2026 OFFICIAL CASEBOOK

USA PICKLEBALL

2026 USA Pickleball Official Referee Casebook

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USA Pickleball Association is the National Governing Body for the sport of pickleball in the United States.

FOREWORD

The 2026 USA Pickleball Official Referee Casebook is the official supplement to the USA Pickleball Official Rulebook. The Casebook is intended for those who officiate the sport, those who are learning to officiate and those players and fans that desire a better understanding of the rules of pickleball.

The Casebook contains accounts of actual scenarios where there was a question as to what rules apply to the situation and the appropriate ruling. Players, referees, and fans can contribute scenarios for possible inclusion in the Casebook via email to the USA Pickleball Director of Officiating. Scenarios appropriate for the Casebook will then be submitted to the USA Pickleball Rules Committee for consideration. Only those scenarios whose rulings and interpretations have been approved by the Rules Committee will be included in the Casebook.

Format

The Casebook is divided into two Sections. Section I, 2026 Casebook Topics, contains new topics that have been approved since the previous Casebook edition. Section II contains existing topics from the previous edition. The existing topics have been edited where necessary to reflect approved 2026 rule changes. References to rule numbers in all cases have been edited to correlate with the rule numbers in the 2026 Rulebook.

Each Casebook item is uniquely numbered by year. Cases 2-25, 4-25, and 6-25 are the cases established in 2025. Cases 1-24, 2-24, 3-24, and 4-24 were the first four cases in 2024. Case 4-23 was the fourth case in 2023, etc. Each is labeled by topic in order to identify the essential topic. All applicable rule numbers are then identified. There is no attempt to arrange the cases numerically by rule number, as there are often multiple rules related to the scenario. The description of the topic is intended to be the primary identifier for the reader to navigate the Casebook.

Each scenario is described in detail followed by the appropriate ruling. Some topics will have a ‘COMMENT’ or a ‘NOTE’ paragraph, which is intended to give additional information related to the scenario or insight into the ruling and the spirit and intent of the rules.

Scenarios will always consist of teams playing doubles unless otherwise noted. In doubles, Team A will have A1 and A2 as partners while Team B will consist of B1 and B2 as partners. Any scenario action by the referee or players that is not specifically mentioned as being illegal can be assumed to be legal. For example, if the scenario begins with “Player A2 served.”, and nothing more was noted about the serve or server, the assumption is that the score was correctly called, the server and receiver were both correct and ready, and the serve was legal.

Navigation Tools

Each entry in the Table of Contents is a hyperlink. Clicking anywhere on the topic name takes the reader to that specific case. The referenced rule number in each case is a hyperlink to the *2026 USA Pickleball Official Rulebook*.

The index lists rule numbers in numerical order and the cases to which the rule is applicable for those who wish to search for all cases that relate to a specific rule.

Revisions to the 2026 Casebook – May 22, 2026

Case 5-26: Addresses altering or attempting to alter the flight of a ball without hitting it with the paddle.

Revisions to the 2026 Casebook – March 15, 2026

The following is a summary of the changes made to the 2026 Casebook:

Case 4-26: Addresses a ball that is mishandled by the server after the score is called.

Case 3-26: Addresses the correction of points scored when a team inadvertently is allowed a third serve in the service sequence.

Case 2-26: Clarifies the ball release requirement for a drop serve.

Case 1-26: Provides guidance on dealing with involuntary emission of bodily fluids.

Revisions to the 2025 Casebook

The following is a summary of the changes that were made to the 2025 Casebook:

Case 1-25: Deleted. The matter is now specifically addressed in the 2026 Rulebook (Rule 21.C.9).

Case 2-25: Provides further clarity on when an out call can be made to resolve a rally by requiring a prompt out call.

Case 3-25: Deleted. The case was necessary in 2025 when the rule inadvertently included a wrong server fault. That error was corrected with an errata to the 2025 rule. The 2026 rule now clearly applies only to a wrong receiver (Rule 5.C.1.c).

Case 5-25: Deleted. The matter is now specifically addressed in the 2026 Rulebook (Rule 22.E.1).

Case 5-23: Deleted. The matter is now specifically addressed in the 2026 Rulebook (Rule 21.C.4).

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SECTION I – 2026 CASEBOOK TOPICS

CASE 1-26: INVOLUNTARY BODILY FLUIDS ON THE COURT DURING A RALLY

Applicable Rule(s): **21.D** Referee Time-Out**; 10.H** Injury

SCENARIO: During a rally, Player A becomes ill on the court, or blood from a player is noticed on the playing surface. The rally is still in progress when the referee observes the bodily fluid on the court. What action should the referee take?

RULING: The referee must immediately stop play and declare a referee timeout. The referee must ensure the affected area is properly cleaned and all items, such as the ball, paddles, shoes, clothing, or any other equipment that may have been contaminated is properly cleaned or removed from play before resuming the match.

COMMENT: Rule 21.D allows the referee to call an immediate referee timeout for extenuating circumstances affecting the safety of play. The presence of bodily fluids on the playing surface presents an immediate safety and biohazard risk. Bodily fluids may create a slipping hazard and may contaminate the court surface, ball, or equipment, thus posing a risk to players and officials. The immediate stoppage of play decreases the risk of cross-contamination and prevents extend cleanup.

When play is stopped by the referee under these circumstances, no fault is assessed and the rally must be replayed.

NOTE: Rule 10.H provides that if a player is injured during a rally, play shall continue until the rally is completed. However, the presence of bodily fluids on the playing surface is fundamentally different from injuries such as a muscle strain or a fall. This case clarifies that the presence of bodily fluids on the playing surface is a safety condition requiring immediate referee intervention and is not treated as a routine player injury under Rule 10.H.

CASE 2-26: BALL RELEASE FOR A DROP SERVE

Applicable Rule(s): **7.D.2** Release Force

SCENARIO: While serving the ball using the drop serve, the player is moving forward toward the baseline while releasing the ball. Is this legal?

RULING: No.

COMMENT: Rule 7.D.2 explicitly requires that, when executing a drop serve, the server must release the ball without imparting any additional force or directional influence. The ball may not be propelled in any direction or by any means. If a server is moving forward while holding the ball and releases it without first coming to a complete stop, the ball is traveling forward at the same velocity as the server at the moment of release. That forward momentum is no different in principle from a server who remains stationary and deliberately tosses the ball

forward before contact. In both cases, the ball has been propelled in a forward direction. Neither action complies with Rule 7.D.2.

The operative concept underlying the drop serve release requirement is "**Stop and Drop**." At the moment of release, the ball must be motionless relative to the court, and the only force acting upon it must be gravity. Minor forward movements may seem insignificant and offer no clear competitive advantage, but the rule does not depend on advantage or material impact as it is absolute. Any force, no matter how slight or in what direction, violates both the wording and intent of Rule 7.D.2.

CASE 3-26: FAILURE TO AWARD SIDE OUT; WRONG TEAM CONTINUES SERVING

Applicable Rule(s): **5.B.6** Duration of Second Serve**; Definition** "Ball in Play"**; 5.C.1.a** Replay – Correct Claim**; 5.C.2** Player or Position Error Identified After Rally

SCENARIO 1: The score is 3-2-2 with Team A serving. Team A loses the rally, which should result in a side out. However, neither the referee nor the players recognize that the service sequence has ended, and Team A continues serving. Team A wins two subsequent rallies and the score becomes 5-2-2. Team A then loses the next rally, and the ball is provided to Team B for the side out. At that time, and before Team B puts the ball in play, the referee realizes that Team A had improperly continued serving after their service entitlement had ended and that Team A scored two points during that period. 1) What is the correct ruling, and 2) what would be the effect of any verbal warnings, technical warnings, or technical fouls that might be assessed during the error?

RULING: Team A was not entitled to serve after losing the rally at 3-2-2. The referee must correct the error by restoring the match to the point at which the side out should have occurred, and the serve should have transferred to Team B. The two points scored by Team A (resulting in 5-2-2) are invalid and must be removed. The score reverts to 3-2-2, the side out is completed, and Team B will serve at 2-3-1.

Any verbal warnings, technical warnings, or technical fouls are assessed during the period when the wrong team is serving will remain in effect. Any time-outs taken during the same period also remains as charged time outs.

COMMENT: Under Rule 5.B.6, when the second server loses a rally, a side out occurs and service entitlement transfers to the opposing team. At that moment, the original serving team no longer has the legal right to initiate a rally. Service entitlement is the controlling principle. Only the team entitled to serve may initiate a valid rally. Any rally initiated by a team that does not have service entitlement is invalid. Because the error was discovered before the opposing team put the ball in play, the referee must reconstruct the score to the point at which service entitlement should have transferred.

NOTE: In officiated play, the referee is responsible for correctly awarding service entitlement and must reconstruct the score based on the best available information. In non-officiated play, players may correct only those points on which both teams agree were won in error.

SCENARIO 2: Same facts as Scenario 1, except the error is discovered after the score is called and Team B has already put the ball in play by serving the next rally.

RULING: Because Team B had already put the ball in play to begin the next rally before the error was discovered, the prior rallies stand. Play continues with Team B at 2-5-1.

COMMENT: A "ball in play" is defined as beginning when the serve is struck. If the error is discovered before the opposing team puts the ball in play (Scenario 1), the referee corrects the score and restores proper service entitlement as it existed when the side out should have occurred. **Once the opposing team has put the ball in play to begin the next rally, the prior score becomes final and is not subject to adjustment.** The start of the next rally establishes the cut-off point for correcting the service entitlement error. This keeps the continuity of play and provides a clear, enforceable standard.

SCENARIO 3: How would this be handled in a match that uses rally scoring?

COMMENT: In this case, we can reasonably assume that the same scenario (i.e., the same player or team serving again after a side out) will not occur since only one server serves per side-out. Under rally scoring, the only similar situation would typically involve an incorrect server rather than a player or team without service entitlement.

RULING: In those cases, no rallies would be cancelled or reversed because the correct player or team had the right to serve. One of two things will have happened; either 1) if an incorrect the server error is discovered before or during the rally, the rally is replayed (Rule 5.C.1.a), or 2) the result of any rally that is played out with an incorrect server stands (Rule 5.C.2). In other words, these are positional errors, not entitlement errors. This is even true if the wrong server serves and loses the rally.

NOTE: This case addresses service entitlement errors and distinguishes them from sequence errors under Rule 5.C (incorrect server, incorrect receiver, or incorrect position within the serving team). In sequence errors, the correct team retained service entitlement but the wrong player or position was involved. In contrast, when a team without service entitlement initiates a rally, those rallies are invalid unless subsequent play has resumed under proper service entitlement.

CASE 4-26: BALL MISHANDLED AFTER THE SCORE IS CALLED

Applicable Rule(s): **6.D** 10-Second Rule**; 6.D.1** Fault – 10-Second Violation

SCENARIO: After the referee calls the score, the server prepares to serve. During preparation, the ball accidentally slips from the server's hand, strikes the server's foot, or otherwise rolls away. The server makes an obvious move to retrieve the ball, but it rolls under nearby bleachers and cannot be retrieved quickly. More than 10 seconds elapse after the score is called before the server is ready to serve. What action should the referee take?

RULING: The referee should enforce Rule 6.D.1 and call a fault if the serve is not struck within 10 seconds after the score is called.

COMMENT: Rule 6.D requires the server to strike the serve within 10 seconds after the score is called. The rule was adopted to maintain the pace of play and prevent unnecessary delay before the serve.

Although the loss of the ball may be accidental, a strict application of the rule eliminates the need for the referee to judge the cause of the delay or determine whether the incident was intentional. Allowing discretion in these situations may create opportunities for a player to simulate an accidental mishap in order to gain additional time before serving. It can also place the referee in the position of monitoring repeated occurrences for potential delay-of-game tactics.

Players have several options available to avoid a 10-second violation. A player who is not ready to serve may request the score again or call a timeout, or otherwise signal the referee for a valid reason before the score is called. Applying the rule in this manner maintains consistency, removes the need for subjective judgments about accidental versus intentional delay, and places the responsibility on the server to be prepared to serve once the score has been called.

NOTE: Strictly applying Rule 6.D guarantees consistent enforcement and removes ambiguity when the ball is mishandled after the score has been called.

CASE 5-26: Physically Altering or Attempting to Alter the Ball Flight During a Rally

Applicable Rule(s): **10.D** Double Hit; **10.D.1** Fault – Double Hit; **10.D.2** Fault – Ball Hit by Two Players; **11.A** Allowable Contact**; 11.A.1** Fault – Non-Volley Zone Contact While Volleying; **13.I.1.a** Player Crosses Plane of Net Before Hitting Ball

SCENARIO 1: During a rally, the ball bounces on Team A's end of the court very close to the net. Player A1 reaches their paddle under the ball and hits it upward and parallel to the net as their only play. As the ball rises above the height of the net, Player A1 (or their partner, Player A2) blows air at the ball, or fans it with the paddle, hat, or other object, causing it to change direction and land on the opponents end of the court. May a player further alter the flight of the ball after it has been struck by that player or their partner?

RULING 1: No. A player may not physically attempt to, or actually physically alter the flight of a ball in play after it has been struck. Any attempt to physically influence the ball after it has been hit constitutes a fault, regardless of whether the ball's flight is successfully altered.

COMMENT 1: A player's ability to alter the flight of the ball ends when the ball is legally struck with the paddle. Any subsequent action to alter the flight of the ball is the functional equivalent of a double hit, which violates Rule 10.D and is a fault under Rule 10.D.1. If the player's partner alters the flight of the ball, the action is the functional equivalent of the ball being struck by both partners and is a fault under Rule 10.D.2.

SCENARIO 2: During a rally, the ball bounces on Team A's end of the court very close to the net. Player A1 reaches their paddle under the ball and hits it upward parallel to the net as their only play. As the ball rises above the height of the net, one of their opponents, Player B1, blows air at the ball, or fans it with the paddle, hat, or other object, preventing it from crossing the plane of the net to Team B's end of the court. Is the act of altering the flight of the ball on the opponent's side of the net legal?

RULING 2: No. Similar to Scenario 1, altering the flight of the ball in this manner is the functional equivalent of striking the ball.

COMMENT 2: Player B1 commits two faults. First, a fault is committed by altering the flight of a ball that remains on the opponents' side of the net. This is a violation of Rule 13.I.1.a because the player has physically altered the flight of a ball on their opponent's side of the net. Although neither the player nor any equipment physically crossed the plane of the net, the player's actions effectively reached across the net and altered the ball's flight while it remained on Team A's side. In addition, because the action is treated as the equivalent of a volley, Player B1 also commits a non-volley-zone fault under Rule 11.A.1 by altering the flight of a ball in the air, a volley, from their non-volley zone.

SECTION II – EXISTING CASEBOOK TOPICS

CASE 2-25: "OUT" CALL AFTER THE BALL IS DEAD

Applicable Rule(s): 8.F.3 Out Call Timing

SCENARIO: Player B1 was unable to reach a put-away shot from Player A1 that landed very close to the sideline. Player B1 believes the ball was "out" but the ball becomes dead (i.e., the ball bounced a second time, or hit the fence, etc.) before B1 makes a line call. What should happen next?

COMMENT: The player is allowed to make an "out" call after the ball becomes dead, but the call must be made promptly.

Under 2025 rules (Rule 6.C.7.b), when a player does not return or is unable to return the opponent's shot, an "out" call was allowed to be made up until the next serve occurs. That gave a player an unnecessarily long period of time to make an out call. The 2026 rule (8.F.3) now requires the call to be made promptly because play cannot proceed without knowing the new score, the new server, or that there is a side out. The criterion (i.e., promptly) is intentionally subjective because it would be impractical to impose a specific number of seconds to make the call. However, the rule effectively accomplishes the intent to have a timely resolution of the rally without an excessive and unnecessary delay.

CASE 4-25: PENALTIES AFTER THE MATCH IS OVER

Applicable Rule(s): 22.A.2 Player Misconduct After Match

NOTE: This case provides guidance for Head Referees and Tournament Directors.

SCENARIO 1: When Team B scores the match-winning point, the referee declares, "Point, game, match." Afterwards, while still on court, Players A1 and A2 each throw their paddles. The referee determines that each player threw their paddle aggressively in frustration with negligent disregard of the consequences, thus both instances rose to the level of a technical foul (TF). As required, the referee reports the behavior to the Tournament Director (TD) who elects to impose a TF that will be applied to each offending player's next match at the tournament. The following situations may occur:

1) In the next match at the tournament, Players A1 and A2 will be playing on the same team.
2) In the next match at the tournament, Players A1 and A2 will be playing separately.

How should the Head Referee (HR) advise the TD regarding penalty application in the next match? How should the HR's advice change if the TD elects to impose a technical warning (TW)?

RULING: The TD must evaluate the player's behavior and response to the situation and has the authority to eject the players from the tournament if warranted.

If the players are allowed to play and will be partners in the next match:

(a) *TF's Imposed*: If both TFs transferred, the result would be a match forfeit. Since the TD did not eject the players from the tournament and chose to allow the players to play, only one team TF will be recorded. The opposing team will be awarded one point to start the match. Any additional penalties recorded during the match will be considered in addition to the existing team TF to determine game or match impacts.
(b) *TW's Imposed*: Each TW will transfer resulting in a team TF. The opposing team will be awarded one point to start the match. Any additional penalties recorded during the match will be considered in addition to the existing team TF to determine game or match impacts.

If they play separately in their next match:

(a) *TF's Imposed*: Each player's TF will transfer to their respective next match. One team TF will be recorded against each offending player's team in the next match. Each opposing team will be awarded one point to start the match. Any additional penalties recorded will be considered in addition to the existing team TF to determine any game or match impacts.
(b) *TW's Imposed*: Each player's TW will transfer to their respective next match. One team TW will be recorded against each offending player's team in the next match. Any additional penalties recorded during each player's next match will be considered in addition to the existing team TW to determine any game or match impacts.

COMMENT: This application achieves two key objectives: (1) promotes good sportsmanship and player safety by holding offending players accountable; and (2) supports a tournament's success by allowing a fair avenue for offending players to continue to participate.

CASE 6-25: PLAYER'S HAT (OR OTHER ITEM) FALLS TO THE GROUND

Applicable Rule(s): **Definition** – Volleying, Act of; **10.C.3** Fault – Ball Hits Player; **11.A.1** Fault – Non-Volley Zone Contact While Volleying; **11.A.2** Fault – Non-Volley Zone Momentum

SCENARIO 1: During a rally, Player A1's hat falls from their head. The opponent returns a shot back toward the player and the ball hits Player A1's hat while the hat is still in the air (i.e., before the hat lands on the ground). What is the referee's call?

RULING: The referee will call a fault on Player A1 and award the rally to Team B.

COMMENT: Per Rule 10.C.3, it is a fault on a player when a ball in play contacts the player or anything the player is wearing or carrying other than the paddle or paddle hand below the wrist. Any item that a player is wearing or carrying is considered part of the player until the item lands and comes to rest on the ground. Therefore, when the ball hits the hat while the hat is still in the air, it is treated the same as though the player was still wearing the hat.

SCENARIO 2: Player A1 is near the non-volley zone and is going hit a volley. Just before hitting the volley, the player's hat (or other item) falls off and the volley is struck while the hat is still in the air. After the volley is struck, the hat lands in the non-volley zone. The referee calls a non-volley zone fault. The player claims that it should not be a fault because he was not wearing the hat when the volley was struck. What is the correct ruling?

RULING: The referee's ruling of a non-volley zone fault is correct.

COMMENT: The player, by definition, is not in the act of volleying prior to striking the volley, and the hat was not in contact with the player at the moment the volley was struck. However, consistent with Scenario 1, the governing principle is that anything a player is or was wearing or carrying is considered part of the player until it lands and comes to rest on the ground. Since the hat was still considered part of the player when the volley was struck and it landed in the non-volley zone, this constitutes a non-volley zone fault under Rule 11.A.1.

SCENARIO 3: Player A1 is near the non-volley zone and is going hit a volley. Immediately after the volley is struck, the player loses their grip on the paddle which falls to the ground. The paddle initially touches the ground outside the non-volley zone but its momentum causes the paddle to come to rest partially inside and partially outside the non-volley zone. What is the correct ruling?

RULING: The referee must call a fault against Player A1.

COMMENT: As with Scenario 2, anything a player is or was wearing or carrying is considered part of the player until it lands and comes to rest on the ground. In this case, the paddle is still part of the player until it lands and comes to rest on the ground. The act of volleying does not end the moment the paddle first touched the ground if the momentum of the paddle continues to carry it toward the non-volley zone. The paddle came to rest in contact with the non-volley zone, therefore by Rule 11.A.2, the player committed a non-volley zone momentum fault.

SCENARIO 4: Player A1 is near the non-volley zone and is going hit a volley. As the player is preparing to volley the ball, the player's hat falls off, lands and comes to rest in the non-volley zone before the volley is struck. What is the correct ruling?

RULING: The referee does not call a fault and must allow the rally to continue to completion.

COMMENT: In this case, the item landed and came to rest before the act of volleying commenced. The item at that point is considered part of the court and no longer part of the player and therefore the player did not commit a non-volley zone fault.

CASE 1-24: QUESTIONABLE SERVE, PLACEMENT OF FEET

Applicable Rule(s): **7.A** Server Positioning; **7.A.3** In Serving Area; **20.E.2** Replays

SCENARIO: While positioned near the far sideline, a standing player serves the ball. The referee is uncertain whether the player's foot was touching the playing surface outside the imaginary extension of the sideline at the moment the ball was served. Before the return of serve, the referee calls for a replay. The player asserts to the referee that questionable serve replays only apply to service motion issues and not foot or wheel placement. Did the referee make the correct call?

RULING: Yes.

COMMENT: Rule 20.E.2 states referees may call for a replay before the return of serve if they are uncertain whether "one or more of the requirements of the serve has been met." The issue here is whether proper placement of the feet is a requirement of the serve. In order to make a legal serve, a standing player must comply with the feet placement requirements outlined in Rule 7.A. Specifically, Rule 7.A.3 states "neither of the server's feet may touch the playing

surface outside the imaginary extension of the sideline or centerline." Here, the referee was uncertain whether the server's foot was touching the playing service outside the imaginary extension of the sideline the moment the ball was served. Therefore, in accordance with Rule 4.A.9, the referee's call for a replay was correct.

NOTE: The same would be true for any of the requirements in Rules 7.A, 7.B, 7.C, and 7.D, all of which are "requirements of the serve" covered in Rule 20.E.2.

CASE 2-24: USE OF PADDLE TO EXECUTE BALL RELEASE

Applicable Rule(s): 7.B.1 Release from Hand or Paddle

SCENARIO: The referee calls the score. The correct server prepares to serve and holds the ball with her non-paddle hand against the face of her paddle. To execute the release, she releases her non-paddle hand grip on the ball and simultaneously moves the paddle away from the ball. The ball begins to fall towards the ground. Before the ball hits the ground, she contacts the ball with the paddle. All other requirements of the serve were met, and the served ball lands in bounds. Did the player execute a legal serve?

RULING: No.

COMMENT: The issue in this scenario is whether the server is permitted to use their paddle in conjunction with their non-paddle hand to release the ball during a volley serve. Rule 7.B.1 permits only one hand or only the paddle to be used to release the ball during the serve. Here, in addition to the non-paddle hand, the server uses her paddle and, therefore, a second hand to perform the release. In accordance with Rule 7.B.1, the server may use their non-paddle hand to release the ball. Alternatively, a server may use their paddle (while held by their paddle hand) to release the ball. The use of any additional object or body part to effectuate the release violates Rule 7.B.1.

CASE 3-24: CHANGE OF STARTING SERVER

Applicable Rule(s): 20.C Replay – Server or Position Correction; **21.F.3** Change of Starting Server; **24.A** Change of Starting Server (Doubles)

SCENARIO: Player A1 was the starting server for Game 1 of a match. Between games, the team decides to change starting server but did not remember to move the starting server identification to Player A2 and did not notify the referee (or their opponents in non-officiated matches). Player A2 serves the ball to start Game 2. The referee immediately stops play, identifies the error, and calls for a replay with Player A1 to serve. They tell the referee they intended to make the change for the second game. Are they allowed to change the starting server now (before the second rally of the game) and have Player A2 be the starting server, or must they finish the game with Player A1 as the starting server?

RULING: The team will be allowed to make the change to Player A2 as the starting server.

COMMENT: Although the referee should have confirmed player correctness before calling the score, the referee correctly stopped play after the serve since Player A1 was still wearing the starting server identification. The call for a replay would also stand if the players had notified

the referee (or their opponents in non-officiated matches per Rule 24.A) of their intent to change starting server but failed to exchange the starting server identification.

The error was discovered during the first rally of the game. The team indicated it was their intent to change per Rule 21.F.3 and must now replay the rally. In the event the referee or players announced or detected the error after the first rally was completed, the result of the rally would stand. It is reasonable to allow the players to change starting server but the decision must be made at this point only (i.e., before the second rally) and cannot be changed thereafter.

In this case, the referee would make the appropriate annotation on the scoresheet, the players would exchange starting server identification, and the first rally of Game 2 would be replayed with Player A2 to serve.

NOTE: The outcome would be the same if this team was receiving to start the second game. They would be allowed to make the change before the second rally of the game. The players and the referee would make the appropriate changes and the game would resume with a replay of the first rally of Game 2 with Player A2 receiving.

CASE 4-24: NVZ FAULT INVOLVING TOURNAMENT-ISSUED EQUIPMENT

Applicable Rule(s): **Definition** - Hinder; **10.I** Player Equipment or Apparel Problem; **10.J** Item on Court; **11.A.1** Fault – Non-Volley Zone Contact While Volleying; **16.H** Starting Server Identification (Doubles); **20.H.2** Replay – Valid Hinder

SCENARIO 1: The Tournament Director mandates paddle inspections. When a paddle passes inspection, a tournament official issues an inspection sticker and applies it to the paddle.

During a rally, a player is in the act of volleying when the inspection sticker falls from their paddle and lands in the non-volley zone (NVZ) due to adhesion failure. Should the referee call a fault under Rule 11.A.1?

SCENARIO 2: The Tournament Director issues required starting server identification bands that latch to close. In a doubles match during a rally, a player from Team A is in the act of volleying when the band they are wearing falls and lands in the NVZ due to failure of the band's latch closure. Should the referee call a fault under Rule 11.A.1?

RULING: The referee should allow play to continue and not call a fault in either scenario. If the referee incorrectly stops play, a replay shall occur.

COMMENT: Players should not be held responsible for failure of equipment that is supplied by and required to be worn or utilized by the Tournament Director.

NOTE: This ruling is appropriate where the malfunction is due to failure or defect in the tournament-issued item. However, a fault call would be appropriate if it is determined that a malfunction is due to a negligent act or omission of a player rather than a defect in the item itself, such as where a player tied the identification band to their shoelace which became loose.

SCENARIO 3: Continuing Scenario 2, the rally proceeds with the identification band on the ground in the NVZ. A player from Team B returns the ball, which bounces on the band,

causing it to deflect beyond the reach of Team A and resulting in a dead ball. Team B claims they won the rally based on Rule 10.J. Team A claims a hinder and a replay in accordance with Rule 20.H.2. What should be the referee's ruling?

RULING: The referee should rule that a valid hinder has occurred and call for a replay. The malfunction of the identification band was not caused by the player. It was therefore a transient occurrence that caused an adverse impact on Team A's ability to make a play on the ball.

CASE 4-23: COIN FLIP TO DETERMINE MATCH WINNER

Applicable Rule(s): **16.O** Officiating Appeals; **18.F.1** Game or Match Forfeit – No Show for First Game; **18.F.2** Match Forfeit – No Show for Multiple-Game Match

SCENARIO: In a doubles match, 2 out of 3 games, only one of the four players is present at the 10-minute mark. All of the appropriate notifications were made for second and/or final call. At 10 minutes, both teams are assessed a game forfeit. At 15 minutes, three of the four players have not reported, so both teams are assessed a match forfeit. How is the match winner determined?

RULING: The Tournament Director, or the Tournament Director's designee, will conduct a coin toss to determine the match winner.

COMMENT: The rules do not provide a formal tiebreaker method for this rare situation. Since a winner must be determined, a coin toss is a fair and equitable way to determine the winner.

NOTE: The scenario would be the same if none of the players reported in time, if only one player reported in time, or if only one player from each team reported in time.

CASE 6-23: PADDLE TOSS OR THROW

NOTE: The purpose of this casebook entry is to provide better consistency on how the referee addresses paddle tosses, throws or drops. It is reasonable and appropriate to allow players to vent a certain level of frustration without penalty, which can include some paddle tosses, even mildly aggressive ones. The referee is still authorized to determine whether the paddle toss was unsportsmanlike or, combined with other circumstances, warrants an appropriate penalty.

Applicable Rule(s): **22.A** Referee Authorization; **22.B.10** Other Behavior; **22.D.1** Paddle Abuse

Rule 22.A authorizes the referee to issue a verbal warning for behavior that could escalate to a level that calls for a more severe penalty, or behavior that should not be repeated.

Rule 22.B.10 authorizes the referee to issue a technical warning for minor unsportsmanlike behavior.

Rule 22.D.1 authorizes the referee to issue a technical foul for an aggressive or reckless paddle throw that shows disregard for consequences but which does not strike another person or damage property.

SCENARIO ONE: After a timeout has been called, a player at the NVZ casually tosses their paddle to the baseline to mark their position for the next rally.

RULING: This is allowed. **No penalty is assessed.**

SCENARIO TWO: After losing a rally, the player yells 'Timeout!'. Clearly frustrated, they toss the paddle with some aggression from the NVZ to the baseline to mark their position for the next rally, then they storm off the court. The paddle may bounce, but it lands at the baseline and does not come close to any players or court fixtures.

RULING: No penalty is assessed, unless the referee determines that the action rises to the level of 'minor unsportsmanlike' behavior and **assesses a verbal warning or technical warning.**

SCENARIO THREE: After losing a rally, the player throws their paddle with some force at their feet directly in front of them. The paddle bounces loudly once or twice but stays in the general location of the player. No other players are around. The court is not damaged.

RULING: Since the paddle was thrown with some force, it is appropriate in this situation **to assess a verbal warning** for minor unsportsmanlike behavior, **or a technical warning** if the referee determines that the extent of force of the throw and the player's body language rises to the level that warrants the more severe penalty.

SCENARIO FOUR: After losing a rally, the player yells 'timeout' then throws their paddle with some force against the fence by their towel or water bottle, hard enough to be easily seen and heard. Spectators are on the other side of the fence. The paddle lands by their towel or water bottle.

RULING: It is appropriate in this situation **to assess a technical warning** for minor unsportsmanlike behavior **or a technical foul** if the referee determines that the extent of force of the throw and the player's body language rises to the level that warrants the more severe penalty.

SCENARIO FIVE: After losing a rally, the player throws their paddle with some force against a wall, fence, or the net. The paddle rebounds in an obvious random direction.

RULING: It is appropriate in this situation **to assess a technical foul** for throwing the paddle with negligent disregard for the consequences.

CASE 7-23: PLAYER ACTIONS AFTER THE SCORE IS CALLED

Applicable Rule(s): **Definition** – Distraction; **6.E** Stop Play Indicators; **17.D.17** Player Conduct; **20.A** Confirmation of Score; **22.B.5** Delay of Game

SCENARIO ONE: The referee calls the correct score. As the server starts their service motion but before the serve is hit, the receiver says "Wait, wait" and says they did not hear the score and therefore did not know if the correct score was called. The server claims that a distraction should be called because they were about to hit the ball to make the serve. What should the referee do?

RULING: The referee will stop play and re-call the score to start play.

COMMENT: The referee will acknowledge the play stoppage in accordance with Rule 6.E and then deal with the reason for the stoppage. In this case, asking for clarification of the score before the serve is hit is a legitimate question. This does not constitute a distraction since the question and its timing is common to the game and, since the serve was not hit, it did not interfere with the server's ability to hit the ball.

SCENARIO TWO: After the referee has called the score and before the ball is served, one of the receivers says "Wait, wait" and the receivers begin talking to each other without saying anything else to the referee. The referee stops play and asks why they said, "Wait, wait" and is told they needed to talk to each other. Nothing occurred that would constitute a hinder. What should the referee do?

RULING: The referee will stop play, issue a verbal warning or technical warning for delay of game, and re-call the score to start play.

COMMENT: As in Scenario One, the referee will acknowledge the play stoppage and deal with the reason. In this case, when the player's actions constitute an unreasonable delay, the referee will issue a warning and recall the score to start the rally. The extent of warning (i.e., VW or TW) is the referee's discretion based on the circumstances involved.

CASE 8-23: RE-ESTABLISHING AFTER CONTACTING THE NON-VOLLEY ZONE

Applicable Rule(s): 11.A.3 Fault – Failure to Exit the Non-Volley Zone Before Volleying

SCENARIO: All four players are dinking at the NVZ. Player A1 attempts a high lob causing Player B1 to hit a volley in return. During the execution of the volley, Player B1 has her right foot on the ground outside the NVZ while the left foot is still touching the NVZ. Her left foot pushes off from the NVZ line back and away from the NVZ and the edge of her left heel touches the ground outside of the NVZ before hitting the volley. No other portion of either foot is now touching the NVZ.

RULING: There is no NVZ fault. The volley shot was legal.

COMMENT: After a player contacts the NVZ, Rule 11.A.3 states that a volley shot cannot be made until *"both feet have made contact with the playing surface completely outside the non-volley zone."* In this case, which is a typical push-off from the NVZ, once the entire foot is clear of the NVZ and any part of the player's second foot touched the ground outside the NVZ before the volley was struck, the volley shot was legal. The rule does not require that the entire foot be placed on the ground in order to satisfy Rule 11.A.3.

CASE 9-23: QUESTIONABLE SERVE, SERVED BALL LANDS OUT

Applicable Rule(s): 20.E.2 Replays

SCENARIO: A player makes a serve with a service motion that the referee deems questionable and intends to call for a replay under Rule 20.E.2. The served ball lands outside the receiver's service court. Which action takes precedence, the replay, or a service fault for serving out of bounds?

RULING: The action that the referee observes as the basis for a replay under Rule 20.E.2 occurred before the ball landed out of bounds. Therefore, calling for the replay takes precedence.

COMMENT: This is same as would apply if the player made a serve that the referee is certain was illegal and warrants a service fault call. In both cases, the referee must not wait for the serve to land before making the call. It is expected that the referee's call, whether it is a replay or a fault, will be made promptly and decisively before the served ball lands.

CASE 13-23: LINE CALL APPEALS AFTER A DEAD BALL

Applicable Rule(s): 8.F.3 Out Call Timing

SCENARIO: Players A1 and A2 are playing against B1 and B2. Player A1 serves to B1. The ball lands near the feet of B1, who plays the ball. The return of serve by B1 goes over the net and lands wide, whereupon A2 calls the ball out. Player B2 then asks the referee if they saw the serve that landed at the feet of B1, questioning whether or not A1's serve hit out of bounds.

RULING: The referee cannot rule on the player's question because Team B never made an 'out' call of the serve. Team B cannot play the ball (as they did), and then question the serve by A1 after the outcome of player B1's return of serve is known/determined. Rule 8.F.3 requires that an 'out' call by Team B be made before either the ball becomes dead or before Team A plays the ball. Neither happened in this case. The return of serve by B1 became dead as soon as the ball bounced and Team A called it 'out', so any 'out' call by Team B of A1's serve was required before Team A called B1's return of serve 'out'.

COMMENT: There are two underlying principles in this scenario. The first is that line call appeals to the referee can only be made when the ball is dead. Questioning the referee about balls that have bounced during live play will be ignored by the referee. The second is the basis for Rule 8.F.3, which prohibits the two-chance option. Some refer to this by the idioms 'two bites of the apple' or 'having your cake and eating it too.' No matter what it is called, it results in an unfair advantage if allowed to occur.

Here is why it is unfair: If a player chooses to keep the ball in play by returning the shot and to not make an 'out' call in the proper time frame, the player has made their choice and must live with the result of their decision. If the player's shot results in a fault (landing out of bounds, going into the net and hitting the ground, hitting a permanent object, etc.), they cannot now go back in time and ask the referee for a second chance to win the rally.

NOTE: If Team B had not returned the serve, they could have made an 'out' call on A1's serve, even after the ball was dead in accordance with Rule 8.F.3, and then either appealed their call to the referee, appealed their call to the opponent, or overruled their 'out' call to their disadvantage if they thought it was actually 'in'.

CASE 14-23: DUAL NVZ MOMENTUM FAULTS

Applicable Rule(s): **Definition** – Volleying, Act of; **11.A.2** Fault – Non-Volley Zone Momentum

SCENARIO: Player A is near the non-volley zone (NVZ) and volleys the ball toward Player B but starts to windmill in an effort to stop his momentum from the volley. Player B, also near the NVZ, then volleys a return shot and begins to windmill to stop her momentum. With both players simultaneously trying to stop their momentum, Player B fails and steps into the NVZ after which Player A fails and steps into the NVZ. Which player committed the fault?

RULING: Player A is charged with the fault.

COMMENT: When both teams commit a fault, the referee will call the fault that was committed first. When momentum is involved in a volley shot, The "act of volleying," by definition, includes the span of time during which momentum occurs. The infraction is the faulty act of volleying. The act of volleying starts when the volley is struck and ends when contact with the NVZ occurs. In this scenario, the fault is assessed against Player A because their act of volleying started before Player B's started. The fact that Player B's act of volleying ended first is irrelevant.

NOTE: There are several observations and variations of this scenario that are notable:

1. The referee's priority is to focus on the player that first initiated a volley, in this case Player A. The correct call depends on the outcome of that player's act of volleying. The referee can rely on their peripheral vision to detect Player B's volley and momentum situation, and other action that may occur.
2. In this case, Player A eventually contacted the NVZ and therefore is called for the fault. If Player A had eventually regained control of their momentum without contacting the NVZ, then they did not commit a fault and Player B would be called for their NVZ momentum fault. If both players eventually regained control of their momentum without contacting the NVZ, then neither will have committed a fault and the outcome of the rally will be determined by how the ball became dead (i.e., the ball was out, hit into the net, hit a permanent object, bounced twice, etc.)
3. The momentum condition from a volley continues through any subsequent dead ball or play stoppage. If play stops for any reason, including an out call, a dead ball, or the referee calling Player B's NVZ fault, the referee must observe the outcome of Player A's momentum to determine the correct fault call as described in #2 above.
4. In the original scenario, when the referee observes Player B's NVZ fault, the referee must announce Player B's NVZ fault while continuing to watch Player A's momentum. A player may perceive this as stopping play, but the momentum conditions continue as explained in #3 above and the referee will eventually determine which fault takes precedence as explained in #2 above.
5. In the original scenario, if Player B was in contact with the NVZ when their volley was struck, the outcome would be the same. Their volley will have ended even sooner than if they had a momentum issue, but the fault call remains against Player A based on when each act of volleying started.

CASE 1-22: DEFLECTING NET CONTACTS A PLAYER

Applicable Rule(s): **13.G** Player Contacting Net or Net Support System; **13.J** Replay – Net System Malfunction

SCENARIO: Player A1 is dinking with Player B1. Player A1 hits a dink that takes them into the non-volley zone very close to the net. Player B1 goes to return the ball but hits it hard into the net, causing the net to stretch and touch Player A1's paddle. The ball drops on Player B1's side without going over the net.

RULING: Because the net moved and flexed to the point it contacted Player A1, a replay should be granted in accordance with Rule 13.J.

COMMENT: Players should have a reasonable expectation that court equipment will function as designed and that the equipment will not move or flex excessively during play. Players cannot be expected to anticipate how much a net can flex from an independent, transient action. Such transient actions include a ball hitting the net or the wind blowing hard enough that the net billows out. Play should normally continue, but if the net malfunctions to the point that it contacts a player, then a replay should be granted. Replays are also granted for other transient, unexpected net malfunctions, such as when a temporary net moves from its normal position on the court due to wind or the ball hits the center pole if it protrudes up through the top of the net.

CASE 2-22: BALL CONTACTS A PLAYER'S HAT

Applicable Rule(s): **10.C.3** Fault – Ball Hits Player; **10.J** Item on Court

SCENARIO: A player makes a quick move to make a play on the ball. In the process, the player's hat slips off her head. The ball hits the hat before the hat lands on the court.

RULING: Because the hat has not yet landed on the court, the hat is still considered part of the player, even though it is not on the head. Accordingly, it is a fault on the player whose hat was hit by the ball. *(Rule 10.C.3)* If the hat lands on the court before being hit by the ball, the hat becomes part of the court, and the ball remains in play. *(Rule 10.J)*

CASE 3-22: CALLING TIME-OUT TO GET THE REFEREE'S ATTENTION

Applicable Rule(s): **5.C** Questions About Correct Server, Receiver, and Positions; **20.A** Confirmation of Score; **20.B** Confirmation of Correct Player or Position

SCENARIO: A player wants to get the referee's attention quickly to ask a question and says "time-out." The referee hears the time out call and starts to follow standard time-out procedures. The player tells the referee that he just wanted to ask a question before the serve and not take an official time-out.

RULING: Since the player was just trying to get the referee's attention, the referee should answer the player's question and recall the score to resume play.

COMMENT: In this scenario, the phrase "time-out" is just being used to get the referee's attention and not to call for an official time-out. While other phrases are preferred to get the

referee's attention, the referee should not charge a time-out to the player when their intention is to simply ask a question or make an appeal.

CASE 5-22: BALL TRAVELS BETWEEN THE NET AND NET POST AFTER LANDING

Applicable Rule(s): **13.D** Ball Between Net and Net Post; **13.D.1** Fault – Ball Between Net and Net Post **13.I.2** Ball Crosses Back to Opponent's Side

NOTE: Rule 13.D.1 establishes a fault for hitting the ball under the net or between the net and the net post. The question arises what happens after a shot hits the opponent's court with enough backspin to travel back between the net post and net. Is it fault on the striking player? This case answers the question.

SCENARIO: Team A hits a ball across the net. The ball lands in bounds on Team B's court but with enough backspin (or due to the wind) that the ball travels back through the gap between the net and the net post.

RULING: Team A has executed a legal shot by hitting the ball across the net and in bounds. Team B must make a play on the ball before the ball either hits a permanent object, bounces twice, or otherwise becomes dead. In this scenario, Team B did not make a play before the ball traveled through the gap between the net and net post. Team B may, however, reach over, under or around the net to make a play on the ball as provided for in Rule 13.I.2.

CASE 6-22: RECORDING THE PENALTY FOR A TECHNICAL FOUL

NOTE: These scenarios examine what happens when a technical foul and a fault occur in close proximity to one another. They describe how to record the penalty based on the timing of the technical foul in relation to the fault. The timing is important because of the impact on which player serves and from what position.

Applicable Rule(s): **22.A.1** Timing of Assessment; **22.D.1** Paddle Abuse; **22.D.3** Threats; **22.E.1** Score Adjustment

SCENARIO ONE: Player A1 is serving with the score 0-8-2 and serves the ball into the net. The ball hits the ground and the referee announces "side out." Player A1 then turns and aggressively throws the paddle in frustration causing it to break. The referee appropriately announces "technical foul, unsportsmanlike conduct." *(Rule 22.D.1)*

RULING: The service fault results in a side out, so the referee must determine which event to record first, the technical foul penalty or the side out. In this case, the rally ended before Player A threw the paddle, so the proper sequence is to record the side out first and then record the technical foul penalty. The moment the rally ended, the status of play immediately became Player B1 (who is Team B's starting server) serving from the right service area with the score 8-0-1. Since Team A had a score of zero, one point is awarded to Team B. *(Rule 22.E.1)* The serve still belongs to Player B1, but since the point was awarded to them after the side out occurred, the score is now 9-0-1 and Player B1 must serve from the left service area. This breaks with the convention that the first server after a side out always serves from the right service area, but it is consistent with how a technical foul that occurs at any other point in a game would be recorded. A point added to or subtracted from a serving team's score does not

affect who the server is. The serving team simply reacts to the change in points by adjusting the server's position. The same holds true in this case. Player B1 was the correct server after the side out (before the technical foul), so B1 remains the server after the technical foul is recorded and serves from the left service area.

SCENARIO TWO: Player A1 serves with the score 0-8-2. Team B returns the serve. Player A2 then mishits a very high third shot lob that is clearly going to be out of bounds. While the ball is in the air, Player A2 in frustration screams an extremely objectionable profanity. By rule, the referee must always wait until the rally ends to call a technical foul. *(Rule 22.A.1)* So here, after Team B makes the "out" call the referee announces "technical foul" first and then "side out." *(Rule 22.D.3)*

RULING: As with Scenario One, the referee must determine which event to record first, the technical foul penalty first or the side out. In this case, the Player A2 uttered the profanity before the rally ended, so the proper sequence is to record the technical foul penalty first and then record the side out. One point is added to Team B, giving them nine points. The side out is then recorded, which means the serve goes over to Team B with the score 9-0-1. Player B1 is Team B's starting server, so the next rally begins with Player B2 serving from the right service area at 9-0-1.

CASE 1-21: MULTIPLE SIMULTANEOUS FAULTS

Applicable Rule(s): **7.A.2** Outside Court; **7.C** Volley Serve; **20.E** Service Faults and Replays

SCENARIO: The score is called, and the server's foot simultaneously touches the baseline and uses an illegal service motion, both of which the referee sees. What should the referee do?

RULING: The referee must immediately call *"Service foot fault; and illegal service motion."* This approach informs the player both infractions. It may appear sufficient to identify one of the faults since only one fault is charged to the team for scoring purposes. However, both faults must be called.

COMMENT: The guiding principle is that the referee must identify ***all*** violations as soon as they are realized. For example, if only the service foot fault was called, the player would not know they need to correct the illegal service motion and might commit the same fault on the next rally.

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