

RULES of Table Tennis

Recent Changes

As of Sept 1, 2000 – Increase in size and weight of ball

2.3.1 The ball shall be spherical with a diameter of 40 mm

2.32 The ball shall weight 2.7 grams. (Note: The bigger and heavier ball behaves very differently than the old 38mm-2.5 gram ball)

As of Sept 1, 2001 – 11-point Game – 2-point Service Rule Change

2.11.1 A game shall be won by the player or pair first scoring 11 points unless both players or pairs score 10 points, when the game shall be won by the first player or pair subsequently gaining a lead of 2 points

2.12.1 A match shall consist of the best of any ODD number of games. (Note: Most tournament and club round-robins matches are best of 5 games.)

2.13.3 After each **2 points** have been scored, the receiving player or pair shall become the serving player or pair and so on until the end of the game, unless both players or pairs score 10 points or the expedite system is in operation, when the sequence of serving and receiving shall be the same but each player shall serve for only 1 point in turn.

Sept 1, 2002 - No Hidden Serve Rule Change

2.6.4 From the start of service until it is struck, the ball shall be above the level of the playing surface and behind the server's end line, and it shall not be hidden from the receiver by any part of the body or clothing of the server or his doubles partner.

Summarize by Yau-Man Chan - USATT Club Umpire (yauman@comcast.net)

The following is an abbreviated version of the rules (without all the legalese!)

1. Playing surface(s) of the Racket or Paddle must be covered by sponge & rubber sheet no thicker than 4 mm. One side of the racket must be RED and the other BLACK. At least 85% of the thickness of the racket must be made of natural wood. Plastic paddles and paddles with sandpaper, bare-wood or sponge-only coverings are **not** table-tennis rackets. For USATT-sanctioned tournaments, all rubber sheets must have an ITTF or USATT stamp of approved logo.
2. Games are played to **11** points and winning player must win by **2** point. Matches are usually best 3 of 5 games. Hide ball under table or toss a coin to decide who serves first. If the winner of the toss decides to serve or receive first, the other player will get to select which end of the table for his/her first game. If the winner of the toss decides to select ends, the other player gets decide to serve or receive.
3. Each player alternately serves **2** balls at a time until the end of game or until the score reaches 10-10. If the score reaches **10-10** (a "deuce" game) alternate service every point until one player wins by **2** points.
4. To serve, place the ball on the free hand's **open palm** and toss it at least **6 inches** vertically and strike ball as it descends. The ball and racket must be behind the end line and above the table level while serving. The racket and ball must not be hidden by any part of the server's body from view of the opponent.
5. In singles matches the serve must bounce first on the server's side, cross over the net without touching it, and land **any where** on the other side of the table. In **DOUBLES** matches, the served ball must bounce first on the **right court** of the server's side and land **any where** on the **right court** of the receiver's side. If the served ball hits the net or any part of the net assembly, and lands on the opposite side (a "net serve"), serve over until a good serve is made.
6. A point begins as soon as the server tosses the ball up in the air. If the server misses hitting the ball or if the ball hits anything (clothing, body etc) other than the paddle, the server loses a point to the receiver.
7. A return (not a serve) striking the net (or any part of the net assembly) and landing on the opposite side of the table is good.
8. A player loses a point if he/she hits a ball and it goes out-of-bound (does not land on the opponent's side of the table.)
9. A player loses a point if he/she touches the table with his/her **free hand**, moves the table or touches the net or any part of the net assembly during the rally.
10. A return that touches the TOP edge of the table is good but a return that touches the SIDE of the table edge is not good.
11. Players switch ends of the table after each game and at the **fifth** point in the deciding game (game **5**) of a match.
12. The player who received first in one game shall serve first in the next game of a match regardless of the outcome of the game.
13. Call a "LET" and play the point over if both players cannot agree on a call or any one player is interfered with while the point is being played.

For a complete detail version of the USATT Rules, go to <http://www.usatt.org/rules/index.shtml>

These are NOT Table Tennis Rules (Common nonsense-rules observed by ping-pong hacks)

1. *“Ping” or “Rally” to decide who serves first.*
No. No. NO. Like any other sports involving a ball, first possession of ball (service) is determined by chance – flip of coin, spin the racket or hide the ball under the table. Winner can decide to serve or receive first, or to select which end of the table; loser gets the other choice.
2. *The game is over if one side leads by 7-0.*
No. There is no such thing as "skunk" or "whitewash." If you can beat your opponent 11-0, more power to you!
3. *You must serve to the right side of the opponent’s court.*
This rule only applies to Doubles game. In singles game, the ball can be served anywhere.
4. *Service ball must bounce only once on opponent’s court and if not intercepted must bounce off the end of the table.*
No, there is no such rule. The receiver, already at a disadvantage should not be made to guess if the ball is going to be long or short and be penalized if he/she guessed wrong. A “short” serve is not only legal, it’s preferred and many players spent many hours practicing such serves.
5. *Service ball must bounce off the end and not the sides of opponent’s court if not intercepted.*
No, there is no such rule. Serving off the side is difficult to master and many hours of practice is required to perfect such a serve. It is a much sought after serve by high level players.
6. *Server gets only 2 net services.*
No, there is no such rule. If you serve a net ball, repeat serving until it’s not a net service. There is no limit.
7. *While serving, after you toss the ball and in attempting to hit it, if you missed, you get to serve again without penalty or if after tossing the ball you change your mind, you can catch the ball, and try to serve again.*
No. The point starts as soon as the ball leaves your hand. Your opponent will get a point if you miss hitting the ball. There is no second chance.
8. *At game point, (10-x) the player losing will be allowed to serve all game points.*
No, there is no such rule. Like any other sports, the losing side is not automatically granted service advantage. The order of service continues (every 2 points) until the end of the game or until 10-10 (deuce) when each player will serve every other point until one player wins by 2.
9. *Your opponent hits an out of bound ball (ball cross your end line without bouncing) – you loose a point if the ball hits you or your paddle or if you intercept the ball or catch it.*
No, there is no such rule. When your opponent hits a ball, it must bounce on your side of the court (volley is not allowed). As soon as the ball crosses your end line without bouncing, the rally ends and you’ve won the point. The ball is dead and you can catch it or intercept and hit it back – you already won. You must intercept the ball behind the end line – if you do so over the table, you lose the point because you did not give it a chance to bounce on your side of the table.
10. *Your opponent gets a point if any part of your body or racket touches the table.*
No – this is a very frequently misunderstood rule in table tennis. The ONLY part of the body that cannot touch the table is your FREE HAND – i.e. the hand not holding the racket. The rest of your body can touch the table any time. You can even sit on the table, lay on it or stand on it while rallying – provided you don’t move it – and still be legal. As soon as your FREE HAND touches the table your opponent wins the point. “HAND” is defined as the fingers, palm, back of palm, and parts up to the wrist. (So, your free hand’s elbow can touch the table – use that to prop yourself up if you need to.) However, NOTHING except the ball can touch the net or net assembly during a rally. Your opponent will get a point if any part of you or your clothing or your paddle touches the net or net assembly. (Net assembly includes the net, post and clamps/clamping devices)
11. *Your opponent gets a point if you hit the ball with your racket hand/fingers/knuckles etc.*
No. There is no such rule. Hitting the ball with the racket holding hand, including the fingers, knuckles and any parts below the wrist is considered a good hit.
12. *When getting to a short ball close to the net, you or your racket cannot cross the net line to your opponent’s side.*
No, there is no such rule. Players are free to go anywhere around the table without penalty, even to the opponents side to get to the ball.
13. *The loser (or winner) of the game always is given the advantage of serving first on the next game.*
No, there is not such rule. After each game, the players switch ends and service alternates – the one who served first the previous game will receive first on the next game, regardless of who won or loss.