



Basic Rules and Customs Every League Player Should Know

Read and understand the *Rules of Tennis* and *The Code*.

Remember that “tennis is a game that requires cooperation and courtesy from all participants.”

- Lateness penalties and defaults are mandatory. *Note the MCTA rule changed in 2010: default now occurs at 15 minutes after the scheduled start time of the match.*
- Make sure you know from your captain what agreement is in effect regarding the calling of “time” if that becomes necessary. **One** timepiece/action applies to all individual matches—not individual choices for each court.
- The calling of “Time” is the only outside intervention permitted in a match. All other issues are decided exclusively by the players on the court where the issue arises, without any involvement of captains, teammates, or other spectators.
- Coaching is not allowed in USTA League play. The *Rules of Tennis* define coaching as “communication, advice or instruction of any kind, audible or visible, to a player.” This prohibition applies at all times beginning with warm-up and continuing uninterrupted until the match is over.
- Where spectator viewing is limited or not available, spectators may sit along the court *only if* all players agree; and any player may demand that a spectator leave the court area at any time and for any reason.
- Make all your “choices” before you begin warm-up (spin racket, etc.) and then warm-up from the side on which you will begin match play.
- Remember, it is “warm-up” and not “practice.” This means: all players must take their warm-up serves before the match begins; and *warm-up is not the time for receivers to practice their return of serve*, but rather “a player who returns serves should return them at a moderate pace in a manner that does not disrupt the server.” (*The Code*, at #3–4)
- Play is continuous until the 3rd game of **any** set...no more than 20 seconds between the end of one point and the start of the next, and no stopping between games or on the first change-over. All other changeovers last no more than 90 seconds; a two-minute break is authorized at the end of any set.
- Players make all calls on balls aimed at, travelling toward, or landing on their side of the net. Players are obligated to call against themselves any illegal touch, “not up,” invasion, etc.
- Don’t call a ball out unless you can clearly see part of the court between where the ball hits and the line.
- When a player genuinely doubts an opponent’s call, the only recourse is to ask “Are you sure of your call?” If the answer is yes, that is the end of it. If the answer is no, then reasonable doubt exists and the player who made the call loses the point. No further delay/discussion is permitted.
- On first serves, when your team is serving, *play to your opponent’s call*. He/she is the only one who can call a serve “out” and may be giving you the benefit of the doubt on a close call (as is required by *The Code*, at #26).
- Server must call the score after every point. Assuming the server is calling the score loud enough for all to hear, unless a player challenges the score immediately, he loses the right to challenge at a later time—the players have accepted the server’s version!
- Foot Faults may be called for a point penalty only if they are “flagrant” and only after (1) warning the offender and (2) seeking an acceptable 3rd party to make such calls.
- Players should not talk while the ball is moving toward the opponent’s side of the net. If such talk interferes with an opponent’s ability to play the ball, advise the offender it is a hindrance (warn) and play a “let.” If it happens again, it is loss of point due to deliberate hindrance.
- Coman Tiebreak procedure is used in MCTA league matches: everything is the same except you change ends after the first point, then every four points thereafter (after points 1-5-9-13-17...) If at any time after beginning the second point of a tiebreak the players discover they failed to change ends at the proper time, the change pattern reverts to the standard procedure (after every 6 points).
- You always change ends at the end of a tiebreak (assuming you are using standard changeover procedures in the match).
- The player/team whose turn it was to serve first in the just-completed tiebreak shall be the receiver in the first game of the next set (or the match tiebreak).
- In doubles, teams may change their service order or sides for receivers, at the beginning of any new set or at the beginning of the deciding Match Tiebreak.
- Clothing, towels or other objects should never be placed on the net.
- No electronic device, including a cell phone, may be used on court for any purpose, including timekeeping (but nothing bars use of a cellphone to track time off the court). **2010 USTA Regulations now require that players’ cellphones be turned off and placed where they cannot be seen, except for emergency medical personnel who are “on call,” who must place their cellphones in “vibrate” mode. If a player’s cellphone rings during play, it is a deliberate hindrance, loss of point.**
- *The Code* stipulates that “Shaking hands at the end of the match is an acknowledgement by the players that the match is over.” This means once you shake hands, the match is considered to have been played in good faith and no changes in the *facts* can/will be made. It does *not* mean that captains have waived their rights to grieve over the proper application of the rules to those facts. For example, if after a “timed” match is over, it is determined that local league rules prescribe a different winner than the players thought when they shook hands, the correct result under the rules is simply applied.
- It is recommended that captains who are themselves participating in a match should instruct their players to initial scores of their individual matches on each captain’s copy of the printed scorecard before departing the site.

(Over)

ITF Rules of Tennis

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USTA Comment 4.2: "...A player who leaves the court to get a replacement [racket] is subject to code violations for delays under the Point Penalty System."

Rule 13: "If the ball in play touches a permanent fixture after it has hit the correct court, the player who hit the ball wins the point. If the ball in play touches a permanent fixture before it hits the ground, the player who hits the ball loses the point."

Rule 20: "If the first service is a fault, the server shall serve again without delay..."

Rule 21: "...A receiver who attempts to return the service shall be considered as being ready."

USTA Comment 21.2: "*Once ready, can the receiver become unready?* The receiver cannot become unready unless outside interference occurs."

Rule 23: "In all cases when a let is called, except when a service let is called on a second serve, the whole point is replayed."

USTA Comment 23.1: "*What happens when the server is interrupted during delivery of the second service?* The server is entitled to two serves."

USTA Comment 23.2: "*What happens when there is a delay between the first and second serves?* If the delay is caused by the receiver, an official, or outside interference, the whole point is replayed. If the server caused the delay, the server gets one serve."

USTA Comment 23.3: "*What happens when a ball from an adjacent court rolls on the court between the first and second serves?* The time it takes to clear an intruding ball between the first and second serves is not considered sufficient time to warrant the server receiving two serves unless this time is so prolonged as to constitute an interruption. The receiver is the judge of whether the delay is sufficiently prolonged to justify giving the server two serves."

USTA Comment 25.2: "*Must a request to remove a ball that is lying in the opponent's court be honored?* Yes, but not while the ball is in play. Additionally, a request to remove a ball that is outside the court but reasonably close to the lines also must be honored."

Rule 26, Case 2: "A player claims to have stopped play because the player thought that the opponent(s) was being hindered. Is this a hindrance? **Decision:** No, the player loses the point."

USTA Comment 26.2: "*Can a player's own action be the basis for that player claiming a let or hindrance?* No. Nothing a player does entitles that player to call a let."

USTA Comment 26.4: "*Can the server's discarding of a second ball constitute a hindrance?* Yes. If the receiver or an official asks the server to stop discarding the ball, then the receiver shall stop. Any continued discarding of the ball constitutes a deliberate hindrance, and the server loses the point."

Appendix IV: "[When using no-ad scoring] in mixed doubles, the player of the same gender as the server shall receive the deciding point."

Appendix V: "Ball mark inspections can only be made on clay courts....[a] player may not cross the net to check a ball mark without being subject to the Unsportsmanlike provision of the Code of Conduct."

The Code, #2: "All points played in good faith stand."

The Code, #8: "A ball that cannot be called out is considered to have been good. A player may not claim a let on the basis of not seeing a ball."

The Code, #20: "A player shall promptly acknowledge when:

- A ball in play touches a player;
- The player touches the net or opponent's court while the ball is in play;
- The player hits a ball before it crosses the net;
- The player deliberately carries or double hits the ball;
- The ball bounces more than once in the player's court.

The opponent is not entitled to make these calls."

The Code, #34: "A player may feint with the body while the ball is in play. A player may change position at any time, including while the Server is tossing the ball. Any other movement or any sound that is made solely to distract an opponent, including, but not limited to, waving the arms or racket or stamping the feet, is not allowed."

The Code, #35: "A let is not automatically granted because of hindrance. A let is authorized only if the player could have made the shot had the player not been hindered."