

# ITF RULES OF TENNIS

A few of the more common rules that people ask about are listed below. To read the full ITF rules of tennis please go to the following website:-

[www.itftennis.com/about/organisation/rules.aspx](http://www.itftennis.com/about/organisation/rules.aspx)

## 11. Ball in Play

Unless a fault or a let is called, the ball is in play, from the moment the server hits the ball, and remains in play until the point is decided.

## 12. Ball Touches a Line

If a ball touches a line, it is regarded as touching the court bounded by that line.

## 13. Ball Touches a Permanent Fixture

If the ball in play touches a permanent fixture after it has hit the correct court, the player who hit the ball wins the point. If the ball in play touches a permanent fixture before it hits the ground, the player who hit the ball loses the point.

## 19. Service Fault

The service is a fault if:

- b. The server misses the ball when trying to hit it;
- c. The ball served touches a permanent fixture, singles stick or net post before it hits the ground;
- d. The ball served touches the server or server's partner, or anything the server or server's partner is wearing or carrying.

*Case 1: After tossing a ball to serve, the server decides not to hit it and catches it instead. Is this a fault?*

*Decision: No. A player, who tosses the ball and then decides not to hit it, is allowed to catch the ball with the hand or the racket, or to let the ball bounce.*

## 21. When to Serve and Receive

The server shall not serve until the receiver is ready. However, the receiver shall play to the reasonable pace of the server and shall be ready to receive within a reasonable time of the server being ready.

A receiver who attempts to return the server shall be considered as being ready. If it is demonstrated that the receiver is not ready, the service cannot be called a fault.

## 22. The let During a Service

The service is a let if:

- a. The ball served touches the net, strap or band, and is otherwise good; or, after touching the net, strap or band, touches the receiver or the receiver's partner or anything they wear or carry before hitting the ground; or
- b. The ball is served when the receiver is not ready.

In the case of a service let, that particular service shall not count, and the server shall serve again, but a service let does not cancel a previous fault.

### 23. The Let

In all cases when a let is called, except when a service let is called on a second service, the whole point should be replayed.

*Case 1: When the ball is in play, another ball rolls onto court. A let is called. The service had previously served a fault. Is the server now entitled to a first service or second service?*

*Decision: First service. The whole point must be replayed.*

### 24. Player Loses Point

The point is lost if:

- a. The player serves two consecutive faults;
- b. The player does not return the ball in play before it bounces twice consecutively;
- c. The player returns the ball in play so that it hits the ground, or before it bounces, an object outside the correct court;
- d. The player returns the ball in play so that, before it bounces, it hits a permanent fixture;
- e. The receiver returns the service before it bounces;
- f. The player deliberately carries or catches the ball in play on the racket or deliberately touches it with the racket more than once;
- g. The player or the racket, whether in the player's hand or not, or anything which the player is wearing or carrying touches the net, net posts/singles sticks, cord or metal cable, strap or band, or the opponent's court at any time while the ball is in play;
- h. The player hits the ball before it has passed the net;
- i. The ball in play touches the player or anything that the player is wearing or carrying, except the racket;
- j. The ball in play touches the racket when the player is not holding it;
- k. The player deliberately and materially changes the shape of the racket when the ball is in play;
- l. In doubles, both players touch the ball when returning it.

*Case 1: After the server has served a first service, the racket falls out of the server's hand and touches the net before the ball has bounced. Is this a service fault, or does the server lose the point?*

*Decision: The server loses the point because the racket touches the net while the ball is in play.*

*Case 2: After the server has served a first service, the racket falls out of the server's hand and touches the ground outside the correct service court. What is the correct decision?*

*Decision: This is a service fault because when the racket touched the net the ball was no longer in play.*

*Case 3: In a doubles match, the receiver's partner touches the net before the ball that has been served touches the ground outside the correct service court. What is the correct decision?*

*Decision: The receiving team loses the point because the receiver's partner touched the net while the ball was in play.*

*Case 4: Does the player lose the point (if an imaginary line in the extension of the net is crossed before or after hitting the ball)?*

*Decision: The player does not lose the point in either case provided the player does not touch the opponent's court.*

*Case 5: Is a player allowed to jump over the net into the opponent's court while the ball is in play?*

*Decision: No. The player loses the point.*

*Case 6: A player throws the racket at the ball in play. Both the racket and ball land in the court on the opponent's side of the net and the opponent(s) is unable to reach the ball. Which player wins the point?*

*Decision: The player who threw the racket at the ball loses the point.*

*Case 7: A ball that has just been served hits the receiver or in doubles the receiver's partner before it touches the ground. Which player wins the point?*

*Decision: The server wins the point, unless it is a service let.*

*Case 8: A player standing outside the court hits the ball or catches it before it bounces and claims the point because the ball was definitely going out of the correct court.*

*Decision: The player loses the point, unless it is a good return, in which case the point continues.*

## 25. A Good Return

It is a good return if:

- a. The ball touches the net, net posts/singles sticks, cord or metal cable, strap or band, provided that it passes over any of them and hits the ground within the correct court;
- b. After the ball in play has hit the ground within the correct court and has spun or been blown back over the net, the player reaches over the net and plays the ball in the correct court, provided that the player does not break Rule 24;
- c. The ball is returned outside the net posts, either above or below the level of the top of the net, even though it touches the net posts, provided that it hits the ground in the correct court, except as provided in Rules 2 and 24(d);
- d. The ball passes under the net cord between the singles stick and the adjacent net post without touching either net, net cord or net post and hits the ground in the correct court;
- e. The player's racket passes over the net after hitting the ball on the player's own side of the net and the ball hits the ground in the correct court;
- f. The player hits the ball in play, which hits another ball lying in the correct court.

*Case 1: A player returns a ball which then hits a singles stick and hits the ground in the correct court. Is this a good return?*

*Decision: Yes. However, if the ball is served and hits the singles stick, it is a service fault.*

*Case 2: A ball in play hits another ball which is lying in the correct court. What is the correct decision?*

*Decision: Play continues. However, if it is not clear that the actual ball in play has been returned, a let should be called.*

## 27. Correcting Errors

As a principle, when an error in respect of the Rules of Tennis is discovered, all points previously played shall stand. Errors so discovered shall be corrected as follows:

- a. During a standard game or a tie-break game, if a player serves from the wrong half of the court, this should be corrected as soon as the error is discovered and the server shall serve from the correct half of the court, according to the score. A fault that was served before the error was discovered shall stand.
- b. During a standard game or a tie-break game, if the players are at the wrong ends of the court, the error should be corrected as soon as it is discovered and the server shall serve from the correct end of the court according to the score.
- c. If a player serves out of turn during a standard game, the player who was originally due to serve shall serve as soon as the error is discovered. However, if the game is completed before the error is discovered the order of service shall remain as altered. In this case any ball change to be made after an agreed number of games should be made one game later than originally scheduled. A fault that was served by the opponent(s) before the error was discovered shall not stand. In doubles, if the partners of one team serve out of turn, a fault that was served before the error was discovered shall stand.
- d. If a player serves out of turn during a tie-break game and the error is discovered after an even number of points have been played, the error is corrected immediately. If the error is discovered after an odd number of points have been played, the order of service shall remain as altered.
- e. During a standard game or a tie-break game in doubles, if there is an error in the order of receiving, this shall remain as altered until the end of the game in which the error is discovered. For the next game in which they are the receivers in that set, the partners shall then resume the original order of receiving.

### 30. Coaching

Coaching is considered to be communication, advice or instruction of any kind and by any means to a player.

In team events where there is a team captain sitting on-court, the team captain may coach the player during a set break and when the players change ends at the end of a game but not when the players change ends after the first game of each set and not during a tie-break game.

In all other matches, coaching is not allowed.

## THE CODE – THE PLAYERS’ GUIDE TO FAIR PLAY AND THE UNWRITTEN RULES OF TENNIS

The Code is not part of the ITF Rules of Tennis. Players should, however, follow the code. Some of the more common rules are listed below but for the full code go to [www.usta.com/Active/The-Rules-of-Tennis/2518 The Code The Players Guide for Unofficial Matches](http://www.usta.com/Active/The-Rules-of-Tennis/2518-The-Code-The-Players-Guide-for-Unofficial-Matches)

### *Principles*

2. *Points played in good faith are counted.* All points played in good faith stand. If during a point, a player realises that a mistake was made at the beginning (for example, service from the wrong court), the player shall continue playing the point. Shaking hands at the end of a match is an acknowledgment by the players that the match is over.

### *Making Calls*

5. *Player makes calls on own side of net.* A player calls all shots landing on, or aimed at, the player’s 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.
7. *Ball touching any part of line is good.* If any part of a ball touches a 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 space between where the ball hits and a line.
8. *Ball that cannot be called out is good.* Any ball that cannot be called out is considered to be good. A player may not claim a let on the basis of not seeing a ball.
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 more likely to be accurate than that of a player looking across a line.
11. *Requesting opponent’s help.* When an opponent’s opinion is requested and the opponent 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 reversed.* A player who calls a ball out shall reverse the call if the player becomes uncertain or realises that the ball was good. The point goes to the opponent and is not replayed. However, when a receiver reverses a fault call on a serve that hit the net, the server is entitled to two serves.
14. *Partners’ disagreement on calls.* If one partner calls the ball out and the other partner sees the ball good, the ball is good.
15. *Audible or visible calls.* No matter how obvious it is to a player that an opponent’s ball is out, the opponent is entitled to a prompt audible or visible out call.
16. *Spectators never make calls.* A player shall not enlist the aid of a spectator in making a call. No spectator has a part in a match.
17. *Prompt calls eliminate two chance option.* A player shall make all calls promptly after a ball has hit the court. A call shall be made either before the player’s return shot has gone out of play or before an opponent has had an opportunity to play the return shot.
18. *Let called when ball rolls on court.* When a ball from another court enters the playing area, any player on the court affected may call a let as soon as the player becomes aware of the ball. The player loses the right to call a let if the player unreasonably delays in making the call.

19. *Touches, hitting ball before it crosses net, invasion of opponent's court, double hits and doubles bounces.* A player shall promptly acknowledge when:
- A ball in play touches the player;
  - The player touches the net or opponent's court while a ball is in play;
  - The player hits a ball before it crosses the net;
  - The player deliberately carries or double hits a ball; or
  - A ball bounces more than once in the player's court.
- The opponent is not entitled to make these calls.
20. *Balls hit through net or into ground.* A player makes the ruling on a ball that the player's opponent hits through the net or into the ground before it goes over the net.
25. *Service calls in doubles.* In doubles the receiver's partner should call the service line, and the receiver should call the sideline and the centre service line. Nonetheless, either partner may call a ball that either clearly sees.
26. *Service calls by serving team.* Neither the server nor server's 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.
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 the server's 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 does not call a serve a fault and gives the 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 server when the receiver is not ready.
30. *Delays during service.* When the server's second service motion is interrupted by a ball coming onto the court, the server is entitled to two serves. When there is a delay between the first and second serves:
- The server gets one serve if the server 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 is sufficiently 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 a 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 disputed points or games;  
 Play from a score mutually agreement to all players

### *Hindrance Issues*

33. *Claiming a hindrance.* A player who claims a hindrance must stop play as soon as possible.

### *Ball Issues.*

42. *Retrieving stray balls.* Each player is responsible for removing stray balls and other objects from the player's end of the court. A player shall not go behind an adjacent court to retrieve a ball or ask a player on an adjacent court to return a ball while a point is in play. When a player returns a ball the player shall wait until the point is over on the court where the ball is being returned and then return it directly to one of the players.
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.

## Tie-Break Scoring

In matches, when a set reaches six games all, a tie break is played. A tie break would conclude each level six all set, not just a final set.

The player whose turn it would be to serve in the next game starts the tiebreak. He or she serves normally to the deuce court (the left hand court as the server perceives it). The opponent serves the next TWO points, starting with a serve to the ad court.

Points are numbered 1, 2, 3 etc, rather than 15, 30, 40 Deuce.

From the second point, each player has two serves.

The tiebreak is over when one player reaches seven points, provided he or she is two clear points ahead of his or her opponent. From 6-6 in a tiebreak a player must have a two point advantage to win the tiebreak.

After 6 points have been played, players change ends, i.e. at 3-3 or 6-6.

A typical tiebreak score would be 7-5, or 8-6, or 9-7.

The players also change ends at the end of the tiebreak to begin the next set.

The player who served first in the tiebreak, RECEIVES at the beginning of the next set (assuming there is one!).

A super tie-break is over when one player reaches ten points, provided he or she is two clear points ahead of his or her opponent.

# TENNIS NEW ZEALAND SELF-UMPIRING CODE POLICY

New Zealand Tennis has adopted the following policy for self-umpiring.

## ON-COURT RULES FOR MATCHES PLAYED WITHOUT UMPIRES

- All calls on your side of the net are **your** responsibility (i.e. you cannot ask an opponent for a let because you do not agree with their call). If you have any doubt as to whether a ball is out or good, you must give your opponent the benefit of the doubt and play the ball as good. You should **not** play a let.
- Any 'out' call must be made instantaneously (i.e. made before either an opponent has hit the return or the return has gone out of play); otherwise, the ball continues in play. The call should be made both verbally **and by using a hand signal**.
- Do **not** enlist the aid of spectators, including parents, in making calls.
- If you call a ball out then realise it was good, you should correct your call and award the point to your opponent.
- To avoid controversy over the score, the Server should announce the set score (e.g. 5-4) before starting a game and the game score (e.g. thirty-forty) prior to serving each point. Game scores must also be recorded on each end change and at the end of each set.
- If players cannot agree on the score the referee is to be called. The referee will discuss the relevant points or games to find out the points or games that the players agree on. All points or games which the players agree on stand and only those in dispute will be replayed.
- Foot faults are not allowed. If an opponent persists in foot faulting after being warned not to do so, the Referee should be informed. The Referee can call foot faults from the side of the court.

The above principles and guidelines shall apply in any match conducted without on court officials.