

USA Pickleball Association (USAPA)

Official Tournament Rulebook

The USA Pickleball Association (USAPA) was organized to perpetuate the growth and advancement of pickleball on a national level. It also includes goals for worldwide play and recognition. The USAPA is chartered to promote pickleball for the enjoyment of its members, to encourage sponsors to contribute goods, services, advertisements and financial support so that this sport can grow to its potential.

The purpose of the rulebook is to provide pickleball players with the rules necessary for organized league and tournament play. Some sections of these rules are designed to be used only for the conduct of USAPA-sanctioned tournaments. A USAPA-sanctioned tournament allows players to be ranked on a national basis. Non-sanctioned tournaments may also use these sections as guidelines. Tournament directors for non-sanctioned tournaments may be flexible in the use of these guidelines to better fit the skills, ages, and diversity of their players. The USAPA enthusiastically encourages these non-sanctioned tournaments to promote knowledge, growth of the game, skill development, and having fun while playing pickleball.

The USAPA published its first rulebook in March, 1984. The first revision was published in January, 1985. The second revision, published in 1987, made several changes for ease of rule finding. It also added sections on definitions, playing tips, and game variations.

The third revision, published in 1999, further clarified and expanded many of the serving, net, fault, non-volley zone, and other rules. Also added were the types of tournament formats, clarifications to the use of technical warnings and technical fouls, and the responsibilities and authority of the referees and Tournament Director.

These rules will not be changed without good cause. Comments and opinions are always welcome. If you have any questions in regards to the rules, please contact:

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Section 1 – The Game

Pickleball is a simple paddle game played using a special perforated, slow-moving ball over a tennis-type net on a badminton-sized court.

The ball is served underhand without bouncing it off the court and is served diagonally to the opponent's service court.

Points are scored by the serving side only and occur when the opponent faults (fails to return ball, hits ball out of bounds, etc.). The server continues to serve, alternating service courts, until server faults.

The first side scoring 11 points and leading by at least a 2-point margin wins. For example, if both sides are tied at 10 points, then play continues until one side wins by 2 points.

Unique Pickleball Features

Double Bounce Rule: Following serve, each side must make at least one groundstroke, prior to volleying the ball (hitting it before it has bounced).

Non-Volley Zone: A player cannot volley a ball while standing within the non-volley zone.

Section 2 – Court and Equipment

Revised 2006 and 4/1/09

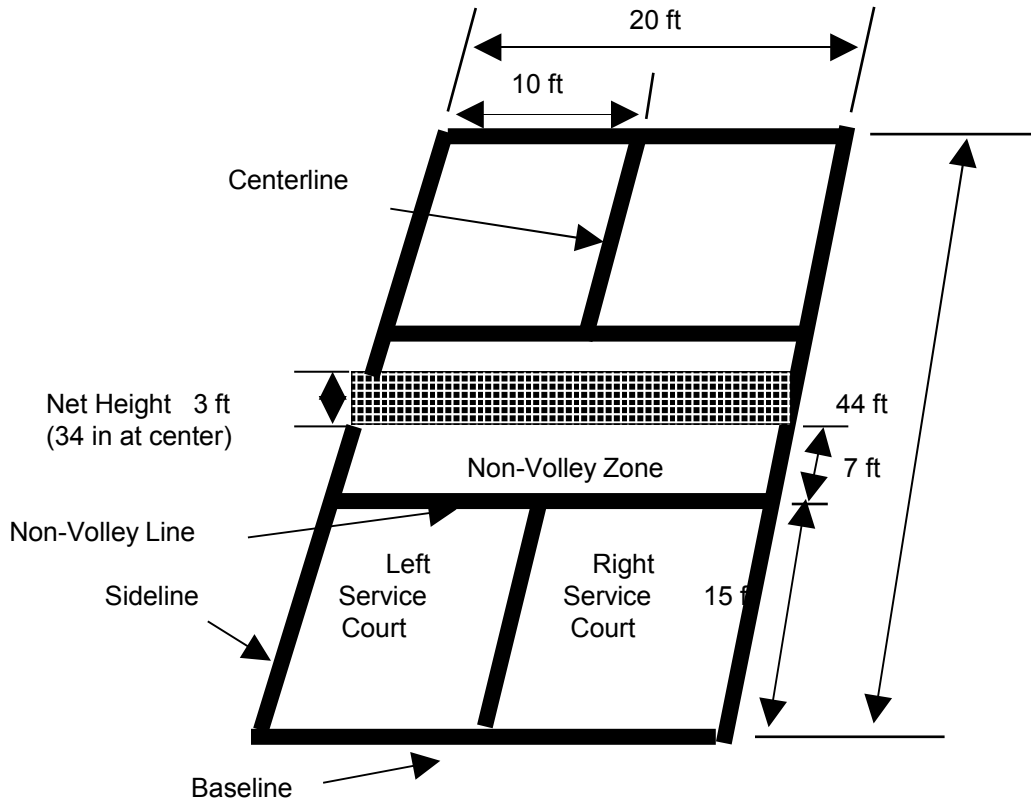


Figure 2-1 The Court

- 2.A. **Court Specifications.** The dimensions and measurements for the standard pickleball court are:
- 2.A.1. The court shall be a rectangle 20 feet (6.10 m) wide and 44 feet (13.41 m) long for both singles and doubles matches. See Figure 2-1.
 - 2.A.2. A total playing area 30 feet (9.14 m) wide and 60 feet (18.28 m) long is the minimum size that is recommended. A total size of 34 feet (10.36 m) by 64 feet (19.5 m) is preferred.
 - 2.A.3. Court measurements shall be made to the outside of the lines. The lines should be 2 inches (5.1 cm) wide and the same color, clearly contrasting with the color of the court surface.
- 2.B. **Lines and Areas.** The lines and areas of the standard pickleball court are:
- 2.B.1. **Baselines.** The baselines are the lines parallel to the net at each end of the court.

- 2.B.2. **Sidelines.** The sidelines are the lines perpendicular to the net on each side of the court.
 - 2.B.3. **Non-Volley Line.** The non-volley line is the line on each side of the net between the sidelines and parallel to the net. These lines are located 7 feet (2.13 m) from the net.
 - 2.B.4. **Non-Volley Zone.** The non-volley zone is the area of the court bounded by the two sidelines, the non-volley line, and the net. The non-volley line and the sidelines are included in the non-volley zone.
 - 2.B.5. **Centerline.** The centerline is the line on each side of the net bisecting the area between the non-volley line and the baseline.
 - 2.B.6. **Service Courts.** The service courts are the areas on either side of the centerline, bounded by the non-volley line and the baseline.
- 2.C. **Net Specifications.**
- 2.C.1. **Material.** The net may be made of any open, meshed fabric material.
 - 2.C.2. **Net Size.** The net length shall be at least 20 feet (6.1 m) extending from one sideline to the other. The net width shall be at least 2½ feet (0.8 m).
 - 2.C.3. **Mesh Size.** The net's mesh size must be sufficiently small to prevent a ball from passing through it.
 - 2.C.4. **Height.** The net shall be suspended over the center of the court and shall be 36 inches (0.914 m) high at the sidelines and 34 inches (0.86 m) high at the center of the court.
 - 2.C.5. **Center Strap.** A center strap may be placed at the center of the net to enable easy adjustment to the 34 in. (0.86 m) requirement at center.
 - 2.C.6. **Net Edge.** The top of the net should be edged with a 2 inch (5.1 cm) white binding over a cord or cable running through the binding. This binding must rest upon the cord or cable.
 - 2.C.7. **Posts.** Net posts should be placed outside the sidelines. Recommended placement is 12 inches (30.48 cm) from the sideline.



Figure 2-2. The Ball.

The ball pictured on the left of [Figure 2-2](#) is customarily used for indoor play and the ball pictured on the right is customarily used for outdoor play. However, either ball is acceptable for indoor or outdoor play.

2.D. Ball Specifications.

- 2.D.1. **Construction.** The standard ball shall be made of durable plastic material molded with a smooth surface and free of texturing.
- 2.D.2. **Size.** The official ball shall be 2 7/8 inches (7.3 cm) to 3 inches (7.62 cm) in diameter.
- 2.D.3. **Weight.** The ball shall weigh between 0.8 and 1.02 oz (21 and 29 grams).
- 2.D.4. **Design.** Spacing of holes and overall design of the ball must conform to the straight flight characteristics required for play. Balls that fly or bounce erratically shall not be used.
- 2.D.5. **Approval.** The Tournament Director will choose the tournament ball. Balls approved for play in any USAPA sanctioned tournament must be named on the official USAPA list of approved balls.

2.E. Paddle Specifications.

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

- 2.E.2. **Surface.** The paddle playing surface shall not contain holes, indentations, rough texturing, tape, or any objects or features that allow a player to impart additional or increased spin on the ball.
- 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 23³/₄ inches (60.3 cm). The most common paddle measurement is approximately 8 inches (20.32 cm) wide by 15³/₄ inches (40 cm) long. There is no restriction on paddle thickness.
- 2.E.4. **Weight.** There is no restriction on paddle weight.
- 2.E.5. **Alterations.** Homemade or modified paddles are acceptable so long as they meet the size and surface specifications.
- 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.1. **Color.** Clothing may be of any color.
- 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.4. **Shoes.** Shoes must have soles that do not mark or damage the court's playing surface.
- 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 3 – Definitions

Revised 11/01/07 and 4/1/09

- 3.A. Carry – Hitting the ball in such a way that it does not bounce away from the paddle but tends to be carried along on the face of the paddle during its forward motion.
- 3.B. Cross-court – The court diagonally opposite your court.
- 3.C. Dead Ball – A dead ball is declared after a fault. See fault.
- 3.D. Dink Shot – A soft shot that is intended to arc over the net and land within the non-volley zone.
- 3.E. Double Bounce – A ball that bounces more than once, on one side, before it is returned.
- 3.F. Double Hit – One side hitting the ball twice before it is returned over net. Double hits may occur by one player or could involve both players on a team.
- 3.G. Drop Shot – A groundstroke shot that falls short of the opponent's position.
- 3.H. Drop Shot Volley – A volley shot that is designed to “kill” the speed of the ball and return it short, near the net, to an opponent positioned at or near the baseline. This shot is especially effective when initiated close to the non-volley line.
- 3.I. Fault – A fault is any action that stops play or creates a rules violation.
- 3.J. Groundstroke – Hitting the ball after one bounce.
- 3.K. Half Volley – A groundstroke shot where the paddle contacts the ball immediately after it bounces from the court and before the ball rises to its potential height.
- 3.L. Hinder – Any element or occurrence that affects play. Examples: a stray ball that enters the court or people who disrupt play by walking across the court.
- 3.M. Let – A serve that hits the net cord and lands in the service court. Let may also refer to a rally that must be replayed for any reason.
- 3.N. Lob – A shot that returns the ball as high and deep as possible, forcing the opposing side back to the baseline.
- 3.O. Non-Volley Zone – The section of court adjacent to the net in which you cannot volley the ball. It includes all lines surrounding the zone.

- 3.P. One Hand Out – A term used to describe the condition when a serving team loses the first of its two allocated serves.
- 3.Q. Overhead Slam/Smash – A hard, overhand shot usually resulting from an opponent’s lob, high return, or high bounce.
- 3.R. Passing Shot – A volley or groundstroke shot that is aimed at a distance from the player and is designed to prevent return of the ball (e.g., a line drive close to sideline).
- 3.S. Permanent Object – Any object near the court or hanging over the court that interferes with the flight of the ball.
- 3.T. Rally – Continuous play that occurs after the serve and before a fault.
- 3.U. Replays – Any rallies that are replayed for any reason without the awarding of a point or a side out.
- 3.V. Service Court – The areas on either side of the centerline, bounded by the non-volley line and the baseline.
- 3.W. Side Out – Declared after one side loses its service and other side is awarded service.
- 3.X. Technical Foul – The referee is empowered to add one point to a player's score or a team's score when the opponent violates one of the rules calling for a technical foul or, in the referee's judgment, the opponent is being overly and deliberately abusive.
- 3.Y. Volley – Hitting the ball in the air, during a rally, before the ball has a chance to bounce onto the court.

Section 4 – Service Rules

Revised 5/1/08

- 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.E.4. The served ball lands on the non-volley line.
- 4.E.5. The served ball hits the net and lands on the non-volley line or inside the non-volley zone.
- 4.E.6. The served ball lands outside the service court.
- 4.E.7. The served ball hits the net and lands outside the service court.
- 4.F. **Service Lets.** The serve is a let and will be replayed if:
 - 4.F.1. The serve touches the net, strap, or band, and is otherwise good and lands in the service court.
 - 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.4. The referee or any player calls a time out because an object (a ball, another court's player, a spectator, etc.) causes a distraction by coming within the playing area.
 - 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.

USAPA Comment. There is no limit to the number of lets a server may serve.

- 4.G. **The Receiver.** The receiver is the player diagonally opposite from the server. In doubles, this position corresponds to the player's score and starting position. There is no restriction on the receiver's position.
- 4.H. **Double Bounce Rule.** The serve and the service return must be allowed to bounce before striking the ball. That is, each side must play a groundstroke on the first shot following the serve. After the initial groundstrokes have been made, play may include volleys.

- 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.I.4. **Wrong Score Called.** If the referee calls the wrong score, any player may stop play at any time before the return of serve to ask for a correction. A player that interrupts play after the return of serve will have committed a fault and shall lose the rally. A player that interrupts play after the serve when there was not an error in the score will have committed a fault and shall lose the rally.
- 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.
- 4.J.1. After one technical warning has been issued by the referee, further delays on the part of the server or the receiver exceeding 10 seconds shall result in a technical foul and a point awarded against the offender.
- 4.J.2. If the server serves the ball while the receiver is signaling "not ready," the ball will be re-served with no penalty and the server shall be "warned" by the referee to check the receiver. If the server continues to serve without checking the receiver, the referee may call a technical foul and award a point to the receiver's score.
- 4.J.3. After the score is called, if the server looks at the receiver and the receiver is not signaling "not ready," the server may then serve. If the receiver attempts to signal "not ready" after the serve is made, then the serve stands, whether or not the ball is returned.

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.A. Singles.

- 5.A.1. At the start of each game, the server begins the serve on the right side and alternates from right to left to right, etc., as long as the server holds serve.
- 5.A.2. The server must serve to the crosscourt (court diagonally opposite) service court.
- 5.A.3. The server's score will always be even (0, 2, 4, 6, 8, 10...) when serving from the right side and odd (1, 3, 5, 7, 9...) when serving from the left side (only in singles play).

5.B. Doubles.

- 5.B.1. The service always starts in the right-hand court and alternates from right to left to right, etc., as long as server holds serve.
- 5.B.2. The server must serve to the crosscourt (court diagonally opposite) service court. There is no restriction on the position of the server's partner.
- 5.B.3. The team's points will be even when the starting server is on the right-hand side. Points will be odd when the starting server is on the left-hand side.
- 5.B.4. The team serving the initial serve of a game can commit only one fault before service is passed on to the opposing team. After that, each team member serves until that player loses the serve when the team commits a fault. After both players have lost their serves, the serve passes to the opposing team.
- 5.B.5. The server will alternate between right and left service courts upon scoring a point. After the first server's team faults, the second server will continue to serve from that server's last side position and then alternate positions as long as the serving team continues to win points.
- 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.7. The receiver is the person on the diagonally opposite side of the court from the server. In doubles, this position corresponds to the player's score and starting position.
- 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.

5.C. Service/Side Selection and Rotation.

- 5.C.1. A coin flip or any other fair method will determine first choice of service or side. If the winner chooses to serve or receive, the loser picks starting side. If the winner chooses starting side, the loser chooses to serve or receive.
- 5.C.2. Sides and initial service will be switched upon completion of each game.
- 5.C.3. Sides will be switched in a third game (if the match is 2 out of 3 games) after the first team reaches a score of 6 points. Serve remains with the player holding serve.
- 5.C.4. In games to 15, sides will be switched after the first team reaches a score of 8 points. Serve remains with the player holding serve.
- 5.C.5. In games to 21, sides will be switched after the first team reaches a score of 11 points. Serve remains with the player holding serve.

Section 6 – Line Call Rules

Revised 5/1/07

- 6.A. Served balls that clear the non-volley line and land on any other service court line are good.
- 6.B. Balls in play (except on serve, see 6.A) that land on any court line are good.
- 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.** Pickleball is played according to specific rules. It also requires a code of ethics for line-calling responsibilities when performed by players.

The line-calling responsibilities of players are different from those assigned to referees or line judges. The officials make impartial judgment calls with all players' interests in mind. The player, when assigned line-calling duties, operates under the principle that all questionable calls must be resolved in favor of the opponent.

The basic elements are:

- 6.D.1. Players will call the lines on their side of the court (excluding the non-volley line, if being called by a referee).
- 6.D.2. The opponent gets the benefit of the doubt on line calls made.
- 6.D.3. Spectators should not be consulted on any line calls. Spectators may be prejudiced, unqualified, or not in position to see the call, and therefore cannot participate.
- 6.D.4. All participants should strive for accuracy in making line calls.
- 6.D.5. No player should question an opponent's call unless asked (except that any player may appeal a call to the referee in an officiated match). A player should ask the opponent's opinion if the opponent was in a better position to see the call. An opponent's opinion, if requested, should be accepted. The opinion of a player looking down the line is more likely to be accurate than one looking across the line.
- 6.D.6. Don't call a ball "out" when you are looking across the line unless you can clearly see the space between the line and the ball as it hits. The player's depth of field judgment, based on the laws of parallax, prevent accurate judgment in these cases.
- 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.8. Any ball that cannot be called “out” is presumed to be “in.” The player cannot claim a “let” (replay) because the ball was not seen. The opponent's opinion can be requested, and, if the opponent says the ball was “in” or the opponent could not see it, the ball must be declared “in.”
- 6.D.9. Players should not request a “let” (replay) because they were not sure the ball was “out” or “in.” In this case, benefit of the doubt goes to the opponent.
- 6.D.10. In doubles play, if one player calls the ball “out” and the partner calls it “in,” then doubt exists and the ball must be declared “in” (except that any player may appeal a call to the referee in an officiated match).
- 6.D.11. Line calls should be promptly signaled by hand or voice, regardless of how obvious they may seem.
- 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.A. Hitting the ball into the net on the service or any return.
- 7.B. Hitting the ball out of bounds.
- 7.C. Failure to hit the ball before it bounces twice on the player's court.
- 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 before a fault has occurred, 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 or a fault 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.J. The serve is made by bouncing the ball off the court surface before hitting it.
- 7.K. A player hits the ball before it passes the plane of the net.

Section 8 – Dead Ball Rules

Revised 11/01/07

- 8.A. A dead ball is declared after any action that stops play.
- 8.B. A ball is not declared dead until it has bounced twice or has violated one of the fault rules (See Section 7).
- 8.C. A hinder called by the referee or player will result in a dead ball and a replay.

Section 9 – Non-Volley Zone Rules

Revised 11/01/07

- 9.A. The non-volley zone is the area of the court bounded by the two sidelines, the non-volley line, and the net. The non-volley line and the sidelines are included in the non-volley zone.
- 9.B. A fault will be declared if, in the act of volleying the ball, a player or anything the player is wearing or carrying touches the non-volley zone or touches any non-volley line. For example, a fault will be declared if, in the act of volleying the ball, one of the player's feet touches a non-volley line.
- 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 if the player's momentum causes the player to touch anything that is touching the non-volley zone including the player's partner. It is a fault even if the ball is declared dead before the player touches the non-volley zone.
- 9.D. A fault will be declared if the player violates the intent of the non-volley zone rule. All volleys must be initiated outside of the non-volley zone. A maneuver such as standing within the non-volley zone, jumping up to hit a volley, and then landing outside the non-volley zone is prohibited. If a player is inside the non-volley zone for any reason, that player cannot volley the return until both feet are on the court surface outside 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 10 – Scoring - Game - Match Rules

Revised 11/01/07 and 12/10/08

- 10.A. Scoring: Only the serving team can score points.
- 10.B. Points are scored by legally serving a ball that is not touched by the opponent (an ace) or by winning the rally (faulting by the opponent).
- 10.C. Game: The first side scoring 11 points and leading by at least a 2-point margin wins. If both sides are tied at 10 points, then play continues until one side wins by 2 points.
- 10.D. Standard tournament format: Best 2 of 3 games to 11 points.
- 10.E. Alternate tournament format: A tournament director may choose to have some or all matches consist of one game to 15 points or one game to 21 points with a win by 2 points. A winning margin of one point would be appropriate for round robin events where the winners are determined by the total number of points rather than the most number of matches won.

USAPA Comment. The proper sequence for calling the score is server score, receiver score, then server 1 or server 2.

Section 11 – Time-Out Rules

Revised 11/01/07 and 10/02/08

- 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.

USAPA Comment. A player may take only 1 injury time-out per match. That time-out must be continuous and may be up to 15 minutes.

- 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 5/01/08

- 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.B. **Switching Hands.** A paddle may be switched from hand to hand at any time. Two-handed shots are also legal.
- 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.D. **Broken or Cracked Ball.** Play continues until the end of the rally. If, in the judgment of the referee, a broken or cracked ball affected the outcome of the rally, the referee shall call for a replay.
- 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.1. The net and the wires or strings holding up the net are positioned (mostly) on the court. Therefore, if the ball strikes the top of the net or strikes the top net wire or string and lands in bounds, then it remains in play.

12.J.2. Hitting the ball between the top and bottom net wires is a fault.

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.

12.K. **Shots Around the Net Post.** If a ball hit at an angle bounces in the court and travels beyond the sidelines, a player may return the ball around the outside of the net post. The ball does not need to travel back over the net. In addition, there is no restriction on the height of the return. For example, a player may return the ball around the net post below the height of the net.

12.L. **Coaching.** Players may consult with coaches or any other person during time-outs and between games. Coaching of players between points is allowed as long as it is not disruptive, does not delay the game, and consists only of instructions to the player, not a conversation between the coach and player. A conversation between a player and any person performing a coaching function shall result in a time-out charged to the player or team. If the team is out of time-outs, then the conversation may result in a technical warning or technical foul. Coaching is not allowed between the time that the referee calls the score and the end of the rally.

Section 13 – Sanctioned Tournament Formats

Revised 5/01/08

13.A. Tournament Formats:

There are five tournament formats that may be used. The particular format is typically the choice of the Tournament Sponsor or the Tournament Director.

- 13.A.1. Single Elimination with Consolation: The loser is out of the winner's bracket. First-round losers go into a consolation bracket.
- 13.A.2. Double Elimination: A loss will put the loser into a lower bracket. The winner of the lower bracket will play the winner of the top bracket for the championship. If the winner of the lower bracket wins, then a tie-breaker match must be played.
- 13.A.3. Drop Flight: All players start at the top level. First-round losers will drop into the second level. First-round losers of the second level will drop into the third level and so on. The winner of a first-round match in any level stays at that level. There may be a lower bracket for the second-round losers of each level.
- 13.A.4. Round Robin: All players will play each other. The player or team winning the most matches is declared the winner. Alternatively, the player or team winning the most points may be declared the winner.
- 13.A.5. Point Award: Similar to a Round Robin, but 1 point is awarded for each win. No points are awarded for a loss. In addition, a player or team winning the match by winning the first 2 games receives an additional point.

13.B. Draws:

13.B.1. If possible, all draws shall be made at least 2 days before the tournament commences.

13.B.2. The Draw and Seeding Committee shall be appointed by the Tournament Director.

- 13.C. **Notice of Matches.** It is the responsibility of each player to check the posted schedules to determine the time and place of each match. If any change is made in the schedule after posting, the Tournament Director or his designated representative shall notify the players of the change.

- 13.D. **Forfeited Matches.** A forfeit is a loss by default. It usually occurs because a player or team did not show up on time, because of player injury, or for misconduct. A player or team forfeiting a match for any reason shall lose the match as if that player or team lost all games of that match. Therefore, the other player or team wins the match as if that player or team won all games of that match. The winning player or team shall receive the appropriate point score or advance to the next level.
- 13.E. **Lower Bracket Matches.** In all USAPA-sanctioned tournaments, each entrant shall be entitled to participate in a minimum of two scheduled matches per event entered. This means that losers of their first match shall have the opportunity to compete in the event's lower bracket. The lower bracket matches may be modified at the discretion of the Tournament Director (e.g., one game to 15 points), but this modification must be announced either verbally or in writing to all players before the tournament begins or on the tournament application. If a first match is scheduled with an opponent who must "forfeit for any reason," then that scheduled match is considered a "win." The Tournament Director is not at fault if a player or team wins their first match by forfeit and then loses a second match and thus only plays one match. This is known as "luck of the draw," and the player or team falling into this category will not go into lower bracket play.
- 13.F. **Scheduling Matches.** If one or more contestants are entered in multiple events, they may be required to play multiple events on the same day or night with little rest between matches. This is a risk assumed on entering multiple events. If possible, the schedule should provide a rest period between matches.
- 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 adult (19 & over) event based upon age grouping, the lowest age of one of the team members will determine the team's classification. Players may play down in a younger division unless prohibited by the rules of the National Senior Games Association. Juniors (18 & under) may enter any Junior age-division event for which they are not too old as well as the adult division of 19 & over. 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.
- 13.H. **Court Changes.** In USAPA-sanctioned tournaments, the Tournament Director may decide on a change of courts after the completion of any tournament game if such a change will accommodate better spectator or playing conditions.
- 13.I. **Tournament Conduct.** In USAPA-sanctioned tournaments, the referee is empowered to call technical fouls and to forfeit a match if an individual player's behavior is detrimental to the tournament. In addition, the Tournament Director has the authority to expel any player for misconduct, no matter how many technical fouls have been received.

Section 14 – Tournament Management and Officiating

Revised 11/01/07 and 4/1/09

- 14.A. **Tournament Director.** A Tournament Director shall manage the tournament. It is the Tournament Director's responsibility to designate the officials and their areas of responsibility.
- 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 line judges at the discretion of the Tournament Director.

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

Before each match begins, the referee must:

- 14.D.1. Check on preparation of court with respect to cleanliness, lighting, height of the net, court markings, and hazards.
- 14.D.2. Check on availability and suitability of necessary materials for the match such as balls, score cards, pencils, and location of the clock.
- 14.D.3. Check to ensure that planned support is available.
- 14.D.4. Meet with players at courtside to:
- 14.D.4.a. Inspect paddles for irregularities.
 - 14.D.4.b. Instruct players on the need to wait for the referee to call out the score before serving.
 - 14.D.4.c. Point out court hindrances and other approved rule modifications.
 - 14.D.4.d. Instruct players on line-calling duties of referee, line judges, and players.

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

During the match, the referee must:

14.D.5. Re-check the net height if the net is disturbed.

14.D.6. Call the score after each point is played and that point has been marked down on the official scorecard. Calling out the score indicates to each side that play is ready to resume.

14.E. **Line Calls:**

Accepted hand signals are: line faults – outstretched arm pointing in direction of the out-of-bounds ball path; fair ball – arms extended parallel to court with palms down.

14.E.1. Officiating Options:

14.E.1.a. Players call all lines (generally used in non-tournament play).

14.E.1.b. The referee calls non-volley zone infractions. Players make their own calls on other lines on their side of court (generally used in tournaments).

14.E.1.c. The referee calls non-volley zone infractions. Line judges make calls for sidelines and baselines (generally restricted to tournament medal matches).

14.E.2. Line judges:

14.E.2.a. It is recommended that line judges be assigned to medal matches. The Tournament Director or designated representative will select line judges.

14.E.2.b. Line judges 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.H. **Match Forfeiture:**

14.H.1. A referee may impose a forfeit when a player refuses to abide by the referee's decision or engages in unsportsmanlike conduct.

14.H.2. The tournament director may impose a forfeit for failure to comply with the tournament or host facility's rules while on the premises, or for improper conduct on the premises between matches, or for abuse of hospitality, locker room, or other rules and procedures.

14.H.3. A referee may impose a forfeit when a player fails to report to play 10 minutes after the match has been called to play. The Tournament Director may permit a longer delay if circumstances warrant such a decision.

14.H.4. A player receiving 2 technical fouls in a match shall automatically forfeit that match. In addition, the Tournament Director has the authority to expel any player from the tournament for misconduct.

14.I. **Appeals.** Appeals to the referee regarding judgment calls (line calls, double bounce, etc.) will be decided by the referee. The referee may consult players or line judges to decide the outcome of the appeal.

14.I.1. A player may appeal a procedural or judgment call to the referee. The referee will consider procedural appeals and will provide a decision.

14.I.2. A referee's decision will either result in a point awarded, a service loss, or a replay.

14.I.3. A player wishing to signify an appeal during a rally may do so by raising his or her non-paddle hand to inform the referee that an appeal is being made regarding a previous possible violation. Play will continue until the rally is over and appeal can then be made.

14.I.4. Replays: After reviewing an appeal, the referee may determine that no decision on the appeal can be made and may direct a replay.

14.J. **Rules Interpretations.** If a player feels that the referee has interpreted the rules incorrectly, that player may request that the referee or the Tournament Director show the applicable rule in the rulebook.

14.K. **Protest.** Any referee's decision involving an interpretation of the rules may, on protest, be decided by the Tournament Director.

14.L. **Removal of a Referee or Lines Person.** A referee or line judge may be removed when both players in singles or both teams in doubles agree to the removal or at the discretion

of the Tournament Director. In the event that the removal of a referee or line judge is requested by only one player or team and not agreed to by the other player or team, then the Tournament Director may accept or reject the request. If a referee or line judge is removed, the Tournament Director will appoint the new referee or line judge.

- 14.M. **Technical Fouls.** The referee is empowered to call technical fouls. When a technical foul is called, 1 point shall be added to the score of the opposing side. After the technical foul is called, if the play is not immediately continued, or the player continues to be abusive, then the referee is empowered to forfeit the match in favor of the opponents. If a player or a team receives 2 technical fouls in a match, then that match shall automatically result in forfeiture. In addition, the Tournament Director has the authority to expel any player or team from the tournament for misconduct. If a player has been expelled from a tournament, any prizes and ranking points gained from the tournament shall not be forfeited.

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.2. Excessive arguing.
- 14.M.3. Threats of any nature to any person.
- 14.M.4. Purposely breaking the ball or striking of the ball between rallies.
- 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.M.6. Delay of game, either in the form of taking too much time during time-outs or between games, in excessive questioning of the referee on the rules, or in excessive or unnecessary appeals.
- 14.M.7. Any other actions that are considered unsportsmanlike behavior.
- 14.N. **Technical Warning.** If a player's behavior is not severe enough to warrant a technical foul, a technical warning may be issued. In most situations, the referee should give a technical warning before imposing a technical foul. Points shall not be awarded for a technical warning.
- 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 1/14/08

15.A. Event Categories:

Men - Singles and Doubles
Women - Singles and Doubles
Mixed - Doubles

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. **List of USAPA-Approved Events.** The list of approved events is in the rankings document on the USAPA website.

15.C. **Guidelines for Moving Between Ability-Level Divisions.** Guidelines for moving between ability-level divisions are addressed in the ratings document on the USAPA website.

Appendix A – Revision History

Feb. 3, 2007. Revised sections 2 and 4.

May 1, 2007. Revised sections 5 and 6. Section 18 revised and moved to section 6.D.

November 1, 2007. Revised section 7-15. Sections 16 and 17 were deleted. Added new rule 6.D.12 and revised rule 4.F.5. Added new paragraph (to the preceding page) regarding non-sanctioned tournament play. Revised paragraph 2.A.2 regarding total playing area of 34x64. Revised definition of “Hinder.” Added new definitions for “Let,” “Permanent Object,” and “Service Court.”

January 14, 2008. List of Approved Events in Section 15.B moved to the rankings document.

May 1, 2008. Added paragraphs 4.I.4 and 12.L and revised paragraph 13.G.

October 2, 2008. Comment added to the end of Section 11.B.

April 1, 2009. Comment added to the end of Section 10.

April 1, 2009. Revised sections 2.B.4, 2.C.7, 3.X, 7.F, 9.C, 14.D.3, and 14.H.2. Global changes: all occurrences of “lines people” replaced with “line judges” and all occurrences of “lines person” replaced with “line judge.”

