



# USA Pickleball Referee Program

This program provides certification to referees who demonstrate reliable professionalism, skill competency, and rule knowledge covering basic situations at all skill levels of play that occur at USA Pickleball sanctioned tournaments.

Our [Tiered Referee Rating \(TRR\)](#) system provides a means to identify the training and skill level of non-certified referees. The foundation of the TRR system is an assessment process that can be easily administered by any [Certified Referee or registered referee trainer](#). Certification requires more rigorous training and passing an evaluation by a Referee Evaluator.

The [USA Pickleball Officiating Handbook](#) is the official resource for training and contains the pickleball officiating standards and procedures used by all USA Pickleball Officials. Thorough knowledge of the [USA Pickleball/IFP Official Rulebook](#) is required.

The steps from newcomer to becoming a USA Pickleball Certified Referee are described below.

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## Initial Training

1. You must be a USA Pickleball member in good standing and at least 16 years of age.
2. Complete a referee training class conducted by a USA Pickleball registered referee trainer. (Contact your regional [Referee Training Coordinator](#) to find a trainer.)

**Note:** Referees may be self-trained, however, the preferred method is training by a USA Pickleball registered referee trainer.

3. Complete a line judge training class conducted by a USA Pickleball registered referee trainer or Certified Referee and satisfy the requirements to become a USA Pickleball Certified Line Judge (see [USA Pickleball Line Judge Program](#)). A [Line Judge Self-Training](#) curriculum is also available.

## Training and Practice Opportunities

After initial training, you should participate in additional training and practice sessions where USA Pickleball referee best practices are used. You ultimately want to gain experience refereeing a wide variety of games and matches, including those where teams stack and when line judges are used.

Begin with refereeing recreational games so there is not added pressure from making a mistake. Singles matches are easier to referee and are good for initial practice to get comfortable handling the [scoresheet](#) and calling the score. Many recreational players welcome the opportunity to have someone referee a game for them, especially if they are getting ready to play in a tournament. As you gain experience refereeing doubles matches, volunteer to referee at tournaments. Continue to work with your trainer or a credentialed referee to ensure you are applying the USA Pickleball best practices properly.

Although face-to-face training sessions are best for learning and demonstrating refereeing skills, more and more trainers are offering online training sessions via Zoom and other video conference platforms. Online sessions can be very effective for learning best practice procedures and rules. Topics are offered in short segments.

USA Pickleball sanctioned tournaments offer several types of training and practice opportunities for referees. Contact the referee coordinator to arrange.

- You can shadow a more experienced referee conduct a match and record a scoresheet for practice purposes. Questions and teaching points are reviewed after the match.
- You can be shadowed by a more experienced referee while you referee a match. The experienced referee will provide you guidance during the match, as necessary.
- You can gain experience refereeing a variety of live matches, including medal matches with line judges.

**Note:** Training and rating sessions are prohibited from being conducted during professional matches.

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## Level 1 and Level 2 Credentials

Level 1 Referees possess sufficient refereeing skills and rules knowledge to keep accurate score and watch for incorrect servers, out-of-position players, and foot faults but require additional training and experience to be considered fully

competent. They are capable of refereeing basic non-medal matches at tournaments but may require some assistance.

Level 2 Referees possess the basic skills and rules knowledge to competently referee most matches at any skill level. They are capable of handling on-court situations that typically arise during skill level tournament matches, including medal matches.

1. Obtain an [assessment](#) of your refereeing skills by your trainer or a Certified Referee. As part of the USA Pickleball referee training session, your trainer normally provides an initial skills assessment. An assessment can also be provided at a later date during a practice session or during a match at a tournament that fully complies with the current *USA Pickleball/IFP Rulebook*. If not assessed as part of a training session, you are responsible for arranging your assessment by contacting the Referee Training Coordinator (RTC) for your region. The RTC will work with registered trainers or other Certified Referees to help arrange the assessment. Assessment opportunities also exist at many sanctioned tournaments.

Trained referees will normally be rated as a Level 1 or Level 2 Referee, depending on their level of proficiency. The assessor will provide a credential to Level 1 and Level 2 Referees and report the assessment results to the regional RTC. **Note:** Those not scoring at least a Level 1 rating will not receive a credential and will remain as trainees until they are rated higher.

2. Contact the RTC for your region to request an assessment for Level 2.

**Note:** Referees must obtain a Level 2 rating before proceeding to prepare to become a Certified Referee.

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## Level 2 Referee Preparation for Certification

1. Request a Mentor through your regional Certified Referee Coordinator (CRC).  
**Note:** You are not required to have a mentor, but it is highly recommended.
2. When your mentor determines you are ready to be evaluated for certification, you must undergo an [Advanced Training Session](#) (ATS). The ATS is designed to simulate routine game situations that can possibly occur during the certification evaluation. Undertaking the ATS increases the likelihood you will pass the evaluation. Your mentor, a Certified Referee, or the regional CRC administers the ATS and will ask 4-8 players to be present. You are responsible for finding a court and paying any associated fees. The ATS results will be shared with you at the end of the session and will be reported to your CRC.

3. After you successfully complete your ATS, the CRC will conduct a phone or in-person interview with you to review of the best practices and rules. This review is similar to the compulsories portion of the certification evaluation.
  4. When the CRC determines you are ready for an evaluation, the CRC will notify the USA Pickleball Certified Referee Administrator to establish your eligibility to apply for referee certification.
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### **The Certified Referee Application Process**

1. Effective 4/1/21, you must meet a requirement of 20/30 visual acuity using both eyes (with or without corrective lenses) and submit a [Visual Acuity Form](#) signed by an eye care professional within the past 12 months.
2. Within 60 days prior to submitting your application for certification, you must have refereed at a tournament conducted in accordance with USA Pickleball/IFP rules. You will be asked to provide the date and name of this event.
3. Within 14 days prior to submitting your application for certification, you must have achieved passing scores on the online USA Pickleball [Referee Test](#) and the [Line Judge Test](#).
4. Complete the online [Certified Referee Application](#).
5. After your application is received and the prerequisites validated, you will receive an email confirmation of acceptance into the program. A link will be including for paying the evaluation fee. If your application is not accepted, you will be notified accordingly. The nonrefundable evaluation fee affords the applicant two opportunities to pass the certification evaluation, which includes on-court observation.
6. After your payment is received, you will receive an email detailing the evaluation process along with a schedule of upcoming on-court evaluation venues and dates. Evaluations are normally conducted at all USA Pickleball regional tournaments and are also held at select tournaments throughout the country. Scheduling for each venue will be done strictly on a first-to-respond basis. You will be asked to select your preferred dates/tournaments. You are responsible for any costs associated with traveling to the venue. **Note:** The scheduling of on-court evaluations is based on evaluator availability and the number of applicants in an area. Therefore, there may not always be an on-court evaluation venue and/or date that is convenient for you to attend. In such cases, a significant amount of time could elapse between paying the evaluation fee and when you are scheduled for an on-court evaluation.

7. After you are scheduled for a venue and date, a USA Pickleball Certified Referee Evaluator will contact you directly to coordinate further details relating to the evaluation.
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## **The On-Court Evaluation**

The evaluation involves a USA Pickleball evaluator critiquing your skills and rules knowledge while you referee a minimum of three doubles matches, at least one involving a stacking team and at least one medal match using line judges.

### **During the evaluation, you must:**

- Display professionalism in your actions, words, and demeanor.
- Maintain an efficient flow in the matches.
- Conscientiously watch for and call faults, especially in the non-volley zone.
- Use a numbered clip to track servers, moving it to the correct server at every service change.
- Mark the scoresheet using the USA Pickleball requirements for each point, side out, and other actions as they occur.
- Position the clipboard so the clip end always points toward the serving team.
- When time-outs are called, follow the best practices procedures.
- Detect incorrect servers and out-of-position players.
- Follow all USA Pickleball refereeing best practices contained in the current *USA Pickleball Officiating Handbook*.

After refereeing the evaluation matches, you will answer a series of questions, called compulsories, that will cover basic situations that did not arise during your on-court matches. These questions are designed to test your knowledge of the Rulebook and the Officiating Handbook.

Upon passing the evaluation, the evaluator will take a passport-size head and shoulders digital photo for your photo ID badge.

**Note:** If you fail to qualify on the first evaluation, you are entitled to a second attempt. A second evaluation is allowed after a waiting period of 30 days, during which you must successfully complete another ATS that is confirmed by your Certified Referee Coordinator. You will need to select another evaluation venue, which may or may not be the same as the first.

If the second attempt results in failure, there is a waiting period of 6 months. The third attempt requires that you re-apply for certification. The process for a third attempt starts as a new application, requiring completion of a basic referee training class taught by a registered trainer, a successful ATS, and recommendation from your CRC. The third attempt also requires payment of another evaluation fee.

If the third attempt results in failure, a fourth evaluation may be attempted but

only after waiting an additional 12 months during which you must take another training class, work with a mentor, successfully complete an ATS, and received approval for evaluation from your CRC.

If the fourth attempt results in failure, further attempts are not encouraged. However, if extenuating circumstances warrant, permission may be granted with the approval of your Section Leader of Officiating.

There are no appeals for failure to pass an evaluation if the candidate failed to call a violation that occurred (e.g., missed foot faults or out-of-position players). Candidates undergoing an evaluation, however, are welcome to record their matches. The recording must be performed at the candidate's expense and shown to the evaluator if the candidate thinks there is sufficient reason to question a judgment decision by the evaluator. The evaluator is the only person who can grant relief if the recording clearly shows a mistake was made. Appeals on procedural grounds may be made by email to [refcertadmin@usapa.org](mailto:refcertadmin@usapa.org), with a copy to the evaluator who conducted the evaluation. Procedural appeals without a copy to the evaluator will not be accepted.

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## **The Certified Referee Credentials Package**

After passing your evaluation, you will receive:

- Two official USA Pickleball Certified Referee shirts
  - A USA Pickleball referee photo ID badge
  - A USA Pickleball badge holder pocket wallet with lanyard
  - Certified Referee designation on the USAPickleball.org website
  - One-time acknowledgement of your accomplishment in *Pickleball Magazine*
  - Priority for refereeing medal and pro matches at USA Pickleball-managed events
  - Certified Referee compensation (where available)
  - Other benefits associated with being recognized as having earned distinction as a USA Pickleball Certified Referee
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## **Certification Renewal**

Referee certification is valid for three years from the date of the Certified Referee credentials are issued. You must [apply for certification renewal](#) within 90 days of expiration. The [certification renewal process](#) includes passing online tests, meeting a 20/30 visual acuity requirement using both eyes (effective 4/1/21), and payment of a nominal fee. You will receive a new photo ID badge.

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## **Decertification**

As a USA Pickleball Certified Referee, you agree to comply with the [USA Pickleball Compliance Policy for Officials](#) and perform officiating duties in accordance with the refereeing best practices contained in the current issue of the *USA Pickleball Officiating Handbook*. Non-compliance will result in disciplinary action, up to decertification. A referee's certification may be revoked for one year after official notification to the referee and an opportunity for the referee to respond to the issue(s) identified. To be reinstated after the one-year revocation period, the referee must reapply for certification and repeat the evaluation process.