

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF RECREATIONAL SPORTS PROGRAMS

Racquetball Rules

(Excerpts taken from Official Rules of Racquetball/approved by USA Racquetball.)

The Game:

1. Types of Games: Racquetball can be played by two, three, or four players. When played by two it is called "Singles," and when played by four is called, "Doubles."
2. 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 side is unable to return 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.
3. Points and Outs: Points are scored only by the serving side, when it serves an ace or wins a rally. When the serving side loses a rally, it loses the serve. Losing the serve is called a "sideout" in singles, a "handout" for the first server and a "sideout" for the second server in doubles.
4. Game: A game is won by the side first scoring 15 points.
5. Match: A match is won by the side winning the best two out of three games. (The tiebreaker is played to 11 points.)

Play Regulations:

1. Serve, Generally:

- a. Order: The player or side winning the toss becomes the first server and starts the first game. The receiving player or side in the first game shall serve first in the second game. In a tiebreaker it shall be the player or side accumulating the greatest number of points in the first two games who shall serve first.
- b. Place: The server may serve from any place in the service zone. No part of either foot may extend beyond either line of the service zone. Stepping on the line (but not beyond it) is permitted. When completing the service motion, the server may step over 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. Server must remain in the service zone until the served ball passes the short line. Violations are called "foot faults."
- c. Manner: A serve is commenced as the ball leaves the server's hand. The ball must bounce on the floor in the service zone and on the first bounce be struck by the server's racquet so that it hits the front wall and on the rebound, hits the floor back of the short line, either with or without touching one of the side walls. A balk serve, or fake swing at the ball although the ball has only been bounced once, shall be deemed an infraction and be judged a sideout.

2. Serve, In Doubles:

- a. Server: At the beginning of each game in doubles, each side shall decide the order of the service, which is the order that shall be followed throughout the game. Only the first server serves the first time up and continues to serve first throughout the

game. When the first server is out, the side is out. Thereafter both players on each side shall serve until an out occurs. It is not necessary for the server to alternate serves to their opponents.

- b. Partner's Position: On each serve, the server's partner shall stand erect with his back to the side wall and with both feet on the floor within the service box until the served ball passes the short line. Violations are called "foot faults."

3. Defective Serves:

- a. Dead-Ball Serve: A dead-ball serve results in no penalty and the server is given another serve (without cancelling 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.)

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

- a. Ball Hits Partner: A serve which strikes the server's partner while in the doubles box is a dead-ball serve. A serve which touches the floor before touching the server's partner is a short serve.
- b. 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.
- c. 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 cancelling any prior fault serve.

5. Fault Serves: The following serves are faults and any two in succession will result in an out:

- a. Foot Fault: A foot fault results when:
 - i. The server does not begin the service motion with both feet in the service zone.
 - ii. 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.
 - iii. In doubles, the server's partner is not in the service box with both feet on the floor and back to the side wall from the time the server begins the service motion until the ball passes the short line. See #2.
- 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 Service: 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. 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.)
- e. 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.)
- f. Out-of-Court Serve: An out-of-court serve is any served ball that first hits the front wall and, before striking the floor, goes out of the court.
- g. Bouncing Ball Outside Service Zone: Bouncing the ball outside the service zone as a part of the service motion is a fault serve.
- h. Illegal Drive Serve: A drive serve in which the player fails to observe the 17-foot drive service zone.
- i. 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 place himself in

good court position, near center court, to obtain that view.) The screen serve is the only fault serve which may not be appealed.

- j. Serving the ball while receiver is signaling "Not Ready."

6. Out Serves: Any one of the following serves results in an out:

- a. Two Consecutive Fault Serves: See #5.
- b. Failure to Serve: Failure of server to put the ball into play within ten seconds after the referee calls the score.
- c. 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.
- d. Touched Serve: Any served ball that on the rebound from the front wall touches the server or server's racquet, or any ball intentionally stopped or caught by the server or server's partner.
- e. 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, he has the option of declaring "no serve" and have the serve replayed without penalty.
- f. 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.
- g. Non-Front Wall Serve: Any served ball that does not strike the front wall first.
- h. 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.
- i. Out-of-Order Serve: In doubles, when either partner serves out of order, the points scored by the server will be subtracted and an out serve will be called: if the second server serves out of order, the out serve will be applied to the first server and the second server will resume serving. If the player designated as the first server serves out of order, a sideout will be called. The referee should call no serve as soon as an out-of-order serve occurs. If no points are scored while the team is out of order, only the out penalty will have to be assessed. However, if points are scored before the out of order condition is noticed and the referee cannot recall the number, the referee may enlist the aid of the line judges to recall the number of points to be deducted.
- j. Ball Hits Partner: A served ball that hits the doubles partner while outside the doubles box results in loss of serve.
- k. 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.

7. Return of Serve:

- a. Receiving Position:
 - i. The receiver may not enter the safety zone until the ball bounces or crosses the receiving line.
 - ii. On the fly return attempt, the receiver may not strike the ball until the ball breaks the plane of the receiving line. The receiver's follow-through may carry the receiver or his racquet past the receiving line.
 - iii. Neither the receiver nor his racquet may break the plane of the short line, except if the ball is struck after rebounding off the back wall.
 - iv. 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 on the receiving team 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.

8. 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 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:
 - i. The ball bounces on the floor more than once before being hit.
 - ii. The ball does not reach the front wall on the fly.
 - iii. The ball is hit so that it goes into a gallery or wall opening without first hitting the front wall.
 - iv. A ball which obviously does not have the velocity or direction to hit the front wall strikes another player.
 - v. A ball struck by one player on a team hits that player or that player's partner.
 - vi. Committing a penalty hinder. See #10.
 - vii. Switching hands during a rally.
 - viii. Failure to use wrist safety cord on racquet.
 - ix. Touching the ball with the body or uniform.
 - x. Carry or sling the ball with the racquet.
- d. Effect of Failure to Return: Violations 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:
 - i. In singles, 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.
 - ii. In doubles, if one player swings at the ball and misses it both partners may make further attempts to return the ball until it touches the floor the second time. Both partners on a side are entitled to return the ball.
- f. Out of Court Ball:
 - i. After return: Any ball returned to the front wall which, on the rebound or the first bounce, goes into the gallery or through any opening in a side wall shall be declared dead and the server shall receive two serves.
 - ii. No Return: Any ball not returned to the front wall but which goes off a player's racquet into the gallery or into any opening in a side wall, either with

or without touching the ceiling, side wall, or back wall, shall be an out for the player failing to make the return, or a point for the opponent.

- g. **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.)
- h. **Play Stoppage:**
 - i. 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.
 - ii. If a player loses any apparel, equipment, or other article, the referee shall stop play immediately and declare a penalty hinder or replay hinder as described in #9 and #10.
- i. **Replays:** Whenever a rally is replayed for any reason, the server is awarded two serves. A previous fault serve is not considered.

9. Replay Hinders: A rally is replayed without penalty and the server receives two serves whenever a dead-ball hinder occurs.

a. **Situations:**

- i. **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 door handle.) 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.
- ii. **Ball Hits Opponent:** When an opponent is hit by a return shot in flight, it is a replay 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.
- iii. **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.
- iv. **Screen Ball:** Any ball rebounding from the front wall so close to the body of the defensive team that it interferes with, or 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 the side that just returned the ball is not automatically a screen. It depends on the proximity of players. Again, the call should work to the advantage of the offensive player.
- v. **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 a penalty hinder. See #10.

- vi. Safety Holdup: Any player about to execute a return who believes he is likely to strike his opponent with the ball or racquet may immediately stop play and request a replay hinder. This call must be made immediately and is subject to acceptance and approval of the referee. (The referee will grant a replay hinder if it is believed the holdup was reasonable and the player would have been able to return the shot, and the referee may also call a penalty hinder if warranted.)
- vii. 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.
- viii. 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 (ii), (v), and (vi) above, and all of these are subject to the approval of the referee. A replay hinder stops play and the rally is replayed. The server receives two serves.
- ix. Avoidance: 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 the ball. In the judgment of the referee however, the receiver must make a reasonable effort to move towards the ball and have a reasonable chance to return the ball in order for a hinder to be called.
- x. In doubles: In doubles, both players on a side are entitled to a fair and unobstructed chance at the ball and either one is entitled to a hinder even though it naturally would be his partner's ball and even though his partner may have attempted to play the ball or that he may already have missed it. It is not a hinder when one player hinders his partner.

10. Penalty Hinders: A penalty hinder results in the loss of the rally. A penalty hinder does not necessarily have to be an intentional act and is the result of the following:

- b. 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.
- c. 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 the wrong direction which prevents an opponent from making an open offensive shot.
- d. 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.
- e. Moving into the Ball: Moves in the way and is struck by the ball just played by the opponent.
- f. Pushing: Deliberately pushes or shoves opponent during a rally.
- g. View Obstruction: A player moves across an opponent's line of vision just before the opponent strikes the ball.

- h. Intentional Distractions: Deliberate shouting, stamping of feet, waiving of racquet, or any other manner of disrupting one's opponent.
- i. Wetting the Ball: The players, particularly the server, should insure that the ball is dry prior to the serve. Any wet ball that is not corrected prior to the serve shall result in a penalty hinder against the server.
- j. 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 a penalty 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 replay hinder should be called. If the opponent's action is judged to have been avoidable, then the opponent should be called for a penalty hinder.