

New Consequential Rules for Pickleball in 2023

Hello all you pickleball players! As we near the end of this year, I wanted to reach out and present to you the most consequential changes to the rulebook for USA Pickleball.

There were over 90 submissions of rule changes that were culled through, discussed, and ultimately decided on with an up or down vote from both the executive board and the rules committee. There are 21 approved changes to the rulebook, most being clerical or editorial in nature.

Many of these folks volunteer their time to make all of this happen. So, when you are out enjoying a casual game of pickleball, or playing competitively at a tournament, know that there are a lot of people behind the scenes making this game we love what it is today.

Okay, on with the rules. These major rule changes affect us as players more directly, so I'm going to stick with the important ones:

Wrong Score Called (4.K)

If the wrong score is called, the referee or any player may stop play before the return of serve to correct the score. It is a fault to stop play after the return of serve to identify or ask for a score correction. It is a fault to stop play to identify or ask for a score correction when the score was correctly called.

My Take- This reverts us back to the rule prior to last year. We found that not having the option to stop play at all, created some angst among players. This will allow you to stop the play to fix it if you do it before the return of serve. If you are wrong however, a fault will occur.

Spin Serve (4.A.5)

Manipulating the ball to add spin during the release of the ball is not allowed. Some natural rotation of the ball when it is released is allowable but the server must not impart manipulation or spin prior to striking the ball to serve. This applies to the volley serve and the drop serve.

My Take- Are you surprised? First, we got rid of the 'chainsaw' serve. Then we got rid of the 2 hand serve. Now, you can no longer impart any spin

from your hand. Pickleball was never intended to be a 'serving' game like tennis. It is a rally game, so this rule helps keep the spirit of the game intact. Natural spin of the ball is fine, but any additional spin from your hand is no longer allowed, and a fault will occur.

The rest of these major rule changes apply more to tournament situations and where there is more likely a referee on court.

Apparel (2.G.1/2.G.4)

Inappropriate apparel may now include apparel that approximates the color of the tournament ball. Section 1 encourages players to avoid wearing apparel that approximates the color of the ball. The Tournament Director retains the right to require an apparel change during a non-chargeable time-out.

My Take- The key to this new rule is that the Tournament Director is the only who can request an apparel change. Of course, as a player, you can request this be done, but you can't demand it yourself.

Player Questions about Correct Server, Receiver or Position (4.B.8)

Player questions about correct server, receiver or position remain allowed before the serve is hit. A generic question by the server such as "Am I good?" is considered to encapsulate both the correct server question and the correct position question, and the referee will answer both questions. In non-officiated play, a player may ask the opponent the same questions and the opponent must respond with the appropriate information.

My Take- This has worked its way into our tournaments for a couple of years. It helps with the flow of the game, so as a ref, I'm not playing 20 questions with you to get to the heart of the matter. Remember though, if you only ask one specific question, I can only answer that question. So just get in the habit of asking 'Am I good?' and you'll cover all the bases.

Replay or Fault on the Serve (4.A.6/4.A.9)

The referee has the authority to immediately stop play and order a replay if the referee is not certain that one or more required elements of a serve have been met. The referee will call an immediate fault if a serve clearly

violates one or more of the requirements. The intent is to induce players to adjust their serve so that it clearly and obviously meets all requirements.

My Take- As a referee, it is difficult to call a fault on a serve based on one of the criteria being violated. Despite what you might think, we are not out to get you! We assume good intentions first in most cases. So, this new rule gives us a chance to correct a problem with a serve without having to call a fault on you. Of course, if I see an obvious violation of one of the serving criteria, you better believe I'm calling you on it!

Equipment Time-Out (10.D)

Players are not required to use a regular time-out for equipment adjustments or changes necessary for fair and safe continuation of the match. The referee will call an equipment time-out of a reasonable duration.

My Take- I think this is a reasonable addition assuming you aren't abusing your equipment during play. We don't want to have to charge you with a timeout just because your handle broke during normal play. Please note though, it's always a good idea to have another paddle on hand should something like this occur. We can hold up the game for only so long before it becomes unfair to the other team.

I hope this information helps you as you start the new year. Please note that these all go into effect January 1. If you have any questions or need any clarification, please contact me directly:

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