time between games for adjustments and replacement of equipment. If a player or team is out of time-outs and the referee determines that an equipment change or adjustment is necessary for fair and safe continuation of the match, the referee may award an equipment time-out not to exceed 2 minutes.
- 11.D. **Between Games Time-Out.** Between games time-outs shall not exceed 2 minutes between each game of a match.
- 11.E. **Postponed Games.** Any game postponed by referees shall be resumed with the same score and remaining time-outs as when postponed.

**USAPA Comment.** When a time-out is called, the referee may request that all players place their paddles on the correct court and the ball be placed under the serving player's paddle.

## **Section 12 – Other Rules**

Revised 11/01/07

- 12.A. **Carry and Double Hits.** Balls hit during one continuous single-direction stroke are legal, even though they may be unintentionally hit twice or “carried.” Only when there is a definite second push by the player does the shot become illegal.
- 12.C. **Return Attempts.** A completely missed return shot does not, by itself, constitute a dead ball. The ball remains in play until it bounces twice or until any other fault has occurred.
- 12.E. **Injury During Game.** Rally continues to its conclusion, despite an injury to any of the players.
- 12.F. **Player Equipment Problem.** A rally shall not be stopped or affected if a player loses or breaks a paddle or loses a personal item.
- 12.G. **Items on the Court.** If anything a player is wearing or carrying lands on the court, it becomes part of the court. Therefore, if a ball in play hits the item on the court, the ball remains in play. If the item lands on the opponent's court, it is a fault. If the item lands in the non-volley zone as a result of a volley, it is a fault.
- 12.H. **Distractions.** Players may not yell, stamp their feet, or otherwise try to distract an opponent when the opponent is about to play the ball. In Doubles, team communication shall not normally be considered a distraction. However, loud communication at the time the opponent is about to strike the ball may be considered a distraction. If, in the judgment of the referee, a distraction has occurred, it shall result in the loss of the rally.

12.I. **The Net Posts.** The net posts are positioned out of bounds. If a ball strikes the net post or anything attached to the net post, it is a fault and a dead ball is declared. This rule does not include the net, the net cable, or rope between the net posts.

12.J. **The Net:**

12.J.3. If the ball bounces into a player's non-volley zone with enough backspin as to cause it to return back over the net, that player may reach over the net to hit the ball but may not touch the net. The player is also allowed to go around the net post and cross the imaginary extension of the net so long as he or she does not touch the opponent's court.

12.J.4. If a player hits the ball over the net into the opponent's court, and then the ball bounces back over the net without being touched by the opponent, the striking player wins the rally.

## **Section 13 – Sanctioned Tournament Formats**

Revised 11/01/07

13.B. **Draws:**

13.G. **Doubles Play.** A Doubles team shall consist of 2 players who meet the classification requirements to participate in a particular division of play. In an event based upon rating, the higher-rated player determines the team's ability level (or division or classification). In an event based upon age grouping, the lowest age of one of the team members will determine the team's classification. The opposite would be true for Juniors (18 & under). Under no circumstances can a partner change be made after the partners have begun team play. A partner change may be made prior to the first-round match if, in the opinion of the tournament director, the change is due to injury, illness, or circumstances beyond the control of the player.

## **Section 14 – Tournament Management and Officiating**

Revised 11/01/07

14.B. **Rules Briefing.** Before the tournament, all officials and players shall be briefed or supplied with the current rules about court hinders. This briefing should be put in writing when possible. The current USAPA tournament rules will apply and be made available. The Tournament Director may not impose any local rule or use any interpretation of any rule not stated within the current USAPA rules. Any exception to the rules that is desired because of physical limitations of the court or other local conditions must be approved in advance by the USAPA.

14.C. **Officials.** Every USAPA-sanctioned tournament must have a referee for each match. The Tournament Director or the Tournament Director's representative will assign all referees.



Although any tournament player may volunteer to referee a match, the Tournament Director or designated representative will have the final say on referee assignments. Officials may also include lines people at the discretion of the Tournament Director.

**14.D. Referee's Duties:**

Before each match begins, the referee must:

14.D.4. Meet with players at courtside to:

14.D.4.e. Use any fair method to determine initial service and side.

**14.E. Line Calls:**

14.E.2. Lines People:

14.E.2.b. Lines people will call all line faults within their jurisdiction and will signify fault by calling "out."

**14.F. Referee's Officiating Duties.** The referee is responsible for all decisions related to procedural and judgment calls during the match. If the players make the line calls and there is a disputed line call, the players may request that the referee determine the line call. The referee's call will stand. If the referee cannot make the line call, the player's call stands. Spectators are not part of the game and, therefore, cannot be consulted on calls.

**14.G.** In doubles, if players on the same side disagree on a line call made by one of them on their side of the court, one of the players may ask the referee for a ruling. If the referee clearly saw the play, the referee shall make a ruling based on observation. If the referee cannot make the call, the ball is good.

**14.M. Technical Fouls.**

Actions that may result in technical fouls are:

14.M.1. A player using objectionable or demeaning language directed at another person shall incur a technical warning or a technical foul, depending upon its severity. Once a technical warning has been issued, the second offense will result in a technical foul. Excessive profanity used for any reason shall incur similar action. The referee will determine the severity of any violation.

14.M.5. Intentionally throwing the paddle. If this action results in the striking or injury of any person or damage to the court or facility, an automatic technical foul shall be assessed against the offender and a point shall be awarded to the opponent.

**14.O. Effect of Technical Fouls and Technical Warnings.** A technical warning shall not result in a loss of rally or point awarded and shall be accompanied by a brief explanation of the reason for the warning. If a referee issues a technical foul, 1 point shall be added to

the non-offender's score. A called technical foul or warning shall have no effect on service change or side out. If a point is awarded, the player or team awarded the point must change positions to reflect the score after the awarding of the point.

## **Section 15 – Sanctioned Tournament Divisions & Categories**

Revised 11/01/07

### **15.A. Event Categories:**

15.A.1. In events described by gender, only members of that gender shall be allowed to play in that event.

15.A.2. Mixed Doubles - A mixed doubles team shall consist of 1 male and 1 female player.

### **15.B.3. USAPA Rated Tournament Events**

Senior 4.5+ — Men's & Women's Singles, Doubles, and Mixed Doubles

Senior 4.0 — Men's & Women's Singles, Doubles, and Mixed Doubles

Senior 3.5 — Men's & Women's Singles, Doubles, and Mixed Doubles

Senior 3.0 — Men's & Women's Singles, Doubles, and Mixed Doubles

4.5+ — Men's & Women's Singles, Doubles, and Mixed Doubles

4.0 — Men's & Women's Singles, Doubles, and Mixed Doubles

3.5 — Men's & Women's Singles, Doubles, and Mixed Doubles

3.0 — Men's & Women's Singles, Doubles, and Mixed Doubles

**USAPA Comment.** 4.5+ is an indication that the 4.5+ rating will initially include players 4.5 and higher. Players assigned a 5.0 rating may play in a 4.5+ event.