

Summary of Tennis Rules

(For all other USTA tennis rules refer to "Friend at Court")

1. The Court

- The net should be 42 inches in height at the net post and 36 inches at the strap at mid-court.
- No single sticks will be used in SDHSAA events.

2. Permanent fixtures

- The net, post, scoring cards, cord or strap back or side stops (fence or curtains), seats, or fixtures around the courts (or over the courts) are considered permanent fixtures.

3. The Ball

- Balls must comply with current specifications. The tennis ball used for state tournament play will be the Wilson US Open Select Extra Duty.
- If a ball is determined to be flat (dead), it may be replaced, but a let may not be played.
- A ball change is optional after players split sets in the best of 3 sets.
- A player may not cause a ball to become wet by wiping away perspiration.

4. The Racket

- Vibration damper(s) must be outside the stringing pattern.
- A player may continue to play with a broken string/racket, but cannot call a let and replay that point.
- A player may not leave the court to get a replacement racket.
(They are subject to the Point Penalty System for delay of game.)

5. Score in a Game

- The server is required to call the score at the beginning of each game and the point scores as the games go on in a match without a chair umpire.
- "Love, 15, 30, 40 and game" is the preferred scoring. At 40-all (40-40), "deuce" is declared.
- Advantage ("ad-in or ad-out) is declared following deuce. A player/team must win two consecutive points following deuce to win that game.
- Players should resolve scoring disputes in a game by replaying only the disputed points. If the set score is in dispute, players should resume play at the score mutually agreed upon.
- If there is a discrepancy in the score, it needs to be addressed immediately or the score will stand as stated. If both players agree that the server stated the score after each point and the receiver heard it, the score declared by the server shall prevail.

Note: In SDHSAA sanctioned events No-Ad scoring will be in effect.

The participant winning the point after the deuce results in winning that game.

(The receiving team has the option as to the court to receive the service, but may not switch places/sides on court.)

6. Score in a Set

- The first player/team to reach six games (by a margin of two games) wins that set.
- At six games all, a Set Tiebreak Game is played to determine the winner of the set (first to seven win by two).

7. Score in a Match

- A match can be either the best of three sets or the best of five sets. (In SDHSAA matches, the best of three sets applies.)

SDHSAA RECOMMENDED FORMAT OPTIONS TO PLAY

- Best 2 out of 3 full sets
- Best 2 out of 3 sets with a match tiebreak in lieu of the 3rd set (first to 10 win by two)
- 8 or 10 game pro sets with use of a set tiebreak at 8-8 or 10-10.

- **“Short Sets” ...first player/team who wins four games wins that set, provided there is a margin of two games over the opponent(s). If the score reaches four games all, a set tiebreak game shall be played to decide the match.**

Note: Matches may consist of best of 3 short sets, but a match tiebreak may still be used in lieu of a third set. This is a preferred method over pro-sets because it allows for a change of momentum, similar to a regular match.

8. Server and Receiver

- The players shall stand on opposite sides of the net. The player who first delivers the ball shall be called the server and the other the receiver.
The server must stay within the confines of the court. The receiver may stand anywhere they please as long as it is on their side of the court, including inside the service box.

9. Choice of Ends & Service

- The toss/spin should occur before warm-up. The winner of the toss/spin may choose the side, to serve or receive (but not both side and service option) or require the other player to choose or **defer the choice (require other person to choose)**. *If a match is postponed before it starts, the winner of the toss/spin may change their choice.*

10. Change of Ends

- Players change ends at the end of the first and subsequent two games (odd total number of games). Therefore, players change ends after the completion of a set only if the number of total games is odd e.g., 6-1, 6-3, etc. Any mistakes are corrected immediately.
- Players change ends after every six points during a tiebreak.

11. Ball in Play

- A ball is in play from the moment the server hits the ball until it actually strikes the ground outside the court, bounces twice or comes into contact with a permanent fixture or another player. *(This is very important in determining if a loss of point is involved by touching the net or invasion of the opponent's court).*
- A ball embedded in the net is out of play.
- If either player touches the net when the ball is still in play, that player loses the point.
- If a ball is played in good faith or returned without an out call, the point may not be claimed later by the person making the error.

12. Ball Touches a Line (A ball 99% out is 100% in.)

- If a ball touches a line, it is regarded as touching the court bounded by that line.
- If a player cannot tell for certain that a ball is out, they must consider the ball good.
General Rule of Thumb: In doubles, if either player sees the ball good, the benefit of doubt is given to the opponents.

13. Ball Touches a Permanent Fixture

- If a ball in play hits a permanent fixture after it hits the correct court, the player who hit the ball wins the point. If the ball hits a permanent fixture before it hits the ground, the opponent wins the point.
- A ball hitting an object attached to a net post (such as score cards) results in the player who hit the ball losing the point. *(Note: A ball striking a net post is considered a part of the net, therefore a ball striking a net post remains in play, except on a serve).*

14. Order of Service

- At the end of the first game, the receiver shall become the server. This alternates throughout the set.
- If a player serves out of turn, the mistake is corrected as soon as discovered. All points played in good faith stand as played. A fault served before discovery shall not stand. If a full game (or service sequence in a tiebreak) has been completed, the altered order of service shall remain.
(Note: In a doubles match, partners may switch their service order at the start of a new set or match tiebreak, but not for a set tiebreak.)

15. Order of Receiving in Doubles

- The team that is to receive in the first game of a set, shall decide which player shall receive the first point in the game. Their opponents shall decide which player shall receive the first point in the next game.
- No player shall be allowed to play alone should their partner become injured or ill.

16. The Service

- The server must be behind the service end lines and not cross the singles outside line when serving in singles.
- The server must come to rest (including feet) before beginning service motion.
(*Service motion begins with any body motion and ends with ball contact*)

17. Serving

- The server shall stand behind alternate halves of the court starting from the right half of the court in every game.
- The serve shall pass over the net and hit the service court diagonally opposite before the server returns it.

18. Foot Fault

- The server cannot cross the extension of the centerline or extension of the sideline with any contact (i.e.: heel of shoe) once the service has started.
- The server cannot change position by walking (two or more steps) or running during service.
- The server cannot touch the baseline or the court with either foot before the ball is struck.
- In singles, the server is not allowed to serve standing outside the singles sideline.
- In a non-officiated match, the receiver or receiver's partner may call foot faults on the server only after all efforts (warning the server and attempting to locate an official) have failed and the foot faulting is so flagrant as to be clearly perceptible from the receiver's side.

19. Service Fault

- The service is a fault if the server breaks above listed rules 16, 17, or 18.
- A service is not a fault unless the server attempts to strike the ball.
(*If the server throws up the ball and does not attempt to strike the ball, it is not a fault, either for foot-faulting or any other reason. A whiff is considered a service fault.*)

20. Second Service

- If the first service is a fault, the server shall serve again without delay.
(*The receiver may clear a ball from the first service if it has bounded back on the court.*)

21. When to Serve & Receive

- The ball must be put in play by the server before 20 seconds has elapsed after the end of the last point
- The server must wait for the receiver to be ready but the receiver must play to the reasonable pace of the server (10-15 seconds). Once a receiver has indicated that he/she is ready they cannot become un-ready unless due to an outside interruption.
- The server cannot suddenly change (abruptly shorten) the time between serves once a pace has been established.
- A receiver who attempts to return a ball is considered to be ready (*they cannot claim that they were not ready. It is recommended that a player put their hand up if not ready to play.*)
- A receiver can be penalized for a delay if they do not play to the pace of the server.
(*The server is ready to serve but the receiver is not getting into the ready position.*)

22. The Let During a Serve

- The service is a let if the ball touches the net, strap or band and is otherwise good.
- **If service hits the net post, the serve is considered a fault, not a let.**
- If the ball touches the net **and then** touches the receiver or receiver's partner, a let is called.
- **If serve hits an opponent before it bounces (in flight), it is a point for the serving team.**
- A let is called if the ball is delivered before the receiver is ready unless the receiver attempts to return the ball.

23. The Let

- Always play a let when there is any outside interference while a ball is in play such as a ball rolling on the court from an adjacent court. (*In play includes the start of a second serve.*)
- A first service is always granted when a let is called for outside interference. If there is an excessive delay due to the receiver having to clear a ball from another court between the first and second serve, the receiver should grant **a let** or **first** serve due to the excessive delay. If the server can clear a stray ball quickly, a let is not typically granted.
- Always play a let if a ball is discovered to be broken (no pressure) after the point since it cannot be determined when the ball was broken (*However, it must be determined that the ball in play was the one that was broken*).

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.
- c. the player returns the ball so that it hits the ground or an object outside the proper court.
- d. the player returns the ball so that, before it bounces, it hits a permanent fixture.
- e. the player deliberately hits the ball twice (*second push*).
- f. the player or anything they wear or carry touches the net or opponent's court while the ball is in play. (*This includes dampening devices from a player's racket landing in the opponent's court while the ball is in play.*)
- g. the player hits the ball before it passes the net.
- h. the ball in play touches the player or anything that the player is wearing or carrying except the racket.
- i. the ball in play touches the racket when the player is not holding it. (*Even if the racket is outside the court playing area.*)
- j. the player deliberately and materially changes the shape of a racket when the ball is in play.
- k. in doubles, both players touch the ball when returning it.
- l. the player catches the ball before it hits the ground. (*Even if the ball is clearly going out of bounds.*)
- m. the receiver or the receiver's partner (*or anything that they wear or carry including a cap*) is hit by a ball in play.
- n. the receiver or the receiver's partner (*or anything that they wear or carry onto the court including a cap that has blown or fallen off*) touches the net while the ball is in play.

25. A Good Return

A ball is a good return if:

- a) it touches the net, posts, cord or metal cable strap or band provided it passes over them and hits the ground within the court.
- b) the ball hits the ground in the proper court and rebounds or is blown over the net and the player whose turn it is to strike it reaches over the net and plays the ball without touching the net or the opponents court.
- c) the ball is returned outside the posts or singles sticks and hits the ground in the proper court.
- d) the ball passes under the net cord between the singles stick and the net post without touching either net, net cord or net post and lands in the correct court. (*Note: This is not applicable since the SDHSAA has voted to eliminate singles sticks.*)
- e) the player's racket passes over the net after they hit the ball provided that it is struck after the ball passes the net.
- f) a player succeeds in returning the ball which strikes a ball, **hat or visor** lying in the court (from the start of the point). **A let may not be called when a hat/visor falls off or a ball falls from a pocket.**

(Note: The ball referred to must be on the court as a result of a service let, fault or the result of a player dropping it and not one from an adjacent court. If a ball strikes a ball that has entered the court from another court, a let is played.)

- g) A player may call a let if the opponent's hat/visor falls onto the court or the opponent drops a second ball or has a ball falls from a pocket.

26. Hindrance

If a player commits any act, which deliberately hinders the opponent from making a stroke, the player loses the point e.g., players talking to each other in a loud voice when the ball is approaching their opponents.

- a) If an unintentional hindrance is committed, the point is replayed e.g., a player screams from a wasp sting.
- b) A player's own actions, such as a cap falling off or a ball falling out of a pocket, cannot be a cause for that player or team to call a let due to unintentional hindrance.
- c) A player may issue a warning to an opponent if that opponent's ball or apparel repeatedly causes a let. Failure to secure a hat or ball after a warning will then result in a player being allowed to call a deliberate hindrance and claim the point.
- d) Likewise, spectator actions (such as an out call) cannot be used as a cause for declaring a let unless the spectator entered the playing area.

27. Correcting Errors

Note: The general guideline for correcting errors is that they should be rectified as soon as discovered but not while the ball is in play. Any points completed under the erroneous condition (played in good faith) shall be counted.

When an error in respect to the Rules of Tennis is discovered, all points previously played shall stand.

Errors so discovered shall be corrected as follows:

- a) 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) If the players are in the wrong end of the court, the error shall be corrected and the server shall serve from the correct end of the court according to the score.
- c) If a player serves out of turn, the player who was originally scheduled to serve shall serve as soon as the error is discovered. However, if a game (or service segment in a tiebreak) is completed, the order shall remain as altered. A service fault by an opponent shall not stand.
- d) If a player serves out of turn during a tiebreak game and the error is discovered after an even number of points has been played, the error is corrected immediately. If an odd number of points have been played, the order of service shall remain as altered.

Note: The reason for this is that, during a tie-break game, the server changes after an odd number of points played and the rules applicable to each service segment or rotation is treated the same as a completed service game.

- e) During a 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, the partners shall resume their original positions.

f-h) PLEASE READ... these rules address errors in tiebreaks (*Refer to Friend at Court*).

- i) If balls are not changed in the correct sequence, the error shall be corrected when the player/team who should have served with the new balls is next due to serve a new game. Balls should not be changed during a game or at the start of any tiebreak.

Note: SDHSAA does not change balls based on the number of games played. Rather, the balls are scheduled to be changed between the second and third sets. Should a ball change not occur at that time and any player desires that they be changed, the ball change should occur as soon as the error is discovered.

28. Role of Court Officials

In matches where an umpire is appointed, his/her decision on a matter of fact shall be final but, where a referee is appointed, an appeal on a matter of law may be issued.

Matter of Fact refers to a judgment item such as whether a ball was in or out or whether it touched a player or not.

Matter of Law refers to decisions based on Tennis Law such as covered by the Rules of Tennis.

An umpire may over rule a player on a call only if he/she actually observed the call and could clearly determine that a mistake was made. (The over rule must be made immediately...additional information on the role of court officials can be found in Appendix V of "Friend at Court".)

29. Continuous Play

Play should be continuous, from the time the match starts (when the first service is put in play) until the match finishes.

- a) Between points a maximum of twenty (20) seconds are allowed. When the players change ends at the end of a game, a maximum of ninety (90) seconds are allowed. However, after the first game of each set and during a tie-break game, play shall be continuous and the players shall change ends without a rest. At the end of each set there shall be a set break of a maximum of one hundred twenty (120) seconds.
- b) If, for reasons outside the player's control, clothing, footwear or necessary equipment (excluding the racket) is broken or needs to be replaced, the player may be allowed reasonable extra time to rectify the problem. (*Note: Time may be suspended for a player to find or replace a lost contact lens but not for a change from glasses to contact lenses due to misty conditions.*)
- c) No extra time shall be given to allow for a player to recover physically from poor conditioning (fatigue). However, a player suffering from a treatable medical condition may be allowed a medical time out of three minutes for the treatment of that medical condition.

d) **REST PERIODS:**

Best 2 out of 3 full sets: mandatory 10 minute rest when playing the full 3rd set.

Best 2 out of 3 with a match tiebreak in lieu of the 3rd set: mandatory 3 minute rest after the split.

Coaching may take place during these listed rest periods and players would be allowed to leave the court.

- e) The warm-up time shall be a maximum of five (5) minutes unless otherwise decided by the event organizers.

Note: SDHSAA guidelines allow for a maximum warm-up time of ten (10) minutes. Should a match delay due to suspension of ten minutes or more occur; a re-warm-up will be granted. This does not apply to an authorized rest period.

30. Coaching

Coaching is considered to be communication, advice or instruction of any kind, audible or visible, to a player.

During a team competition, a player may receive coaching from a designated coach only on a change-over (including a set break), but not during a tiebreak. A player may not receive coaching during the playing of any other match. (*A player may receive coaching during an authorized rest period since play is not occurring. However coaching is not allowed during a toilet visit, an injury time out or when equipment is being adjusted.*)

(Note: SDHSAA guidelines allow for coaching during a change-over but it must be completed during the 90 seconds allocated to the change-over or a 120 second set break. Note: USTA rules prohibit coaching after the first game of each set since continuous play is in effect. However, SDHSAA guidelines allow for an additional 90 seconds after the first game of each set, so there is coaching at this time.)

A player is allowed to bring and read written notes that were prepared before the match. The use of any device to receive coaching (e.g. cell phones, digital messaging systems, MP3 players CD and DVD players, cassette players, radios etc.) is not allowed and is subject to the Point Penalty System.