

GUIDELINES FOR UNOFFICIATED MATCHES



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The following guidelines will apply to matches that are played without officials present on court.

Players are encouraged to use this guide during tournament play, recreational play and leagues in conjunction with any additional information or procedures provided by event organizers.

This document provides a summary of procedures and unwritten rules which custom and tradition dictate players should follow. Although no system of rules will cover every specific problem or situation that may arise, all players have a responsibility to be familiar with the basic rules and customs of tennis.

The principles in this guide shall apply in cases not specifically covered by The Rules of Tennis and Tennis Canada Regulations.

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STARTING THE MATCH AND WARM UP

1. Coin Toss. Before the match starts, you and your opponent should either toss a coin or spin a racket to decide choice of ends and service. If you win the toss you may choose:

- to be the server or the receiver for the first game of the match, in which case your opponent may choose the end of the court or;
- the end of the court from which to start, in which case your opponent may choose to be either the server or receiver or;
- to require your opponent to make the first choice

2. Warm Up. The warm-up before the match should take no more than 5 minutes. It should consist of a few ground strokes followed by volleys, overheads and then serves. If you refuse to warm up your opponent, then you forfeit your right to a warm-up. You should make a special effort to hit your shots directly to your opponent. In doubles, if you and your partner want to warm each other up while your opponents are warming up, you may do so.

3. Warm-up serves and returns. You should warm up serves first from the deuce court and then from the ad court. Take all your warm-up serves before the first serve of the match. If you return your opponent's warm-up serves, then do so in a cooperative manner at a pace that does not disrupt your opponent.

SCORING

4. Server announces score. As the server, you should announce the game score before the first point of the game and the point score before each subsequent point of the game.

5. Counting points played in good faith. All points played in good faith stand. For example, if after losing a point, you discover that the net was four inches too high, the point stands. If a point is played from the wrong court, there is no replay. If during a point you realize that a mistake was made at the beginning (for example, service from the wrong court) then you should continue playing the point. Corrective action may be taken only after a point has been completed. (Refer to Rules of Tennis - Rule 27 for methods to correct errors.)

6. Disputes. If you and your opponent disagree on the score you should use one of the following methods, which are listed in order of priority:

- Count all points and games that you agree on and replay only the disputed points or games;
- Play from a score mutually agreeable to all players;
- Spin a racket or toss a coin
- If you do not agree on the court in which the disputed point started, toss a coin to select the court.
- If you do not agree on who served a disputed point in a tiebreak, toss a coin to select the server. (A coin toss may also be needed to determine the side in which the point is played and the end from which the server serves.)
- If you do not agree on who served a disputed game, toss a coin to select the server.

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Do not spend a long time debating each point or who is correct. You should follow the procedures outlined in this guide for making calls or calling the score. As soon as it has been established that you and your opponent are not in agreement and neither of you are likely to change your opinion, this becomes a disputed point to be replayed. Replaying a point because you have lost track or disagree on the score should not be confused with a scoring dispute that arises because of a disagreement on a call. (See Making Line Calls - Opponent's calls questioned)

Note: Disagreements during matches should not disrupt play on other courts or require other players to stop their matches in order to facilitate the dispute. Players should follow the procedures outlined and move on with the match. Patterns of problem behaviour with players at unofficial matches should be addressed through appropriate channels. (e.g. an official or tournament director if present.)

SERVING

7. Server's request for third ball. If your opponent requests 3 balls when serving you should comply if the third ball is readily available. Distant balls or balls on other courts should be retrieved at the end of a game.

8. Foot Faults. You may notify your opponent that they have committed a flagrant foot fault (as long as it is clearly visible from your side of the court). If you are serving and are advised by your opponent that you are foot faulting, then you should take action to correct your behaviour once informed. You may not expect to be excused your foot faulting because it is your established serving habit, or because you only just touched the line and did not create an advantage in the point.

9. Service calls by serving team. If you are serving, neither you nor your partner shall make a fault call on the first service even if you think it is out because the receiver may be giving you the benefit of the doubt. But you and your partner should call out any second serve that either of you clearly sees out.

10. Service let calls. Any player may call a service let. You should make the call before the return of serve goes out of play or is hit by the server or their partner. If the serve is an apparent or near ace, any let must be called promptly. Note that some circuits (junior tennis) no longer use the service let rule.

11. Obvious faults. When receiving you should not put into play or hit over the net an obvious fault. To do so may be considered a form of gamesmanship. On the other hand, if the receiver believes that they cannot call your serve a fault and gives you the benefit of a close call, you (the server) are not entitled to replay the point.

12. Receiver readiness. When receiving, you must play to the reasonable pace of the server. You should make no effort to return a serve when you are not ready. If you attempt to return a serve (even if it is a "quick" serve), then you (or your partner) are presumed to be ready.

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13. Delays during service. When serving, if your second service motion is interrupted by a ball coming onto the court, you are entitled to two serves. When there is a significant delay between the first and second serves:

- you get one serve if you were the cause of the delay;
- you get two serves if the delay was caused by the receiver or if there was outside interference.

14. Clearing balls between first and second serve. The time it takes to clear a ball that comes onto the court between the first and second serves is usually not considered sufficient time to warrant the server receiving two serves unless this time is so lengthy as to constitute an interruption. The receiver is the judge of whether the delay was long enough to justify giving the server two serves. It is not normally considered necessary to clear balls that are at the net between a first and second serve.

15. Retrieving stray balls. Each player is responsible for removing stray balls and other objects from their end of the court. Whenever a ball is not in play, you must honor your opponent's request to remove a ball from the court or from an area outside the court that is reasonably close to the lines. When you are retrieving balls, do not go behind an adjacent court to fetch a ball, and do not ask for return of a ball from players on an adjacent court until their point is over. If a ball comes onto your court from an adjacent court, you should wait until their point is over and then return it directly to one of the players, ideally the server.

MAKING LINE CALLS

16. Opponent gets benefit of doubt. In an unofficial match, players have the responsibility for making decisions, particularly line calls. You should be guided by the unwritten rule that if you have any doubt, the decision must be resolved in favor of your opponent. This means that you might find yourself keeping a ball in play that may have been out, or that you discover too late was out.

17. Player makes line calls on their side of the net. You are responsible for making the line calls for all shots landing on, or aimed at, your side of the net.

18. Ball touching any part of line is good. If any part of the ball touches the line, the ball is good. A ball 99% out is still 100% good. You should not call a ball out unless you can clearly see a space between where the ball lands and the line. You should never call a ball out until it has actually landed outside of the court boundaries.

19. Ball that cannot be called out is good. Any ball that cannot be called out is considered to be good. If you cannot call a ball out with certainty, you must call it as good. You may not claim a let or replay on the basis that you did not see a ball, or that you are not sure if it was in or out. Note that if you insist that your opponent's shot was really out but then you offer to replay the point to give your opponent a break, it seems clear that you actually have some doubt that the ball was indeed out.

20. Treat all points the same regardless of their importance. All points in a match should be treated the same. There is no justification for you to consider a match point any differently than the first point.

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21. Audible or visible calls. No matter how obvious it is to you that your opponent's ball is out, your opponent is entitled to a prompt audible and/or visible "out" call.

22. Player calls their own shots out. With the exception of the first serve, you should call against yourself any ball you clearly see out regardless of whether you are requested to do so by your opponent. The primary objective in making calls is accuracy. All players should cooperate to accomplish this objective.

23. Out calls corrected. If you mistakenly call a ball "out" and then you realize that it was good: the first time that this occurs, the point shall be replayed unless it was a point-winning shot (on a point-winning shot, your opponent wins the point). Subsequently, if you make any other incorrect calls you will lose the point. If the mistake is made on the second serve, the server is entitled to two serves.

24. Requesting opponent's help. When you request an opponent's opinion on a call and you receive a positive opinion, you must accept this judgment. If neither player has an opinion, the ball is considered good. Aid from an opponent is available only on a call that ends a point.

25. Service call in doubles. In doubles the receiver's partner should call the service line, and the receiver should call the sideline and the center service line. Nonetheless, either partner may call a ball that they clearly see.

26. Either partner may make calls in doubles. Although either doubles partner may make a call, the call of a player looking down a line is much more likely to be accurate than that of a player looking across a line. When you are looking across a line, do not call a ball out unless you can clearly see part of the court between where the ball hit and the line.

27. Partners' disagreement on calls. If you and your partner disagree about whether your opponents' ball was out, then you shall call it good. It is more important to give your opponents the benefit of the doubt than to avoid possibly hurting your partner's feeling by not overruling. If a call is changed from out to good, the principles of section 23 above apply.

28. Opponent's calls questioned. Before you question a call your opponent has made, you should ask yourself if you clearly saw the ball land in the court. It is difficult for a player who stands on one baseline to question a call on a ball that landed near the other baseline. You may ask your opponent about their call with the query: "Are you sure of your call?" If your opponent acknowledges that they are uncertain, they lose the point. If your opponent confirms that they are sure of the call, then it stands and there should be no further delay or discussion on the subject.

29. Prompt call eliminates two-chance option. You should make all calls promptly after the ball has hit the court. Make your call either before your return shot has gone out of play or before your opponent has had the opportunity to play the return shot.

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Prompt calls will quickly eliminate the “two chances to win the point” option that some players practice. To illustrate, consider the situation where you are advancing to the net for an easy put away when you see a ball from an adjoining court rolling toward you. You continue your advance and hit the shot, only to have your supposed easy put away fly over the baseline. You then claim a let. The claim is not valid because you forfeited your right to call a let by choosing instead to play the ball. You took your chance to win or lose, and you are not entitled to a second chance.

LINE CALLS ON CLAY

30. Calling balls on clay courts. If any part of the ball mark touches the line on a clay court, you should call the ball good. If you can see only part of the mark on the court, this means that the missing part is on the line or tape. You should take a careful second look at any point-ending placement that is close to a line on a clay court. Occasionally a ball will strike that tape, jump, and then leave a full mark behind the line. You should listen for the sound of the ball striking the tape and look for a clean spot on the tape near the mark. If these conditions exist, then you should give the point to your opponent.

31. Checking marks. Although it is acceptable to check marks on clay courts, calls should still be made promptly. It is not acceptable for you to delay making a call while you look for a mark on the court to justify your call.

If your opponent has made a call you may ask them to show you the mark and then if necessary, you may cross the net to view such mark. Likewise, you should offer your opponent this same courtesy for marks on your side of the net. It is only permitted to check a ball mark on a clay court. You may not use marks left on hard courts to determine the result of a ball.

OTHER CALLS

32. Lets called when balls roll on the court. When a ball from an adjacent court enters the playing area, you should call a let as soon as you become aware of the ball. You should not wait to see the outcome of the next shot before deciding to make the call. If you delay making the call you lose the right to call the let.

33. Touches, hitting ball before it crosses the net, invasion of opponent’s court, double hits, and double bounces. It is your responsibility to make a prompt call against yourself if:

- a ball touches you or your clothing;
- you or your clothing touches the net;
- you touch your opponent’s court;
- you hit a ball before it crosses the net;
- you deliberately carry or double hit the ball; or
- the ball bounces more than once.

These calls must be made by the player themselves. You cannot make these calls against your opponent, or they against you.

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34. Balls hit through the net or into the ground. You shall promptly make the call on a ball that your opponent hits through the net, or on a ball that your opponent hits into the ground before it goes over the net.

35. Catching a ball. If you catch a ball in play before it bounces, you lose the point regardless of where on the court you are standing.

HINDRANCE

36. Claiming a hindrance. If you need to claim a hindrance you must stop play as soon as possible. A let is not permitted for a hindrance caused by something within a player's control. You may not hinder yourself, therefore if a ball falls out of your pocket, or you trip over your own hat etc you may not claim this as a hindrance.

37. Talking during a point. You should not talk while the ball is moving toward your opponent's side of the court. If your talking interferes with your opponent's ability to play the ball, it is a hindrance and you will lose the point. Talking between doubles partners when the ball is moving towards them is allowed; you should not talk, however, when the ball is moving towards your opponents' court.

Consider the situation where you hit a weak lob and loudly yell at your partner to get back. If the shout is loud enough to distract your opponent who is about to hit the ball, then your opponent may claim the point based on a deliberate hindrance. If your opponent chooses to hit the lob and misses it, then they lose the point because they did not make a timely claim of hindrance.

If a player yells because of an injury or getting stung by a bee, this is an unintentional hindrance that would entitle the opponent to claim a let.

38. Feinting with the body. You may feint with your body while the ball is in play. You may change position at any time, including while the server is tossing the ball. However, any movement or sound that is made solely to distract your opponent, including but not limited to waving the arms or racket or stamping the feet, is not allowed.

39. Lets due to unintentional hindrance. If you are hindered by your opponent's unintentional act or by something else outside your control you are entitled to a let only if you could have made the shot had you not been hindered. Note however that calls or noises by spectators do not constitute a let for hindrance.

40. Grunting. You should avoid grunting and making other loud noises. Grunting and other loud noises may bother not only your opponents but also players on adjacent courts. If you are advised that you are disturbing other players you should make every effort to reduce the amount of noise you are making.

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MISCELLANEOUS

41. Timing. The following actions constitute delaying tactics and unsportsmanlike behaviour, and you should make every effort to avoid them:

- warming up for more than the allotted time;
- playing at about one-third a player's normal pace;
- taking more than the allotted 90 seconds on the odd-game changeover or more than two minutes on the set break;
- starting a discussion or argument in order to catch your breath;
- clearing a missed first service that doesn't need to be cleared; and
- excessive bouncing of the ball before a serve.

42. Clothing and equipment malfunction. If your clothing or equipment (other than your racket) becomes unusable through circumstances outside your control, then play may be suspended for a reasonable period. You may leave the court after the point is over to correct the problem.

43. Placement of towels. Place your towels on the ground outside the net post or at the back of the court. Do not hang your towel on the fence at the back of the court within the boundaries of the court. Clothing and towels should never be placed on the net.

44. Spectators never to make calls. No spectator has a part in the match. You should never enlist the aid of a spectator in making a call or request the opinion of a spectator to resolve a dispute. Noises made by spectators, however distracting, do not constitute a let.

45. Injury caused by a player. If you accidentally injure your opponent, it is your opponent that suffers the consequences. Consider the situation where you as the server accidentally release your racquet which strikes your opponent and incapacitates them. Your opponent is unable to resume play within the time limit and therefore even though you caused the injury, you win the match by retirement.

However, if you deliberately injure your opponent and affect their ability to play, then your opponent will win the match by default. Hitting a ball in anger or throwing a racket in anger is considered to be a deliberate act.

46. Toilet Breaks. Toilet breaks should be used for that purpose and no other. It is not acceptable for you to take a toilet break merely to rest or regroup after losing a set, or to disrupt your opponent's momentum. You should not communicate with other people or receive advice during your toilet break.

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47. Medical Issues and Cramping. A three minute medical time out may be allowed for you to treat an injury that has occurred during play. There must be some form of treatment available that will improve the condition of your injury to enable you to continue to play. Rest does not constitute treatment. The medical time out should be taken at a changeover or set break unless the injury is acute (eg a rolled ankle, bleeding due to a fall). Up to five minutes may be allowed to treat bleeding so that it is completely under control. Medical time outs are not permitted for untreatable conditions.

Cramping is not considered an injury and no medical time out is allowed to treat the effects. You may treat yourself during the time allowed at a changeover or set break but these breaks may not be extended in order for you to continue treatment. You may not stop play during a game or point to receive treatment for cramping. If you are unable to play at the time required, you may have to withdraw from the match.

TOURNAMENT ETTIQUETTE / GUIDELINES

48. Entering a tournament. You should not enter a tournament unless you are able to commit to playing the entire event. When you enter online it is recommended that you read any posted regulations carefully so that you are aware of the conditions under which you have entered. It is also a good idea to make sure that all your contact information is current so that the tournament organizers are able to contact you if necessary.

49. Draws and Schedule. The draws and schedule are usually posted online. You should check the tournament website regularly once the entries have closed to be sure you have the most current information. It is also a good idea to check your email regularly, as sometimes it is necessary to make changes to a posted schedule.

50. Pre-match preparation / arrival. You should arrive in plenty of time for you to perform any pre-match preparation you may wish to do, but at a minimum you should aim to check in with the tournament desk 15 minutes prior to your posted match time. Once you have checked in, your match may be called at any time, so you should be changed, have all of your equipment ready and any bathroom needs taken care of.

51. Lateness. If you find yourself running late for your match, you are advised to contact the tournament organizers or Referee as soon as possible and advise them of your situation. They may be able to offer solutions which would not be available if you otherwise arrive late without contacting the tournament.

52. New balls for a third set. When a tournament specifies new balls for a third set, new balls shall be used unless all the players agree otherwise.

53. End of match. At the end of the match, it is customary that the winner collects the balls and returns them to the tournament desk. If you have won the match you should also report your score and check to see if your next match has been scheduled. If there is a consolation being offered then it is also advisable that if you lose the match you also report to the tournament desk to determine if you have another match to play.

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54. Withdrawing from a match or tournament. You should not enter a tournament and then withdraw when you discover that tough opponents have also entered, or you do not like your draw. You may withdraw from a match or tournament only because of injury, illness, personal emergency, or another bona fide reason. If you cannot play a match, you should notify the referee at once so that your opponent may be saved a trip. If you withdraw from a tournament you are not entitled to the return of your entry fee unless you withdrew before the draw was made.

55. Requesting an official. While normally you may not leave the playing area during a match, you may visit the referee or seek a roving official to request assistance if officials are present at the tournament. Some reasons for requesting an official include:

- chronic flagrant foot faults
- a medical time-out
- a scoring dispute
- a pattern of bad calls
- rules clarification