

Official Racquetball Rules

Rule 1.1 TYPES OF GAMES

Racquetball is played by two or four players. When played by two, it is called singles and when played by four, doubles. A non-tournament variation of the game that is played by three players is called cut-throat.

Rule 1.2 DESCRIPTION

Racquetball is a competitive game in which a strung racquet is used to serve and return the ball.

Rule 1.3 OBJECTIVE

The objective is to win each rally by serving or returning the ball so the opponent is unable to keep the ball in play. A rally is over when a player (or team in doubles) is unable to hit the ball before it touches the floor twice, is unable to return the ball in such a manner that it touches the front wall before it touches the floor, or when a hinder is called.

Rule 1.4 POINTS AND OUTS

Points are scored only by the serving side when it serves an irretrievable serve (an ace) or wins a rally. Losing the serve is called a sideout in singles. In doubles, when the first server loses the serve it is called a handout and when the second server loses the serve it is a sideout.

Rule 1.5 MATCH, GAME, TIEBREAKER

A match is won by the first side winning two games. The first two games of a match are played to 15 points. If each side wins one game, a tiebreaker game is played to 11 points.

Rule 3.1 SERVE

In Open Division competition, the server will have one opportunity to put the ball into play [see section [5.0](#), for complete, one-serve modifications]. In all other divisions, the server will have two opportunities to put the ball into play.

The player or team winning the coin toss has the option to either serve or receive at the start of the first game. The second game will begin in reverse order of the first game. The player or team scoring the highest total of points in games 1 and 2 will have the option to serve or receive first at the start of the tiebreaker. In the event that both players or teams score an equal number of points in the first two games, another coin toss will take place and the winner of the toss will have the option to serve or receive.

Rule 3.2 START

The server may not start the service motion until the referee has called the score or "second serve." The serve is started from any place within the service zone. (Certain drive serves are an exception. See Rule [3.6](#).) Neither the ball nor any part of either foot may extend beyond either line of the service zone when initiating the service

motion. Stepping on, but not beyond, the lines is permitted. However, when completing the service motion, the server may step beyond the service (front) line provided that some part of both feet remain on or inside the line until the served ball passes the short line. The server may not step beyond the short line until the ball passes the short line. See Rule [3.9\(a\)](#) and [3.10\(i\)](#) for penalties for violations.

Rule 3.3 MANNER

After taking a set position inside the service zone, a player may begin the service motion--any continuous movement which results in the ball being served. Once the service motion begins, the ball must be bounced on the floor in the zone and be struck by the racquet before it bounces a second time. After being struck, the ball must hit the front wall first and on the rebound hit the floor beyond the back edge of the short line, either with or without touching one of the side walls.

Rule 3.4 READINESS

The service motion shall not begin until the referee has called the score or the second serve and the server has visually checked the receiver. The referee shall call the score as both server and receiver prepare to return to their respective positions, shortly after the previous rally has ended.

Rule 3.5 DELAYS

Except as noted in Rule [3.5\(b\)](#), the referee may call a technical foul for delays exceeding 10 seconds.

- (a) The 10 second rule applies to the server and receiver simultaneously. Collectively, they are allowed up to 10 seconds after the score is called to serve or be ready to receive. It is the server's responsibility to look and be certain the receiver is ready. If a receiver is not ready, they must signal by raising the racquet above the head or completely turning the back to the server. (These are the only two acceptable signals.)
- (b) Serving while the receiving player/team is signaling not ready is a fault serve.
- (c) After the score is called, if the server looks at the receiver and the receiver is not signaling not ready, the server may then serve. If the receiver attempts to signal not ready after that point, the signal shall not be acknowledged and the serve becomes legal.

Rule 3.6 DRIVE SERVICE ZONES

The drive serve lines will be 3 feet from each side wall in the service zone. Viewed one at a time, the drive serve line divides the service area into a 3-foot and a 17-foot section that apply only to drive serves. The player may drive serve between the body and the side wall nearest to where the service motion began only if the player starts and remains outside of the 3-foot drive service zone. In the event that the service motion begins in one 3-foot drive service zone and continues into the other 3-foot drive serve zone, the player may not hit a drive serve at all.

- (a) The drive serve zones are not observed for cross-court drive serves, the hard-Z, soft-Z, lob or half-lob serves.
- (b) The racquet may not break the plane of the 17-foot zone while making contact with the ball.
- (c) The drive serve line is not part of the 17-foot zone. Dropping the ball on the line or standing on the line while serving to the same side is an infraction.

Rule 3.7 DEFECTIVE SERVES

Defective serves are of three types resulting in penalties as follows:

- (a) Dead-Ball Serve. A dead-ball serve results in no penalty and the server is given another serve (without canceling a prior fault serve).
- (b) Fault Serve. Two fault serves result in an out (either a sideout or a handout).
- (c) Out Serve. An out serve results in an out (either a sideout or a handout).

Rule 3.8 DEAD-BALL SERVES

Dead-ball serves do not cancel any previous fault serve. The following are dead-ball serves:

- (a) Court Hinders. A serve that takes an irregular bounce because it hit a wet spot or an irregular surface on the court is a dead-ball serve. Also, any serve that hits any surface designated by local rules as an obstruction rather than being out-of-play.
- (b) Broken Ball. If the ball is determined to have broken on the serve, a new ball shall be substituted and the serve shall be replayed, not canceling any prior fault serve.

Rule 3.9 FAULT SERVES

The following serves are faults and any two in succession result in an out:

- (a) Foot Faults. A foot fault results when:
 - 1. The server does not begin the service motion with both feet in the service zone.
 - 2. The server steps completely over the service line (no part of the foot on or inside the service zone) before the served ball crosses the short line.
- (b) Short Service. A short serve is any served ball that first hits the front wall and, on the rebound, hits the floor on or in front of the short line either with or without touching a side wall.
- (c) Three Wall Serve. A three-wall serve is any served ball that first hits the front wall and, on the rebound, strikes both side walls before touching the floor.
- (d) Ceiling Serve. A ceiling serve is any served ball that first hits the front wall and then touches the ceiling (with or without touching a side wall).
- (e) Long Serve. A long serve is a served ball that first hits the front wall and rebounds to the back wall before touching the floor (with or without touching a side wall).
- (f) Bouncing Ball Outside Service Zone. Bouncing the ball outside the service zone as a part of the service motion is a fault serve.
- (g) Illegal Drive Serve. A drive serve in which the player fails to observe the 17-foot drive service zone outlined in [Rule 3.6](#).
- (h) Screen Serve. A served ball that first hits the front wall and on the rebound passes so closely to the server, or server's partner in doubles, that it prevents the receiver from having a clear view of the ball. (The receiver is obligated to take up good court position, near center court, to obtain that view.)

- (i) In open division play, if a serve is called a screen, the server will be allowed one more opportunity to hit a legal serve. Two consecutive screen serves results in an out.
- (j) Serving before the Receiver is Ready. A serve is made while the receiver is not ready as described in Rule [3.5\(b\)](#).

Rule 3.10 OUT SERVES

Any of the following results in an out:

- (a) Two Consecutive Fault Serves. See Rule [3.9](#), or a single fault serve in open division play [see exceptions: [5.0](#)].
- (b) Missed Serve Attempt. Any attempt to strike the ball that results in a total miss or in the ball touching any part of the server's body. Also, allowing the ball to bounce more than once during the service motion.
- (c) Touched Serve. Any served ball that on the rebound from the front wall touches the server or server's racquet before touching the floor, or any ball intentionally stopped or caught by the server or server's partner.
- (d) Fake or Balk Serve. Any movement of the racquet toward the ball during the serve which is non-continuous and done for the purpose of deceiving the receiver. If a balk serve occurs, but the referee believes that no deceit was involved, the option of declaring "no serve" and having the serve replayed without penalty can be exercised.
- (e) Illegal Hit. An illegal hit includes contacting the ball twice, carrying the ball, or hitting the ball with the handle of the racquet or part of the body or uniform.
- (f) Non-Front Wall Serve. Any served ball that does not strike the front wall first.
- (g) Crotch Serve. Any served ball that hits the crotch of the front wall and floor, front wall and side wall, or front wall and ceiling is an out serve (because it did not hit the front wall first). A serve into the crotch of the back wall and floor is a good serve and in play. A served ball that hits the crotch of the side wall and floor beyond the short line is in play.
- (h) Out-of-Court Serve. An out-of-court serve is any served ball that first hits the front wall and, before striking the floor, either goes out of the court or hits a surface above the normal playing area of the court that has been declared as out-of-play for a valid reason [[See Rule 2.1\(a\)](#)].
- (i) Safety Zone Violation. If the server, or doubles partner, enters into the safety zone before the served ball passes the short line, it shall result in the loss of serve.

Rule 3.11 RETURN OF SERVE

- (a) Receiving Position
 - 1. The receiver may not enter the safety zone until the ball bounces or crosses the receiving line.
 - 2. In making an "on the fly" return attempt, the receiver may not strike the ball until the ball breaks the plane of the receiving line. However, the receiver's follow-through may carry the receiver or the racquet past the receiving line.
 - 3. Neither the receiver nor the racquet may break the plane of the short line, except if the ball is struck after rebounding off the back wall.

- 4. Any violation by the receiver results in a point for the server.
- (b) Defective Serve. A player on the receiving side may not intentionally catch or touch a served ball (such as an apparently long or short serve) until the referee has made a call or the ball has touched the floor for a second time. Violation results in a point.
- (c) Legal Return. After a legal serve, a player receiving the serve must strike the ball on the fly or after the first bounce, and before the ball touches the floor the second time; and return the ball to the front wall, either directly or after touching one or both side walls, the back wall or the ceiling, or any combination of those surfaces. A returned ball must touch the front wall before touching the floor.
- (d) Failure to Return. The failure to return a serve results in a point for the server.
- (e) Other Provisions. Except as noted in this rule (3.11), the return of serve is subject to all provisions of Rules 3.13 through 3.15.

Rule 3.12 CHANGES OF SERVE

- (a) Outs. A server is entitled to continue serving until one of the following occurs:
 - 1. Out Serve. See Rule [3.10](#), or a single fault serve in open division play [see exceptions: [5.0](#)].
 - 2. Two Consecutive Fault Serves. See Rule [3.9](#).
 - 3. Failure to Return Ball. Player or team fails to keep the ball in play as required by Rule [3.11\(c\)](#).
 - 4. Avoidable Hinder. Player or team commits an avoidable hinder which results in an out. See Rule [3.15](#).
- (b) Sideout. Retiring the server in singles is called a sideout.
- (c) Effect of Sideout. When the server (or serving team) receives a sideout, the server becomes the receiver and the receiver becomes the server.

Rule 3.13 RALLIES

All of the play which occurs after the successful return of serve is called the rally. Play shall be conducted according to the following rules:

- (a) Legal Hits. Only the head of the racquet may be used at any time to return the ball. The racquet may be held in one or both hands. Switching hands to hit a ball, touching the ball with any part of the body or uniform, or removing the wrist safety cord during a rally results in a loss of the rally.
- (b) One Touch. The player or team trying to return the ball may touch or strike the ball only once or else the rally is lost. The ball may not be carried. (A carried ball is one which rests on the racquet long enough that the effect is more of a sling or throw than a hit.)
- (c) Failure to Return. Any of the following constitutes a failure to make a legal return during a rally:
 - 1. The ball bounces on the floor more than once before being hit.
 - 2. The ball does not reach the front wall on the fly.
 - 3. The ball is hit such that it goes into the gallery or wall opening or else hits a surface above the normal playing area of the court that has been declared as out-of-play [[See Rule 2.1\(a\)](#)].
 - 4. A ball which obviously does not have the velocity or direction to hit the front wall strikes another player.

- 5. A ball struck by one player on a team hits that player or that player's partner.
- 6. Committing an avoidable hinder. See Rule [3.15](#).
- 7. Switching hands during a rally.
- 8. Failure to use a racquet wrist safety cord.
- 9. Touching the ball with the body or uniform.
- 10. Carrying or slinging the ball with the racquet.
- (d) Effect of Failure to Return. Violations of Rules [3.13](#) (a) through (c) result in a loss of rally. If the serving player or team loses the rally, it is an out. If the receiver loses the rally, it results in a point for the server.
- (e) Return Attempts. The ball remains in play until it touches the floor a second time, regardless of how many walls it makes contact with -- including the front wall. If a player swings at the ball and misses it, the player may continue to attempt to return the ball until it touches the floor for the second time.
- (f) Broken Ball. If there is any suspicion that a ball has broken during a rally, play shall continue until the end of the rally. The referee or any player may request the ball be examined. If the referee decides the ball is broken the ball will be replaced and the rally replayed. The server will get two serves. The only proper way to check for a broken ball is to squeeze it by hand. (Checking the ball by striking it with a racquet will not be considered a valid check and shall work to the disadvantage of the player or team which struck the ball after the rally.)
- (g) Play Stoppage
 - 1. If a foreign object enters the court, or any other outside interference occurs, the referee shall stop the play immediately and declare a dead-ball hinder.
 - 2. If a player loses any apparel, equipment, or other article, the referee shall stop play immediately and declare an avoidable hinder or dead-ball hinder as described in Rule [3.15\(i\)](#).
- (h) Replays. Whenever a rally is replayed for any reason, the server is awarded two serves. A previous fault serve is not considered.

Rule 3.14 DEAD-BALL HINDERS

A rally is replayed without penalty and the server resumes play at first serve whenever a dead-ball hinder occurs. Also, see Rule [3.15](#) which describes conditions under which a hinder might be declared avoidable and result in loss of the rally.

- (a) Situations
 - 1. Court Hinders. The referee should stop play immediately whenever the ball hits any part of the court that was designated in advance as a court hinder (such as a vent grate). The referee should also stop play
 - (i) when the ball takes an irregular bounce as a result of contacting a rough surface (such as court light or vent) or after striking a wet spot on the floor or wall and
 - (ii) when, in the referee's opinion, the irregular bounce affected the rally.
 - 2. Ball Hits Opponent. When an opponent is hit by a return shot in flight, it is a dead-ball hinder. If the opponent is struck by a ball which obviously did not have the velocity or direction to reach the front wall, it is not a hinder, and the player who hit the ball will lose the rally. A player who has been hit by the ball can stop play and make the call though the call must be made immediately and acknowledged by the

- referee. Note this interference may, under certain conditions, be declared an avoidable hinder. See Rule [3.15](#).
- 3. Body Contact. If body contact occurs which the referee believes was sufficient to stop the rally, either for the purpose of preventing injury by further contact or because the contact prevented a player from being able to make a reasonable return, the referee shall call a hinder. Incidental body contact in which the offensive player clearly will have the advantage should not be called a hinder, unless the offensive player obviously stops play. Contact with the racquet on the follow-through normally is not considered a hinder.
 - 4. Screen Ball. Any ball rebounding from the front wall so close to the body of the defensive player that it prevents the offensive player from having a clear view of the ball. (The referee should be careful not to make the screen call so quickly that it takes away a good offensive opportunity.) A ball that passes between the legs of a player who has just returned the ball is not automatically a screen. It depends on whether the other player is impaired as a result. Generally, the call should work to the advantage of the offensive player.
 - 5. Backswing Hinder. Any body or racquet contact, on the backswing or on the way to or just prior to returning the ball, which impairs the hitter's ability to take a reasonable swing. This call can be made by the player attempting the return, though the call must be made immediately and is subject to the referee's approval. Note the interference may be considered an avoidable hinder. See Rule [3.15](#).
 - 6. Safety Holdup. Any player about to execute a return who believes that striking the opponent with the ball or racquet is likely, may immediately stop play and request a dead-ball hinder. This call must be made immediately and is subject to acceptance and approval of the referee. (The referee will grant a dead-ball hinder if it is believed the holdup was reasonable and the player would have been able to return the shot. The referee may also call an avoidable hinder if warranted.)
 - 7. Other Interference. Any other unintentional interference which prevents an opponent from having a fair chance to see or return the ball. Example: When a ball from another court enters the court during a rally or when a referee's call on an adjacent court obviously distracts a player.
- (b) Effect of Hinders. The referee's call of hinder stops play and voids any situation which follows, such as the ball hitting the player. The only hinders that may be called by a player are described in rules (2), (5), and (6) above, and all of these are subject to the approval of the referee. A dead-ball hinder stops play and the rally is replayed. The server resumes play at first serve.
 - (c) Responsibility. While making an attempt to return the ball, a player is entitled to a fair chance to see and return the ball. It is the responsibility of the side that has just hit the ball to move so the receiving side may go straight to the ball and have an unobstructed view of and swing at the ball. However, the receiver is responsible for making a reasonable effort to move towards the ball and must have a reasonable chance to return the ball for any type of hinder to be called.

Rule 3.15 AVOIDABLE HINDERS

An avoidable hinder results in the loss of the rally. An avoidable hinder does not necessarily have to be an intentional act. Dead-ball hinders are described in Rule [3.14](#). Any of the following results in an avoidable hinder:

- (a) Failure to Move. A player does not move sufficiently to allow an opponent a shot straight to the front wall as well as a cross-court shot which is a shot directly to the front wall at an angle that would cause the ball to rebound directly to the rear corner farthest from the player hitting the ball. Also when a player moves in such a direction that it prevents an opponent from taking either of these shots.
- (b) Stroke Interference. This occurs when a player moves, or fails to move, so that the opponent returning the ball does not have a free, unimpeded swing. This includes unintentionally moving in a direction which prevents the opponent from making an open, offensive shot.
- (c) Blocking. Moves into a position which blocks the opponent from getting to, or returning, the ball; or in doubles, a player moves in front of an opponent as the player's partner is returning the ball.
- (d) Moving into the Ball. Moves in the way and is struck by the ball just played by the opponent.
- (e) Pushing. Deliberately pushes or shoves opponent during a rally.
- (f) Intentional Distractions. Deliberate shouting, stamping of feet, waving of racquet, or any other manner of disrupting one's opponent.
- (g) View Obstruction. A player moves across an opponent's line of vision just before the opponent strikes the ball.
- (h) Wetting the Ball. The players, particularly the server, should ensure that the ball is dry prior to the serve. Any wet ball that is not corrected prior to the serve shall result in an avoidable hinder against the server.
- (i) Apparel or Equipment Loss. If a player loses any apparel, equipment, or other article, play shall be immediately stopped and that player shall be called for an avoidable hinder, unless the player has just hit a shot that could not be retrieved. If the loss of equipment is caused by a player's opponent, then a dead-ball hinder should be called. If the opponent's action is judged to have been avoidable, then the opponent should be called for an avoidable hinder.

Rule 3.16 TIMEOUTS

- (a) Rest Periods. Each player or team is entitled to three 30-second timeouts in games to 15 and two 30-second timeouts in games to 11. Timeouts may not be called by either side after service motion has begun. Calling for a timeout when none remain or after service motion has begun, or taking more than 30 seconds in a timeout, will result in the assessment of a technical foul for delay of game.
- (b) Injury. If a player is injured during the course of a match as a result of contact, such as with the ball, racquet, wall or floor, an injury timeout will be awarded. While a player may call more than one timeout for the same injury or for additional injuries which occur during the match, a player is not allowed more than a total of 15 minutes of rest for injury during the entire match. If the injured player is not able to resume play after total rest of 15 minutes, the match shall be awarded to the opponent.
 - 1. Should any external bleeding occur, the referee must halt play as soon as the rally is over, charge an injury timeout to the person who is bleeding, and not allow the match to continue until the bleeding has stopped.
 - 2. Muscle cramps and pulls, fatigue, and other ailments that are not caused by direct contact on the court will not be considered an injury. Injury time is also not allowed for pre-existing conditions.

- (c) Equipment Timeouts. Players are expected to keep all clothing and equipment in good, playable condition and are expected to use regular timeouts and time between games for adjustment and replacement of equipment. If a player or team is out of timeouts and the referee determines that an equipment change or adjustment is necessary for fair and safe continuation of the match, the referee may grant an equipment timeout not to exceed 2 minutes. The referee may allow additional time under unusual circumstances.
- (d) Between Games. The rest period between the first two games of a match is 2 minutes. If a tiebreaker is necessary, the rest period between the second and third game is 5 minutes.
- (e) Postponed Games. Any games postponed by referees shall be resumed with the same score as when postponed.

Rule 3.17 TECHNICAL FOULS AND WARNINGS

- (a) Technical Fouls. The referee is empowered to deduct one point from a player's or team's score when, in the referee's sole judgment, the player is being overtly and deliberately abusive. If the player or team against whom the technical foul was assessed does not resume play immediately, the referee is empowered to forfeit the match in favor of the opponent. Some examples of actions which can result in technical fouls are:
 - 1. Profanity.
 - 2. Excessive arguing.
 - 3. Threat of any nature to opponent or referee.
 - 4. Excessive or hard striking of the ball between rallies.
 - 5. Slamming of the racquet against walls or floor, slamming the door, or any action which might result in damage to the court or injury to other players.
 - 6. Delay of game. Examples include
 - (i) taking too much time to dry the court,
 - (ii) excessive questioning of the referee about the rules,
 - (iii) exceeding the time allotted for timeouts or between games,
 - (iv) calling a timeout when none remain, or after the service motion begins, or
 - (v) taking more than ten seconds to serve or be ready to receive serve.
 - 7. Intentional front line foot fault to negate a bad lob serve.
 - 8. Anything the referee considers to be unsportsmanlike behavior.
 - 9. Failure to wear lensed eyewear designed for racquet sports [[See Rule 2.5\(a\)](#)] is an automatic technical foul on the first infraction, plus a mandatory timeout (to acquire the proper eyewear) will be charged against the offending player. A second infraction by that player during the match will result in automatic forfeiture of the match.
- (b) Technical Warnings. If a player's behavior is not so severe as to warrant a technical foul, a technical warning may be issued without the deduction of a point.
- (c) Effect of Technical Foul or Warning. If a referee issues a technical foul, one point shall be removed from the offender's score. No point will be deducted if a referee issues a technical warning. In either case, a technical foul or warning should be accompanied by a brief explanation. Issuing a technical foul or warning has no effect on who will be serving when play resumes. If a technical foul occurs when the offender has no points or

between games, the result will be that the offender's score becomes minus one (-1).