

The Basic Rules of Pickleball

The Two Bounce Rule: The ball must bounce twice, once on each side of the court, before players can hit the ball in the air or on the “volley”. When the ball is served, it bounces in the receivers service court, the serving team must stay back and wait for the ball to bounce again on their side before they can move up and play the ball in the air.

This rule is instrumental in providing long rallies in the game of Pickleball. The serving team cannot serve the ball deep and then run to the net and smash it down “the throat” of their opponents. They must stay back and wait for the return bounce. New players often forget this and start to move up quickly with the serve and get caught hitting the ball in the air.

The Non-Volley Zone Faults: The Non-Volley Zone is a rectangle that is 7' X 20 feet on both sides of the net. Since Pickleball was designed as a family game this area was put in place so that a player has to stay back from the net when hitting the ball in the air. Thus, cutting down on the number of smashes and possible injury to an opposing player.

This is one of the most difficult rules for players to get used to especially tennis players. You cannot step on the NV-line or into the NV-Zone when making a volley shot, a shot in the air. Your forward momentum cannot take you into the NV-zone after you hit the ball even if it is missed on the other side. No article of clothing, jewelry or paddle can fall into the zone on a volley or it is a fault. Your hat or paddle falling in is considered a fault.

You can step in after making a ground stroke.

Points: The game of Pickleball is usually played to a score of 11. The winning team must win by two points or play continues until one team wins by 2. In tournament play, games can be played to 15 or 21. Unlike tennis or badminton, only the serving team can win a point. The receiving team must get the “side down” and get the serve back before earning points.

You earn a point when the other team commits a fault. Faults are described below.

Scoring: Scoring in Pickleball can be very confusing to beginners. The first rule of etiquette in Pickleball is that the server and only the server should announce the score. The player that is standing in the right-hand service area of the serving side always starts. That player is server number 1 for this sequence only. The next time they get the serve, their partner maybe in the right court to start and they become server number 1.

The sequence for announcing the score is as follows; serving team’s score first, opponents score second and server number third. So if the server announces 3, 4, 1, the serving team has 3 points, the opposing team has 4 points and server number 1 is serving. If the serving team wins a point, the score would be 4, 4, 1. The serving team switches courts after winning a point but the receiving team stays as is.

Remember the server only gets one fault and they lose their serve. You only get one chance to get your serve in, not two as in tennis.

Serving: To start the game, teams may decide to rally for serve playing the ball three times over the net before it is in play. Often, one team just decides to start. The team serving first gets only one serve their first time. This rule helps prevent “blow” out games with one team getting a large number of points to start. The server making the first serve should announce 0, 0, 2. The score is 0, 0, and because the team gets only one serve, the server is number 2. When the serve switches to the other side that team gets two serves and play continues that way until a score of 11 is reached.

The server must serve underhand making contact with the ball below the waist. The top of the paddle face must be below the wrist and the server must have both feet behind the service line at the time of contact with the ball. The ball must be served to the diagonally opposite court and it must be clearly in the service area. The ball cannot hit any part of the non-volley zone including the non-volley line. A serve that hits the net but lands in the service area is called a “let” and is reserved. Before serving the ball, the server should make sure all players are ready. Take a minute to check to make sure your partner is ready and that the opposing team is ready.

If you are receiving the serve but you or your partner are not ready, hold up your hand or paddle. If the server serves to you anyway, do not swing at the ball and call for a “let” serve because you were not

ready. Returning the ball indicates you were ready and the point stands.

Calling Lines: Pickleball like most racquet sports relies on the integrity of the players in calling shots in or out. The rule of etiquette suggests that players will call the lines as honestly and fairly as they can. Players should call the lines on their side of the net and opponents will do the same on their side. Opponents should never make a call on the other side of the net unless they are asked. If a team cannot decide on a line call, then the benefit always goes to the opponent. If a team asks for an opinion from an opponent, that decision is final. Again, fairness is the rule of the day. Remember it is only a game. Keeping this in mind, will prevent conflict on the court.

Faults: A point is earned or a serve is lost if a fault occurs. Remember, as in volley ball a point can only be scored by the serving team. A fault occurs on a serve when the ball hits short of the service court including the non-volley line. If the ball is served to the wrong court, long behind the back service line or out of the bounds that is a fault.

After the serve, a fault occurs if a player steps in the non-volley court or on the non-volley line while making a volley shot. If the ball is hit into the net or other permanent object such as the pole, that is a fault.

A ball that hit outside the boundary lines of the court are considered out and a fault. If the ball hits a player they have committed a fault. On the serve, if a ball is hit into the wrong court and the opposing player in that court is hit or catches the ball that is considered a fault on the receiving team.

A player should not catch a ball that is heading out of bounds because that is considered a fault as well. Always let the ball bounce first. An indication of an out ball should be made by yelling out or by hand jester indicating out. This should be done quickly.

Failing to hit the ball before it bounces twice is a fault. However, if the ball bounces twice off your paddle while you are making a continuous forward motion, this is legal. If the ball hits any part of your paddle hand, the hand below the wrist, is considered part to the paddle and legal.

If a ball hits a player or his/her clothing, while standing on or off the court during a rally, this is a fault and a point for the opponents.