

THE CODE: GUIDELINES FOR UNOFFICATED MATCHES

PREFACE

When your serve hits your partner stationed at the net, is it a let, fault, or loss of point? Likewise, what is the ruling when your serve, before touching the ground, hits an opponent who is standing *back* of the baseline? The answers to these questions are obvious to anyone who knows the fundamentals of tennis, but the number of players who are not aware of these fundamentals is surprising. All players have a responsibility to be familiar with the basic rules and customs of tennis. Further, it can be distressing to your opponent when he makes a decision in accordance with a rule and you protest with the remark; "Well, I never heard of that rule before!" Ignorance of the rules constitutes a delinquency on the part of a player and often spoils an otherwise good match.

What is written here constitutes the essentials of *The Code*, a summary of procedures and unwritten rules which custom and tradition dictate all players should follow. No system of rules will cover every specific problem or situation that may arise. If players of good will follow the principles of *The Code*, they should always be able to reach an agreement, while at the same time making tennis more fun and a better game for all. The principles set forth in *The Code* shall apply in cases not specifically covered by The Rule of Tennis and Tennis Canada Regulations.

Before reading this, you might well ask yourself: Since we have a book that contains all the Rules of Tennis, why do we need a Code? There are a number of things not specifically set forth in the rules that are covered by custom and tradition only. For example, if you have a doubt on a line call, your opponent gets the benefit of the doubt. Can you find that in the rules? Further, custom dictates the standard procedures that players will use in reaching decisions. These are the reasons why we need a Code.

PRINCIPLES

- 1. Courtesy.** Tennis is a game that requires cooperation and courtesy from all participants. Make tennis a fun game by praising your opponents' good shots and by not:
 - conducting loud postmortems after points;
 - complaining about shots like lobs and drop shots;
 - embarrassing a weak opponent by being overly gracious or condescending;
 - losing your temper, using vile language, throwing your racquet, or
 - slamming a ball in anger; or
 - sulking when you are losing.
- 2. Counting points played in good faith.** All points played in good faith stand. For example, if after losing a point, a player discovers that the net was four inches too high, the point stands. If a point is played from the wrong court, there is no replay. If during a point, a player realized that a mistake was made at the beginning (for example, service from the wrong court), he shall continue playing the point. Corrective action may be taken only after a point has been completed. Shaking hands at the end of a match is an acknowledgment by the players that the match is over.

THE WARM-UP

- 3. Warm-up is not practice.** A player should provide his opponent a five-minute warm-up (ten minutes if there are no ball persons). If a player refuses to warm-up his opponent, he forfeits his right to a warm-up. Some players confuse warm up and practice. A player should make a special effort to hit his shots directly to his opponent. (If partners want to warm each other up while their opponents are warming up, they may do so.)
- 4. Warm-up serves and returns.** Take all your warm-up serves before the first serve of the match. A player who returns his opponent's warm-up serves should return them at a moderate pace in a manner that does not disrupt the server.

MAKING CALLS

5. **Player makes calls on his side of the net.** A player calls all shots landing on, or aimed at, his side of the net.
6. **Opponent gets benefit of doubt.** When a match is played without officials, the players are responsible for making decisions, particularly for line calls. There is a subtle difference between player decisions and those of an on-court official. An official impartially resolves a problem involving a call, whereas a player is guided by the unwritten law that any doubt must be resolved in favor of his opponent. A player in attempting to be scrupulously honest on line calls frequently will find himself keeping a ball in play that might have been out or that he discovers too late was out. Even so, the game is much better played this way.
7. **Ball touching any part of line is good.** If any part of the ball touches the line, the ball is good. A ball 99% out is still 100% good. A player shall not call a ball out unless the player clearly sees a space between where the ball hits and the line.
8. **Ball that cannot be called out is good.** Any ball that cannot be called out is considered to have been good. A player may not claim a let on the basis that he did not see a ball. One of tennis' most infuriating moments occurs after a long hard rally when a player makes a clean placement and his opponent says: "I'm not sure if it was good or out. Let's play a let." Remember, it is each player's responsibility to call all balls landing on, or aimed at, his side of the net. If a ball can't be called out with certainty, it is good. When you say your opponent's shot was really out but you offer to replay the point to give him a break, it seems clear that the player actually doubted that the ball was out.
9. **Either partner may make calls in doubles.** Although either doubles partner may make a call, the call of a player looking down a line is much more likely to be accurate than that of a player looking across a line. When you are looking across a line, don't call a ball out unless you can clearly see part of the court between where the ball hit and the line. It is difficult for a player who stands on one baseline to question a call on a ball that landed near the other baseline.

10. **Treat all points the same regardless of their importance.** All points in a match should be treated the same. There is no justification for considering a match point differently than the first point.
11. **Requesting opponent's help.** When an opponent's opinion is requested and he gives a positive opinion, it must be accepted. If neither player has an opinion, the ball is considered good. Aid from an opponent is available only on a call that ends a point.
12. **Out calls corrected.** If a player mistakenly calls a ball "out" and then realizes that it was good: the first time that this occurs, the point shall be replayed unless it was a point-winning shot (on a point-winning shot, the player's opponent wins the point); on each subsequent occasion, the player that made the incorrect call shall lose the point. If the mistake was made on the second serve, the server is entitled to two serves.
***TC Note:** The procedure described above for correcting "out" calls is that utilized by the International Tennis Federation in its Player Notice "Matches Played Without A Chair Umpire", which is in effect in all unofficial matches played in the context of ITF Junior, Senior, Wheelchair and Professional tournaments. The USTA procedure, presented in its version of "The Code" differs from the above.*
13. **Player calls his own shots out.** With the exception of the first serve, a player should call against himself any ball he clearly sees out regardless of whether he is requested to do so by his opponent. The prime objective in making calls is accuracy. All players should cooperate to attain this objective.
14. **Partners' disagreement on calls.** If a player and his partner disagree about whether their opponents' ball was out, they shall call it good. It is more important to give your opponents the benefit of the doubt than to avoid possibly hurting your partner's feeling by not overruling. The tactful way to achieve the desired result is to tell your partner quietly that he has made a mistake and then let him overrule himself. If a call is changed from out to good, the principles of **paragraph 12** apply.
15. **Audible or visible calls.** No matter how obvious it is to a player that his opponent's ball is out, the opponent is entitled to a prompt audible or visible out call.

- 16. Opponent's calls questioned.** A player may ask his opponent about his call with the query: "Are you sure of your call?" If the opponent acknowledges that his is uncertain, he loses the point. There shall be no further delay or discussion.
- 17. Spectators never to make calls.** A player shall not enlist the aid of a spectator in making a call. No spectator has a part in the match.
- 18. Prompt call eliminates two-chance option.** A player shall make all calls promptly after the ball has hit the court. A call shall be made either before the player's return shot has gone out of play or before the opponent has had the opportunity to play the return shot.
Prompt calls will quickly eliminate the "two chances to win the point" option that some players practice. To illustrate, a player is advancing to the net for an easy put away when he sees a ball from an adjoining court rolling toward him. He continues his advance and hits the shot, only to have his supposed easy put away fly over the baseline. The player then claims a let. The claim is not valid because he forfeited his right to call a let by choosing instead to play the ball. He took his chance to win or lose, and he is not entitled to a second chance.
- 19. Lets called when balls roll on the court.** When a ball from an adjacent court enters the playing area, a player shall call a let as soon as he becomes aware of the ball. The player loses the right to call a let if he unreasonably delays in making the call.
- 20. Touches, hitting ball before it crosses net, invasion of opponent's court, double hits, and double bounces.** A player shall promptly acknowledge if:
- a ball touches him;
 - he touches the net;
 - he touches his opponent's court;
 - he hits a ball before it crosses the net;
 - he deliberately carries or double hits the ball; or
 - the ball bounces more than once in his court.
- The opponent is not entitled to make these calls.
- 21. Balls hit through the net or into the ground.** A player shall make the ruling on a ball that his opponent hits through the net

and on a ball that his opponent hits into the ground before it goes over the net.

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

***TC Note:** In a match played without a chair umpire on a clay court, a player can ask the opponent(s) to show the mark and then cross to the other side of the net to check the mark. Note, however, that in a match played with a chair umpire a player cannot cross the net to check the mark. (This is the responsibility of the chair umpire.) To do so constitutes a Code Violation for Unsportsmanlike Conduct.*

SERVING

- 23. Server's request for third ball.** When a server requests three balls, the receiver shall comply when the third ball is readily available. Distant balls shall be retrieved at the end of a game.
- 24. Foot Faults.** A player may warn his opponent that the opponent has committed a flagrant foot fault (one that is clearly visible from the receiver's side of the court). If the foot faulting continues, the player may attempt to locate an official. If no official is available, the player may call flagrant foot faults. Compliance with the foot fault rule is very much a function of a player's personal honor system. The plea that he should not be penalized because he only just touched the line and did not rush the net is not acceptable.
- 25. Service call in doubles.** In doubles the receiver's partner should call the service line, and the receiver should call the sideline and the center service line. Nonetheless, either partner may call a ball that he clearly sees.
- 26. Service calls by serving team.** Neither the server nor his

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partner shall make a fault call on the first service even if they think it is out because the receiver may be giving the server the benefit of the doubt. But the server and his partner shall call out any second serve that either of them clearly sees out.

- 27. **Service let calls.** Any player may call a service let. The call shall be made before the return of serve goes out of play or is hit by the server or his partner. If the serve is an apparent or near ace, any let shall be called promptly.
- 28. **Obvious faults.** A player shall not put into play or hit over the net an obvious fault. To do so constitutes rudeness and may even be a form of gamesmanship. On the other hand, if a player believes that he cannot call a serve a fault and gives his opponent the benefit of a close call, the server is not entitled to replay the point.
- 29. **Receiver readiness.** The receiver shall play to the reasonable pace of the server. The receiver should make no effort to return a serve when he is not ready. If a player attempts to return a serve (even if it is a “quick” serve), then he (or his team) is presumed to be ready.
- 30. **Delays during service.** When the server’s second service motion is interrupted by a ball coming onto the court, he is entitled to two serves. When there is a delay between the first and second serves:
 - the server gets one serve if he was the cause of the delay;
 - the server gets two serves if the delay was caused by the receiver or if there was outside interference.

The time it takes to clear a ball that comes onto the court between the first and second serves is not considered sufficient time to warrant the server receiving two serves unless this time is so prolonged as to constitute an interruption. The receiver is the judge of whether the delay insufficiently prolonged to justify giving the server two serves.

SCORING

- 31. **Server announces score.** The server shall announce the game score before the first point of the game and the point score before each subsequent point of the game.
- 32. **Disputes.** Disputes over the score shall be resolved by using one of the following methods, which are listed in the order of

preference:

- count all points and games agreed upon by the players and replay only the disputed points or games;
 - If the players do not agree on the court in which the disputed point started, toss a coin to select the court.
 - If the players do not agree on who served a disputed point in a tiebreak, toss a coin to select the server. (A coin toss may also be needed to determine the side in which the point is played and the end from which the server serves.)
 - If the players do not agree on who served a disputed game, toss a coin to select the server.
- play from a score mutually agreeable to all players;
- spin a racquet or toss a coin.

HINDRANCE ISSUES

- 33. Claiming a hindrance.** A player who claims a hindrance must stop play as soon as possible.
- 34. Talking during a point.** A player shall not talk while the ball is moving toward his opponent's side of the court. If the player's talking interferes with this opponent's ability to play the ball, it is a hindrance and the player loses the point. Talking between doubles partners when the ball is moving towards them is allowed; they should not talk, however, when the ball is moving towards their opponents' court. Consider the situation where a player hits a weak lob and loudly yells at his partner to get back. If the shout is loud enough to distract his opponent who is about to hit the ball, the opponent may claim the point based on a deliberate hindrance. If the opponent chooses to hit the lob and misses it, the opponent loses the point because he did not make a timely claim of hindrance. If a player yells because of an injury or getting stung by a bee, this is an unintentional hindrance that would entitle the opponent to claim a let.
- 35. Feinting with the body.** A player may feint with his body while the ball is in play. He may change position at any time, including while the server is tossing the ball. Any movement or sound that is made solely to distract an opponent, including but not limited to waving the arms or racquet or stamping the feet, is not allowed.
- 36. Lets due to unintentional hindrance.** A player who is hindered

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by an opponent's unintentional act or by something else outside the player's control is entitled to a let only if the player could have made the shot had he not been hindered. A let is (DEL also) not authorized for a hindrance caused by something within a player's control. For example, a request for a let because the player tripped over his own hat should be denied.

- 37. Grunting.** A player should avoid grunting and making other loud noises. Grunting and other loud noises may bother not only opponents but also players on adjacent courts. In an extreme case, an opponent or a player on an adjacent court may seek the assistance of the referee or a roving official. The referee or official may treat grunting and the making of loud noises that affect the outcome of a point as a hindrance. Depending upon the circumstance, this could result in a let or loss of point.
- 38. Injury caused by a player.** When a player accidentally injures his opponent, the opponent suffers the consequences. Consider the situation where the server's racquet accidentally strikes the receiver and incapacitates him. The receiver is unable to resume play within the time limit. Even though the server caused the injury, the server wins the match by retirement.
On the other hand, when a player deliberately injures his opponent and affects the opponent's ability to play, then the opponent wins the match by default. Hitting a ball or throwing a racquet in anger is considered a deliberate act.

WHEN TO CONTACT AN OFFICAL

- 39. Withdrawing from a match or tournament.** A player shall not enter a tournament and then withdraw when he discovers that tough opponents have also entered. A player may withdraw from a match or tournament only because of injury, illness, personal emergency, or another bona fide reason. If a player cannot play a match, he shall notify the referee at once so that his opponent may be saved a trip. A player who withdraws from a tournament is not entitled to the return of his entry fee unless he withdrew before the draw was made.
- 40. Stalling.** The following actions constitute stalling:
- warming up for more than the allotted time;
 - playing at about one-third a player's normal pace;
 - taking more than the allotted 90 seconds on the odd-game changeover or more than two minutes on the setbreak;

- taking more than the authorized ten minutes during an authorized rest period between sets;
- starting a discussion or argument in order for a player to catch his breath;
- clearing a missed first service that doesn't need to be cleared; and
- excessive bouncing of the ball before a serve.

Contact an official if you encounter a problem with stalling. It is subject to penalty under the Point Penalty System.

- 41. Requesting an official.** While normally a player may not leave the playing area, he may visit the referee or seek a roving official to request assistance. Some reasons for visiting the referee include:
- stalling;
 - chronic flagrant foot faults;
 - a medical time-out;
 - a scoring dispute; and
 - a pattern of bad calls.

Players may refuse to play until an official responds.

BALL ISSUES

- 42. Retrieving stray balls.** Each player is responsible for removing stray balls and other objects from his end of the court. Whenever a ball is not in play, a player must honor an opponent's request to remove a ball from the court or from an area outside the court that is reasonably close to the lines. A player shall not go behind an adjacent court to retrieve a ball, nor shall he ask for return of a ball from players on an adjacent court until their point is over. When a player returns a ball that comes from an adjacent court, he shall wait until their point is over and then return it directly to one of the players, preferably the server.
- 43. Catching a ball.** If a player catches a ball in play before it bounces, the player loses the point regardless of where the player is standing.
- 44. New balls for a third set.** When a tournament specifies new balls for a third set, new balls shall be used unless all the players agree otherwise.

MISCELLANEOUS

- 45. Clothing and equipment malfunction.** If clothing or equipment other than a racquet becomes unusable through circumstances outside the control of the player, play may be suspended for a reasonable period. The player may leave the court after the point is over to correct the problem. If a racquet or string is broken, the player may leave the court to get a replacement, but he is subject to code violations under the Point Penalty System.
- 46. Placement of towels.** Place towels on the ground outside the net post or at the back fence. Clothing and towels should never be placed on the net.