ILLUSTRATED INTRODUCTION TO THE RULES OF TENNIS

THIRD EDITION

UNITED STATES TENNIS ASSOCIATION

White Plains, NY • Flushing, NY • Boca Raton, FL

UNITED STATES TENNIS ASSOCIATION

Illustrations: SENAN GORMAN (NORTH POLE DESIGN, FARMINGTON, CT)

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INTRODUCTION

This new edition of the *Illustrated Introduction to the Rules of Tennis* takes the mystery out of a game where LOVE means zero and ALL means the score is tied. With full illustrations, the *Illustrated Rules* explains in easy-to-understand language everything you need to know to start playing tennis—serving, scoring, the lines and parts of the tennis court, how to call balls in and out, and many other helpful tidbits.

The *Illustrated Rules* also provides tips on how to prepare for safe play and proper court etiquette.

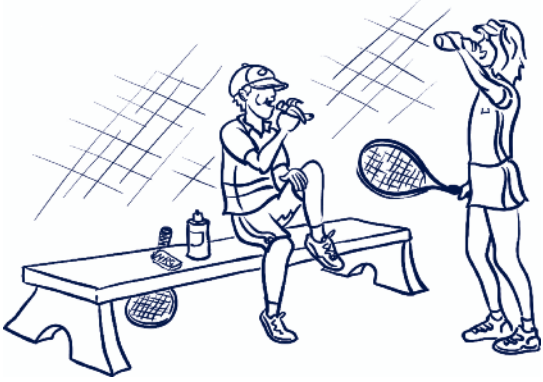
This book breaks down the rules and regulations for all age groups, including the popular new QuickStart Tennis play format that scales the game to size for younger players: a 36-foot (or mini) court for children 8-and-under and a 60-foot (or ¾) court for 9-10-year-olds. It also highlights the rules of play on a 78-foot (or full-size) court for those ages 11 and above.

The *Illustrated Rules* is for anyone and everyone who wants to understand the basic rules of the game in a fun, easy-to-learn format. By following the rules and treating opponents with respect, everyone wins because everyone gets the most enjoyment out of the game.

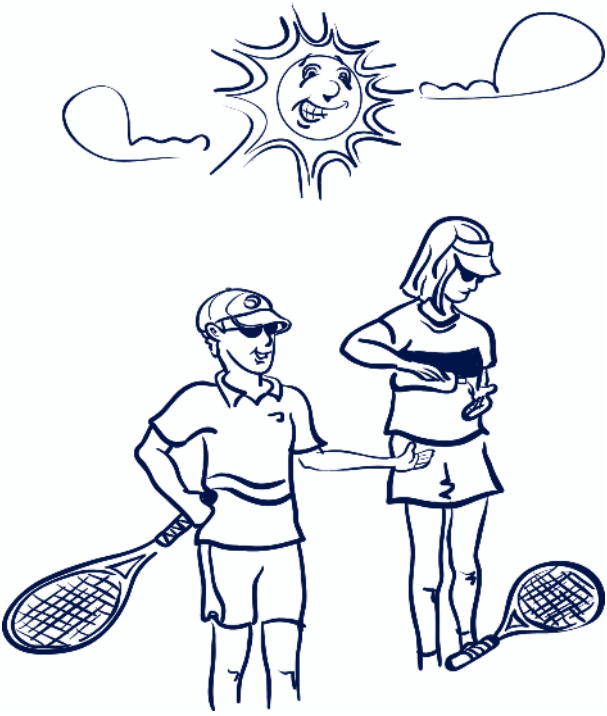
PREPARING FOR PLAY

Before starting to play, warm up by jogging lightly and moving easily about the court. This gets the heart pumping and makes the muscles warm and loose. Then do some easy hitting before starting play.

Wear tennis sneakers that provide good support. Other shoes may wear out quickly, hurt your feet or damage the court. Avoid black-soled shoes, which can leave marks on the court.

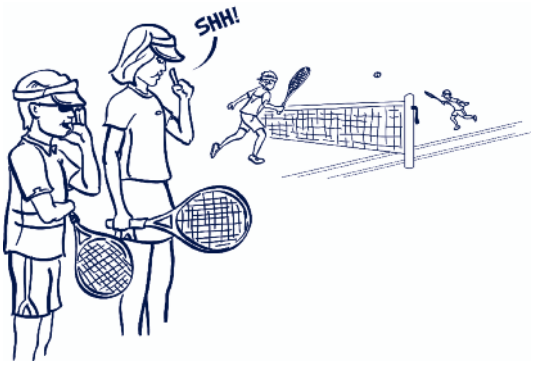


Don't eat a heavy meal or foods with lots of sugar before playing. And drink plenty of water and/or sports drinks leading up to and during your match.

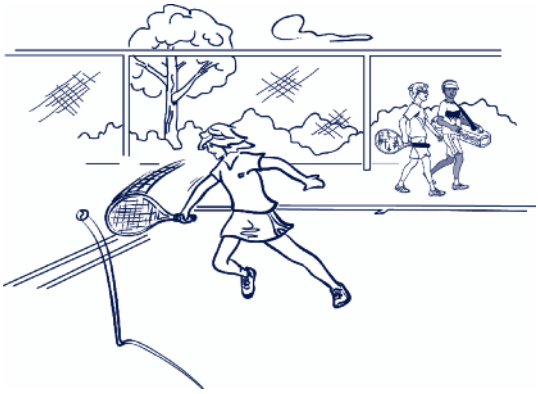


Use sweatproof sunscreen and wear a hat when appropriate.

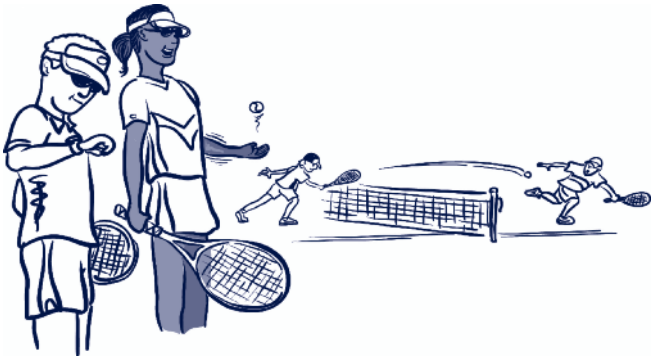
COURT CONDUCT



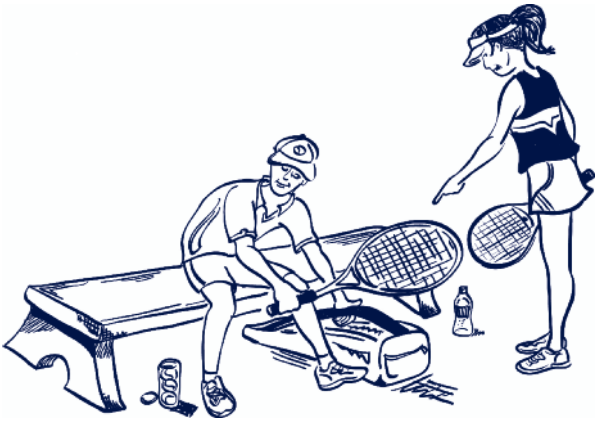
Always be courteous to those around you. Talk quietly when standing near tennis courts that are in use, and try to keep conversation during points to a minimum.



Don’t walk across the back of another court until the players have finished playing their point. This can be disturbing to them and affect their play.

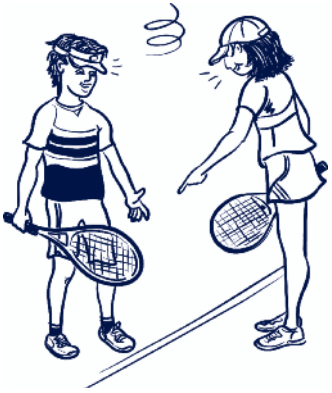


If people are using your court, don’t disturb them and wait until their time is up.



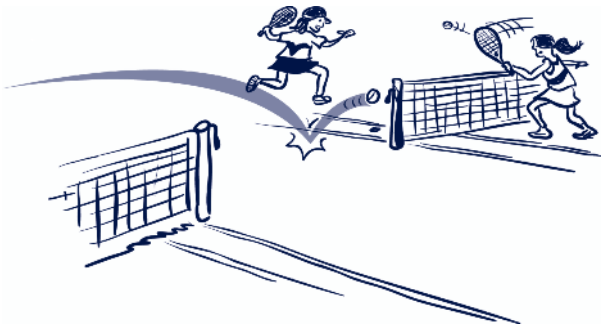
When you're ready to play, put jackets, water bottles and any other items you have safely out of everyone's way.

Keep a positive outlook and display proper sportsmanship throughout the match. Remember, you're playing for fun.

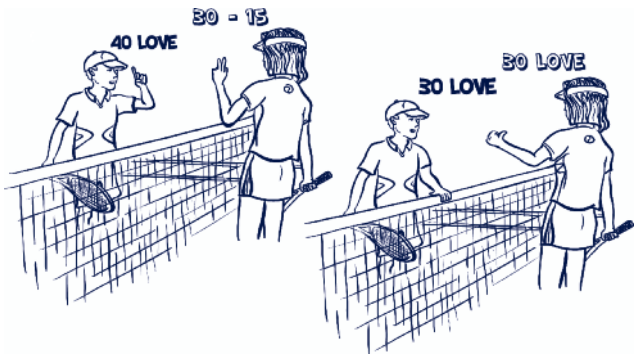


Keep the game moving. Don't stall and waste time between points. Accept all calls made by your opponent—without arguing or sulking. If you're unsure of a call, give your opponent the benefit of the doubt.

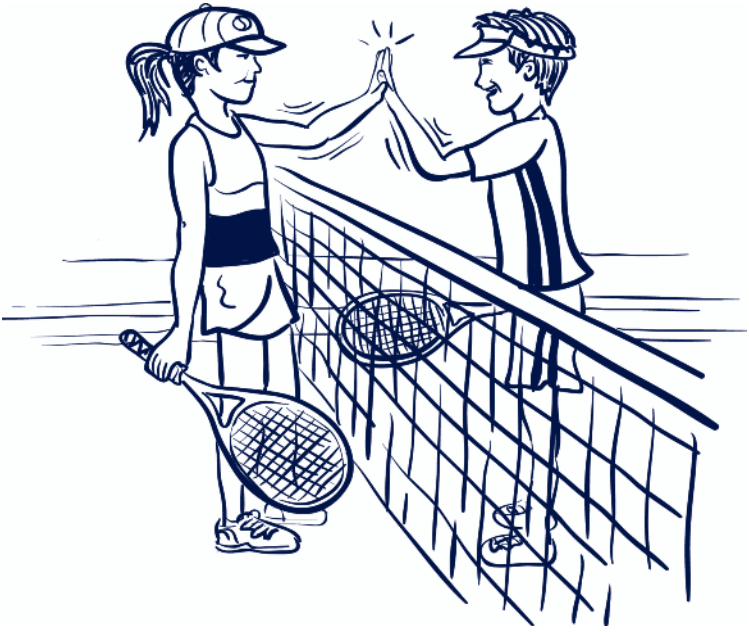
Don't distract your opponent on purpose by talking or making unnecessary movements.



If your ball goes into the next court, wait until the players on that court finish their point before you ask for the ball. If a ball bounces onto your court, return it as soon as play has stopped on both courts.

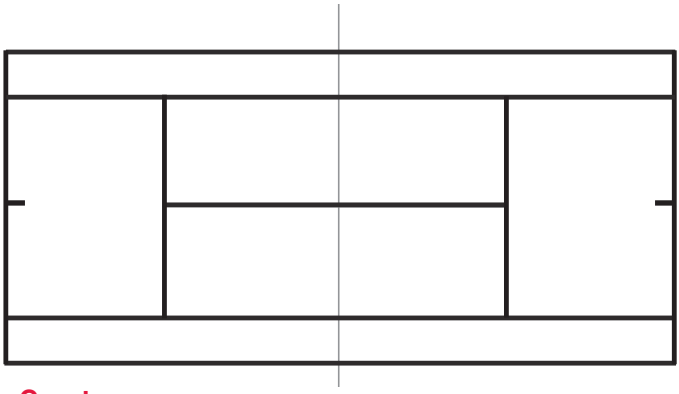


If there is a disagreement on the score, go back to the last score that you both agree upon or spin a racquet to decide which score to accept. Both players must accept the score put forward by the person who wins the racquet spin.

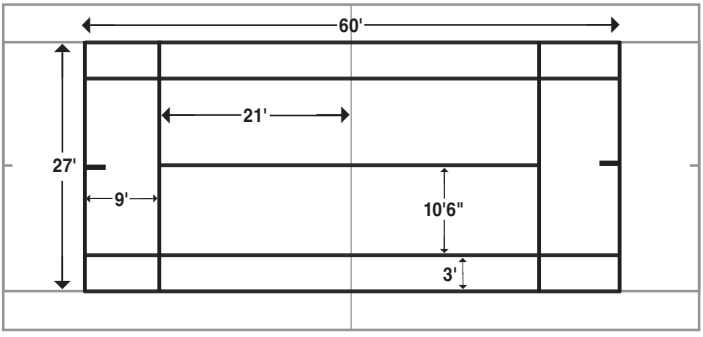


After the last point of the match, come to the net quickly and shake hands. Let your opponent know that you appreciated the match, no matter the outcome. If you and your opponent follow the rules of tennis and treat each other with respect, you'll both get the most enjoyment from the game—regardless of who wins.

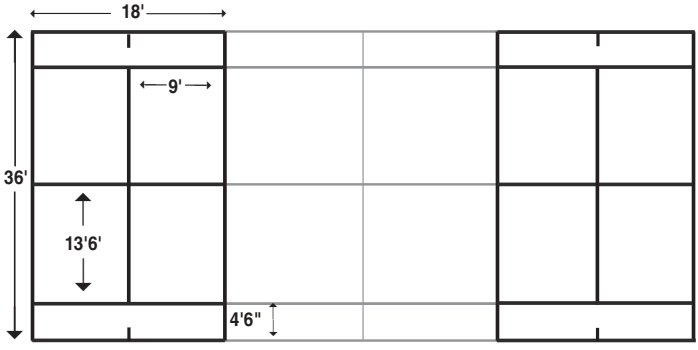
STARTING A GAME



Full-Size Court

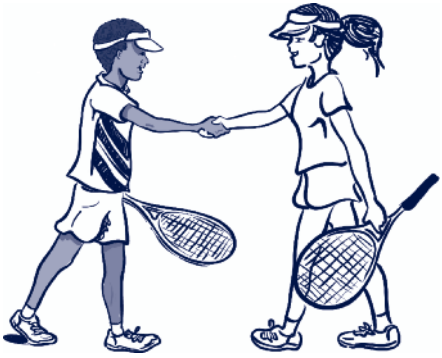


QuickStart Tennis – 60-Foot

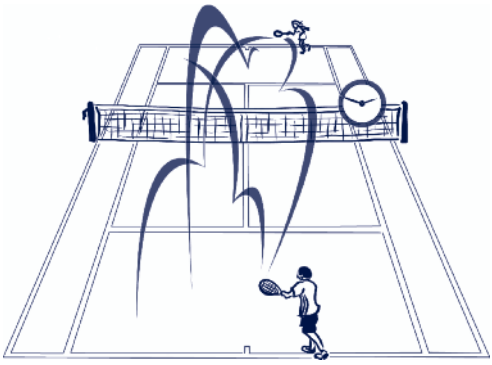


QuickStart Tennis – 36-Foot

Note: There are no doubles alleys on a 36-foot court, so use all existing lines as the court boundaries.



Before you begin play, introduce yourself to your opponent and wish them good luck during the match.



Limit the warm-up before a match to approximately five minutes. Rally the ball back and forth with your opponent, hitting ground strokes, volleys and overheads. Then each player should take practice serves before play begins.

To see who serves first, spin your racquet or toss a coin. If you win the racquet spin or coin toss, you may: (1) choose to serve or receive first; (2) choose which side of the court you want to start playing on; or (3) require your opponent to choose first.

To put the ball in play for each point, one player serves the ball from behind the baseline. That player is called the **Server**; the player who receives the serve is called the **Receiver**.

SCORING: GAME, SET, MATCH

Before you're ready to begin playing a game, you'll need to know how to score. With the traditional scoring method, this may seem confusing at first. But once you master what each point is worth and a few other tennis terms, you'll have no problem.

The first thing you need to know is that tennis players play a **Match**, which consists of **Sets**, which in turn consist of **Games**. So we'll start by explaining scoring for a Game.

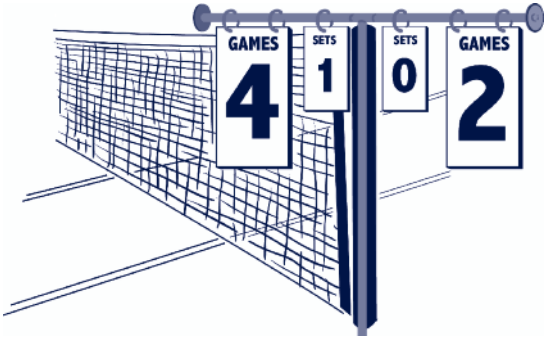
Scoring Using the QuickStart Tennis Format

Age	Court Size	Scoring
8-and-under	36' x 18'	Best-of-three, first-to-7-point games
10-and-under	60' x 21' (singles)	Best-of-three, with the first two sets as first-to-4-point games and a third set that is first to 7 points

In QuickStart Tennis, for children 10-and-under, the scoring system follows a 1-2-3-4 point pattern.

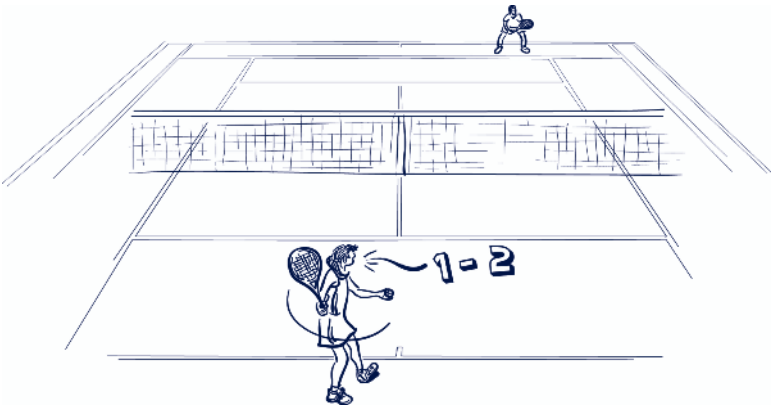
On a 36-foot court, for players 8-and-under: A **Game** is played to 7 points. The first player to win 7 points wins the game. The first player to win 2 games wins the **Match**.

Under the 36-foot court scoring system, the two players take turns serving. First a player serves for two points, then the opponent serves for two points. The two players trade serves back and forth until someone wins 7 points.



On a 60-foot court, for players 9-10: A **Game** is played to 4 points. The first player to win 4 points wins the game. As we noted earlier, a **Set** is made up of games. For the 60-foot court scoring system, the first player to win 4 games wins the set.

If a player wins both of the first two sets, that player wins the **Match**. If the players split the first two sets (that is, each player wins one set), the match is determined by a game to 7 points. In this case, first a player serves for two points, then the opponent serves for two points. The two players trade serves back and forth until someone wins 7 points and, with it, the match.



Before each point, the server should call out the score in a loud, clear voice so the receiver can hear it. The server should always say his or her score first. For example, if the server has 1 point and the receiver has 2 points, the server should say, “One-Two.”

Scoring Using the Traditional Scoring Method

Scoring a Game

Age	Court Size	Points	Scoring
11-plus	78' x 27'	0	Love
		1	15
		2	30
		3	40
		4	Game

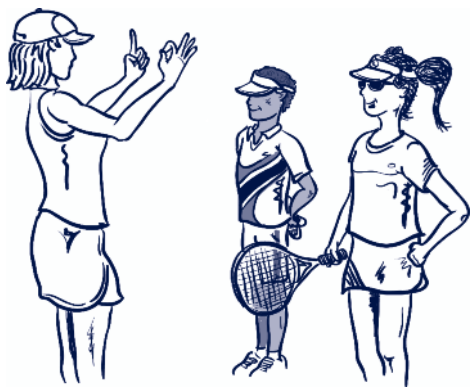
Scoring Terms

Love:	Zero
All:	Tied score except when Deuce
Deuce:	A score of 40-40
Ad in:	Scorer needs one more point to win
Ad out:	Receiver needs one more point to win

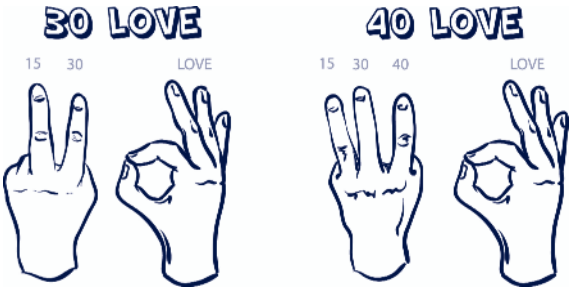
*In a **Game**, the player must win by two points in the traditional method or by one point in the No-Ad scoring method.*

There are two terms you need to know up front under the traditional scoring system: Love and All. Love means "zero" and All means the score is tied. In many ways, scoring in traditional tennis is the same as in QuickStart Tennis, just with different names for each point. See the chart above for how they match up.

In traditional tennis, it takes 4 points to win a Game, 6 games to win a Set and 2 sets to win a Match.

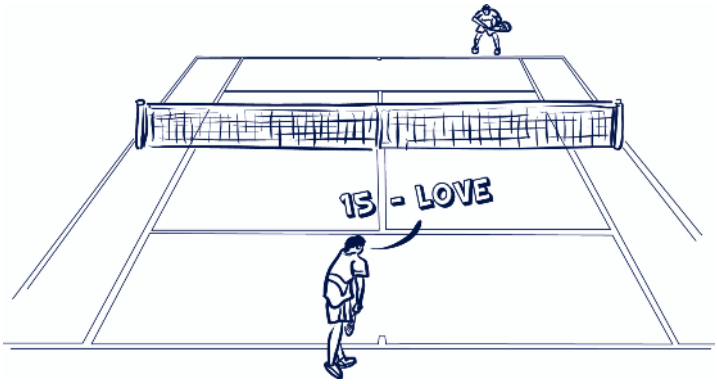


Here's an example of how traditional scoring works. The first player to win a point has a score of 15 (or one); the other player who has no points has a score of Love (or zero). The server's score is always said first. So 15-Love means the server's score is 15 and the receiver's score is 0.



If the server wins the next point, the score is 30-Love. If the server wins the third and fourth points, the score is 40-Love and, finally, **Game**.

If the receiver wins any of those points, the scoring changes. For example, it may go Love-15 (no points for the server, 15 for the receiver). Or 15-all (15 for the server, 15 for the receiver), 15-30, 15-40, **Game**, this time with the receiver winning the game.

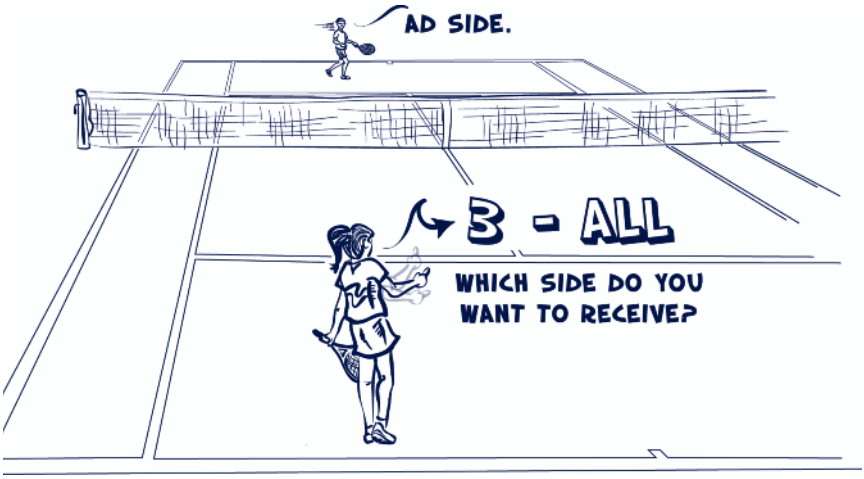


Before each point, the server should call out the score in a loud, clear voice so the receiver can hear it.

DEUCE!

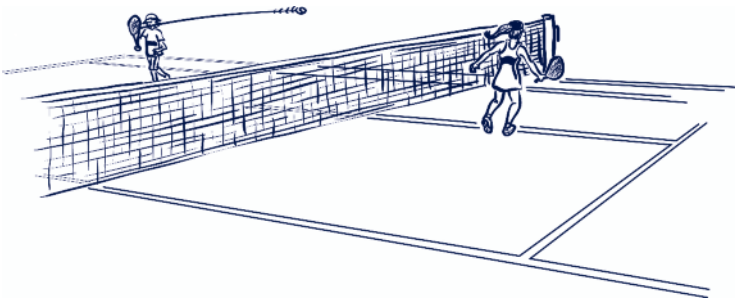
One of the big differences between QuickStart Tennis and traditional tennis is that you must win by two points to win a game in traditional tennis. This is where the term **"Deuce"** comes in. If each player wins three points, the score is tied at 40-40. This score is called **Deuce**.

The player who wins the next point after deuce has the **Advantage**, called Ad-in if the server wins the point and Ad-out if the receiver wins the point. If this same player wins the following point, he or she wins the game; if not, the score returns to deuce. The first player to win two points in a row after the deuce score wins the game.



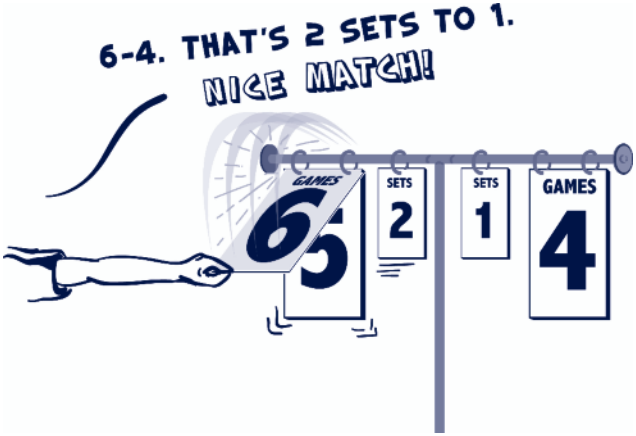
Alternative System for Scoring a Game – No-Ad Scoring: In No-Ad scoring, everything is the same up to Deuce (a score of 3-All).

In No-Ad scoring, when the two players reach 3-All, the receiver decides whether to receive the serve from the right half or the left half of the court. The player who wins the next point after 3-All wins the game.



Scoring a Set and a Match Using Traditional Scoring: The first player to win 6 games and be ahead by at least two games wins a **Set**. If the score reaches six games all, or 6-6, you may play a **Tie-break**.

In a tie-break in traditional scoring, the first player to reach 7 points with a margin of two points wins the set. But remember, you must win by a margin of two points, so the final score of a tie-break could be 8-6, 9-7 or even 20-18.



The first player to win two sets wins the **Match**.

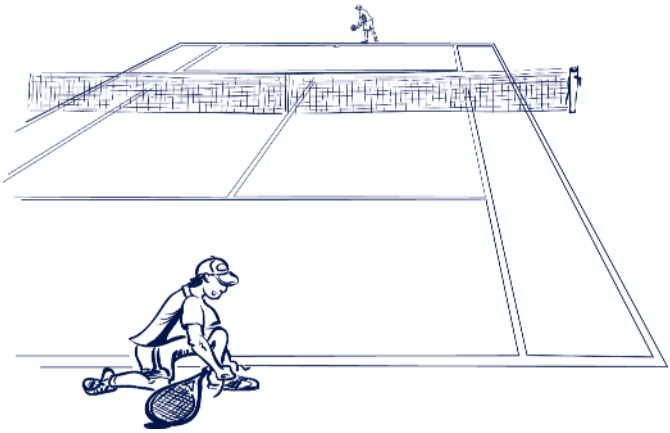
Note: This is the most common method of scoring a traditional set and match. Alternative methods are sometimes used in high school or college matches, or in other matches when time is a factor.

SERVING

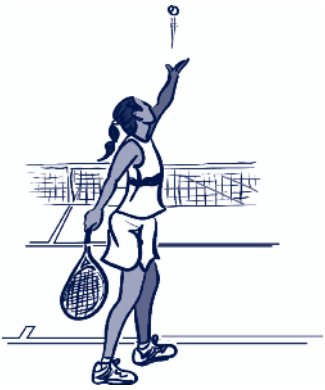
The serve starts a point in tennis, with the ball being hit before it bounces. The good news is that you get two chances to put the ball in play.

Under QuickStart Tennis' 36-foot court rules, serves can be underhand. Under 60-foot court rules, the first serve is overhand, but the second serve may be underhand. For traditional tennis rules, both the first and second serves typically are overhand.

And remember, always call out the score before you serve.

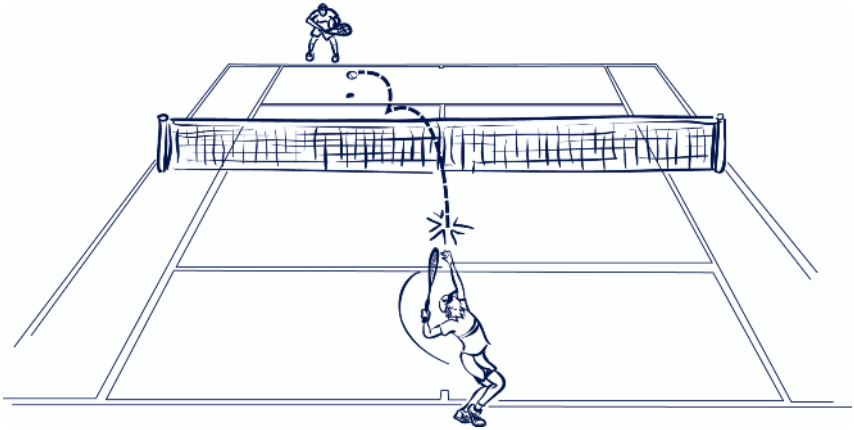


Before serving, be sure that the receiver is ready to play.

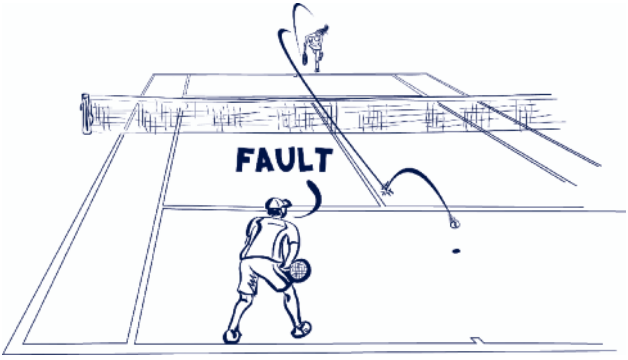


When serving the first serve, stand behind the baseline between the center mark and the right sideline. The ball is hit into the diagonal service box on the other side of the net.

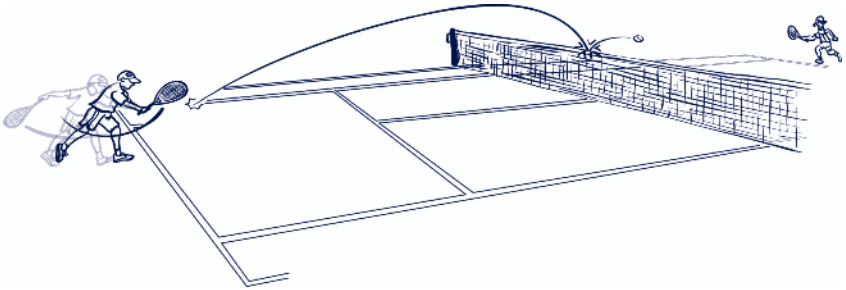
When serving, you're not allowed to step on or over the baseline before hitting the ball.



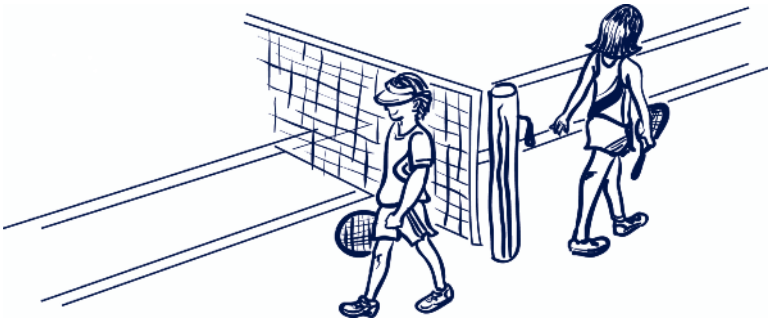
On the first point of a game, the first serve must go over the net and into the receiver's right service court. If your first serve doesn't go into the correct court, it's called a **Fault**. But remember, you get a second chance. If you miss your second serve, however, your opponent wins that point.



It's now either 15-Love (1-0 for QuickStart Tennis rules) or Love-15 (0-1 for QuickStart Tennis rules), so now you serve to the opposite court. This means you should stand behind the baseline between the center mark and the left sideline and aim diagonally for the receiver's left service court.

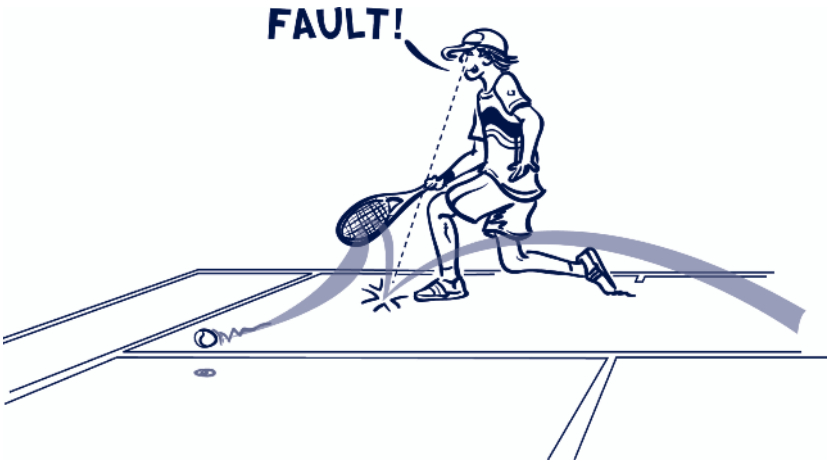


If you serve a ball that hits the top of the net before bouncing into the correct service court, it is called a **Let**. You may take that serve again. If it hits the net and then goes outside the correct service court, it's a fault. A served ball hitting the post is also a fault.



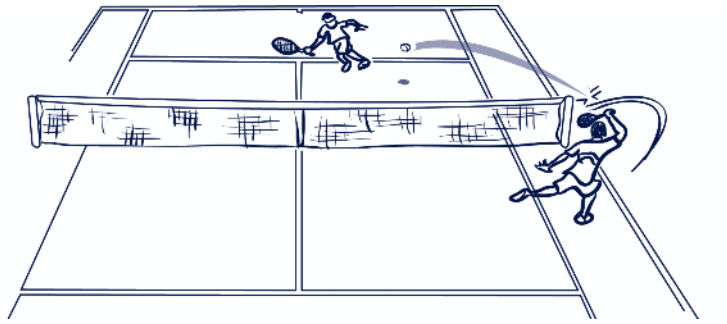
On a 36-foot court, you serve two points and then your opponent serves two points.

In traditional tennis and on a 60-foot court, after you have served one game in a set, you switch ends of the court and now receive your opponent's serve for one game. You should switch ends again after the third, fifth, seventh and following every odd-numbered game.

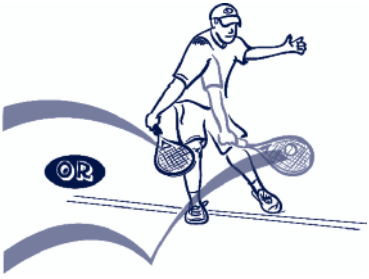


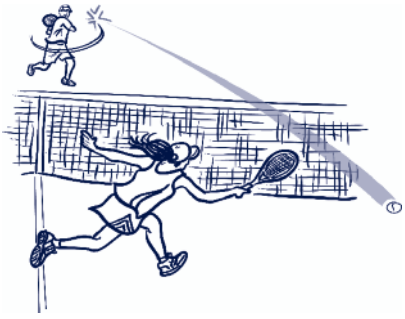
When receiving serve, if the serve is out, make sure to call out “fault” to alert the server and don’t return the ball unless you can’t avoid doing so. Just tap it gently into the net or let it go behind you.

PLAYING A POINT



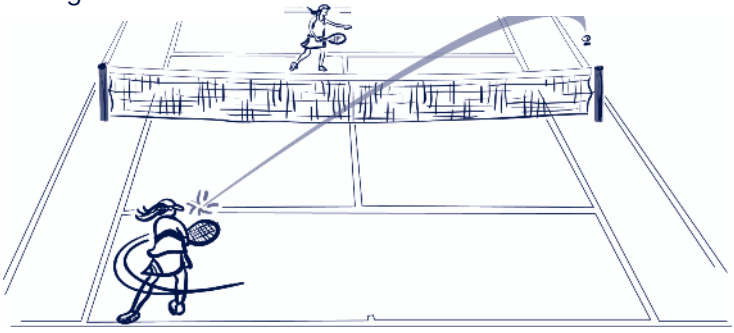
Except when serving, you may stand anywhere—in or out of the court—on your side of the net.



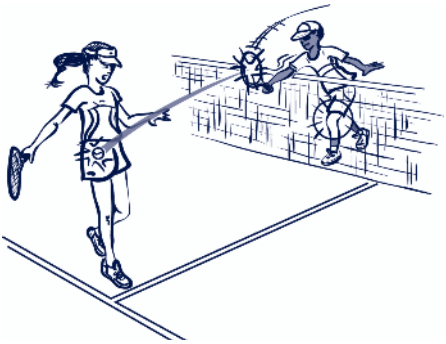


Except when receiving serve, you have the choice of hitting the ball on your side before it bounces (this is a **Volley**) or after one bounce (a **Ground Stroke**). When receiving serve, you must let the ball bounce once before hitting it.

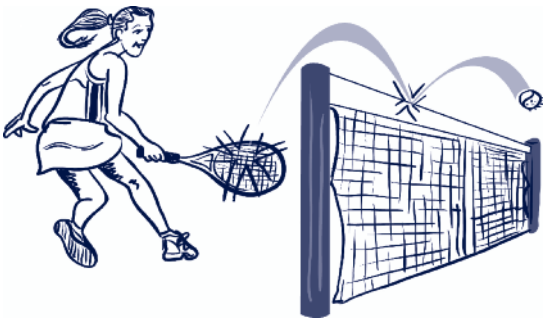
You win the point if you hit the ball over the net and into the court on the other side and your opponent doesn't return it, or if your opponent returns it to your side of the court but not inside the lines.



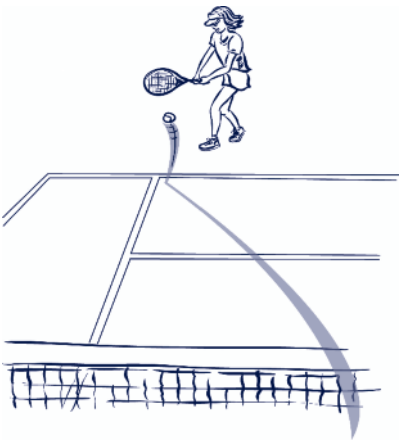
You lose the point if you hit the ball into the net or out of the court (unless your opponent plays the ball in the air before it lands outside the court boundaries; a ball must land out of bounds to be "out").



You also lose the point if: (1) the ball touches you or your clothing; (2) if you or your racquet touches the net or the net post before the point is over; (3) if you hit the ball before it passes the net; or (4) if you deliberately hit the ball more than once. You're on your honor to make these calls against yourself.



A ball is still in play if it happens to touch the net or post (except on a serve).

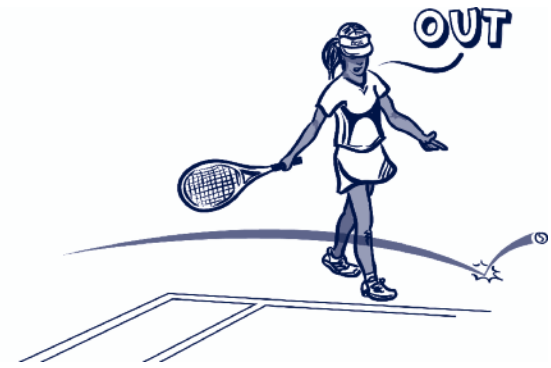


Continue to play a ball that lands on or touches a boundary line of the court. A ball that lands on the line is good.

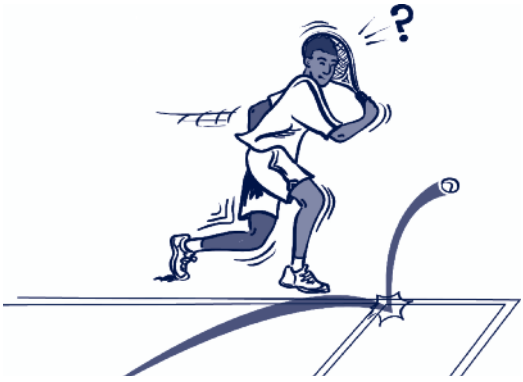
CALLING LINES

Only at the professional level are there line judges. The majority of tennis players make their own calls, which means you must always be honest and practice good sportsmanship. A fair match is the most fun for both players.

If the ball touches any part of the line, it is good. Call the ball out only if you clearly see space between where the ball hits and the line.

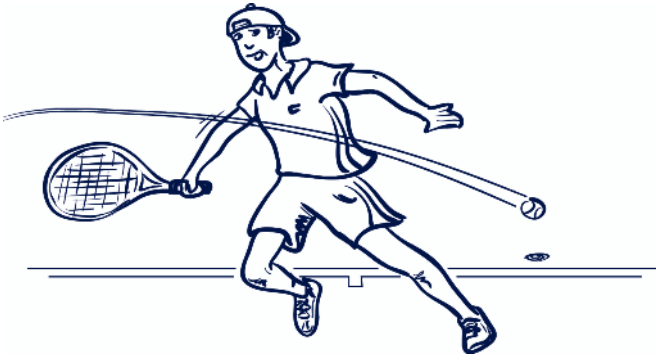


You should only make calls for balls hit to your end of the court. Out calls should be made immediately.

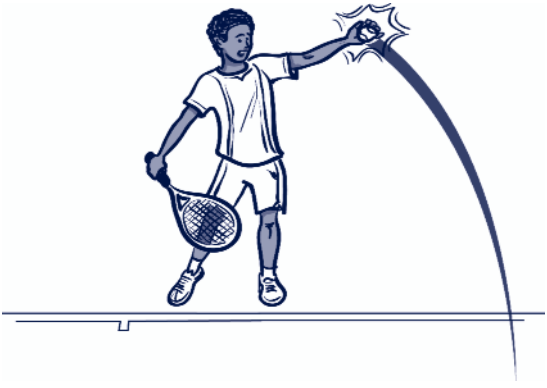


If you can't see that a ball is definitely out, you should consider it good and continue playing the point.

If later you see by a mark on the court that a ball you played was out, you can't change your mind and call it out. The point stands as played.

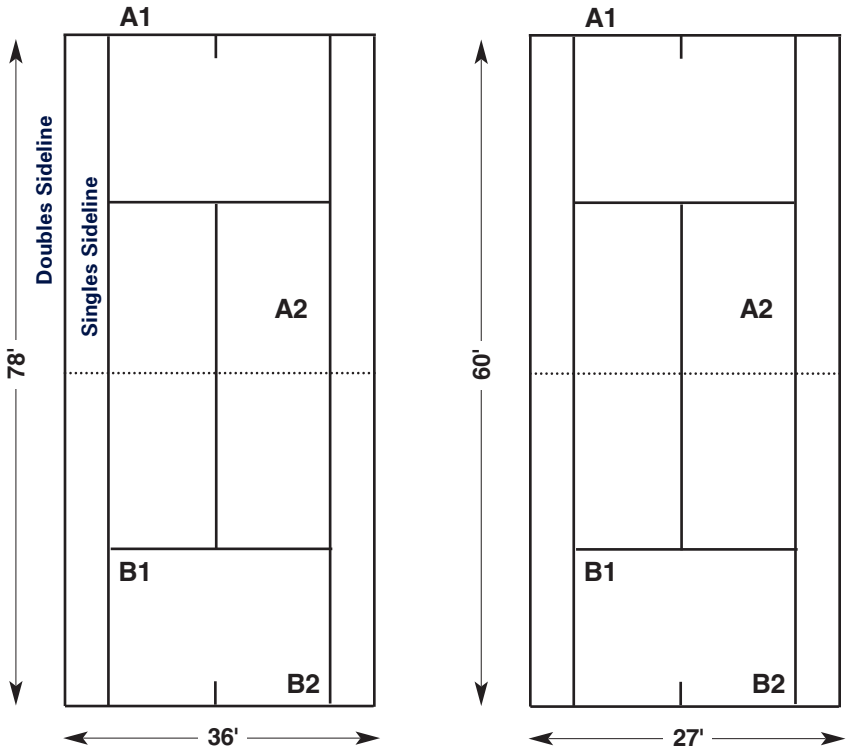


If a ball goes past you and you can't see where it lands, you must give the point to your opponent.



You lose the point if you catch the ball on the fly, no matter where you think it might land and even if you are standing outside the court.

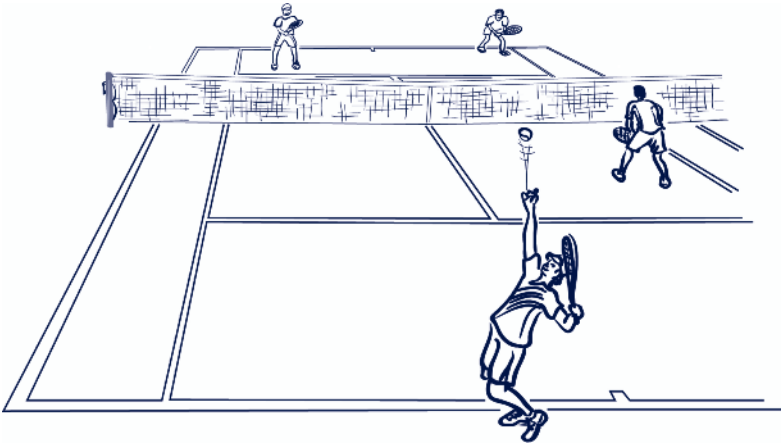
PLAYING DOUBLES



Traditional Court **All-Position Doubles**

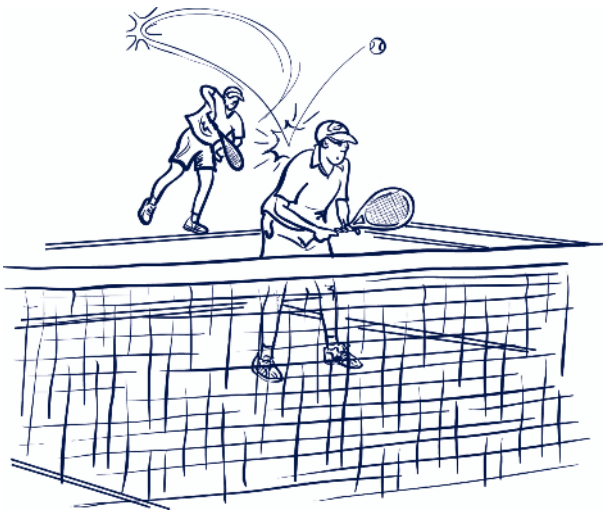
In doubles, you and a partner play against a team of two players on the other side of the net, using the full court between the baselines and the doubles sidelines.

If you are on the team that serves first, either you or your partner may begin the match by serving the first ball. Either person on the opposing team may receive the first ball on the right (or deuce) court. The partner will receive all serves to the left (or the ad) court. (The right side is also called the deuce court because, on a deuce score, the ball is served there.)

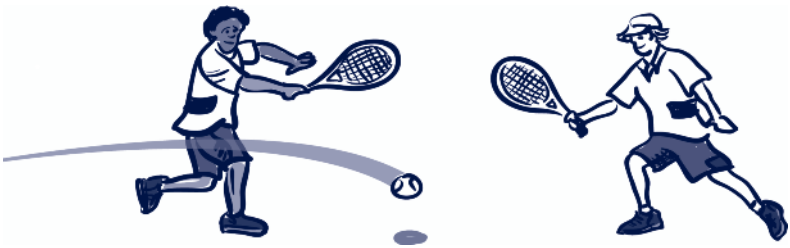


The same player must serve the entire game. So if you serve the first game, the opposing team will serve the second game, your partner will serve the third game, the partner on the opposing team will serve the fourth game and you will serve again on the fifth game, and so on. You must keep the same order of serving.

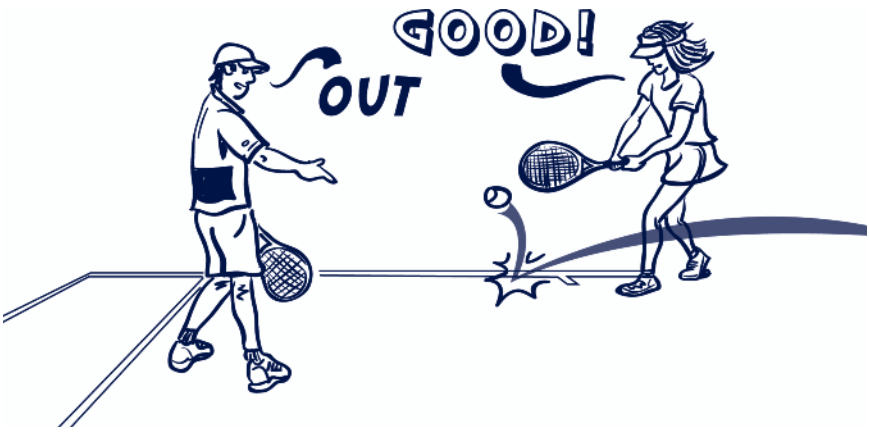
When it is your team's turn to receive, you can choose which player will receive the first ball. You must then keep the same sides for receiving for the entire set.



If the server's partner is hit with the serve, a fault is called. If the receiver or the receiver's partner is hit with the serve before it bounces, the server wins the point.



In returning shots (except the serve), either member of a doubles team may hit the ball. The partners don't have to alternate hits.



You should help your partner with line calls. If you think a ball your partner called out actually hit the line, you must call it good.

GLOSSARY OF TENNIS TERMS

ACE - A ball that is served so well the opponent cannot touch it with his or her racquet.

AD – Short for **Advantage**. It is the point scored after **Deuce**. If the serving side scores, it is **Ad-in**. If the receiving side scores, it is **Ad-out**.

ALL – An even score. 30-30 is, for example, 30-all. 3-3 would be 3-all.

ALLEY – The area between the singles and doubles sideline on each side of the court. (The singles court is made wider for doubles play by the addition of the alley.)

APPROACH – The shot hit by a player just before coming to the net.

BACKCOURT – The area around the baseline.

BACKHAND – The stroke used to return balls hit to the left side of a right-handed player (or to the right side of a left-handed player). Backhands are hit either one-handed or two-handed.

BACKSPIN – The backward rotation of the ball caused by hitting high to low under the ball.

BASELINE – The court's back line that runs parallel to the net and perpendicular to the sidelines.

CHOKE-UP – To grip the racquet closer to the throat and head of the racquet.

DEUCE – A score of 40-all, or 40-40. (This means the score is tied and each side has won at least three points.)

DEUCE COURT – The right side of the court, so called because on a deuce score, the ball is served there.

DOUBLE FAULT – The failure of both service attempts. On a double fault, the server loses the point.

DOUBLES – A match with four players, two on each team.

DOWN-THE-LINE SHOT – A shot where the ball follows the path of the sideline.

DROP SHOT – A softly hit ball with lots of backspin that lands near the net after crossing it.

FAULT – A served ball that does not land in the proper court.

FIFTEEN – The score of a player who has won one point.

FLAT SHOT – A shot that travels in a straight line with little arc and little spin.

FOOT FAULT – A fault called against the server for stepping on the baseline or into the court with either foot during delivery of the serve.

FORECOURT – The area between the service line and the net.

FOREHAND – The stroke used to return balls hit to the right side of a right-handed player (or to the left side of a left-handed player). Forehands are commonly hit one-handed.

FORTY – The score of a player who has won three points.

GAME – The part of a set that is completed when one player or side either wins four points and is at least two points ahead of his or her opponent, or who wins two points in a row after deuce.

GOOD BALL – Applies to a ball in play that lands in the court, or on any part of the line forming the boundary of the court.

GROUND STROKE – A stroke made after the ball has bounced; either a forehand or backhand.

HALF-VOLLEY – The stroke made by hitting a ball immediately after is has touched the ground.

LET – A point played over because of interference. Also, a serve that hits the top of the net but is otherwise good, in which case the serve is taken again.

LOB – A stroke that lifts the ball high in the air, usually over the head of the opponent at the net.

LOB VOLLEY – A volleying stroke hit over the head of the opponent.

LOVE – A score of zero in the traditional scoring system.

MATCH – The overall contest, usually decided by the best two-out-of-three sets.

NET GAME – Play in the forecourt close to the net.

NO-AD – A system of scoring a game in which the first player to win four points wins the game. If the score reaches 3-All, the next point decides the game.

NO MAN'S LAND – A slang term for the area between the service line and the baseline.

OUT – A ball landing outside the boundary lines of the court.

OVERHEAD – During play, a stroke made with the racquet above the head in a motion similar to that of an overhand serve.

POACH – To hit a ball in doubles at the net that would normally have been played by one's partner.

POINT – The smallest unit of score, which is awarded to a player when the opponent does not make a good return.

QUICKSTART TENNIS – A new play format for ages 10-and-under that includes age-appropriate court sizes, net heights, equipment and scoring.

RALLY – A series of good hits made successfully by players. Also, the practice procedure in which players hit the ball back and forth to each other.

RECEIVER – The player who receives the serve. Also known as the **Returner**.

SERVE – Short for **Service**. It is the act of putting the ball into play for each point.

SERVER – The player who serves.

SERVICE BREAK – A game won by the opponent of the server (that is, a game won by the receiver/returner).

SET – A scoring unit awarded to a player who or team that has won: (a) 6 or more games and has a two-game lead; or (b) 6 games and the tie-break game when played at 6-all. In QuickStart Tennis (for 10-and-under on the 60-foot court), a set is awarded to the first player to win 4 games.

SHOT – The hitting of the ball across the net and into the court on the other side.

SINGLES – A match between two players.

SLICE SHOT – A shot that imparts backspin on the ball by hitting the ball with a high-to-low motion.

SMASH – A hard overhead shot.

SPIN – The rotation of the ball.

STROKE – The act of striking the ball with the racquet.

THIRTY – The score of a player who has won two points.

TIE-BREAK – A system in traditional tennis used to decide a set when the score is tied, 6-all.

TOPSPIN – Forward rotation of the ball caused by hitting from low to high.

TOURNAMENT – A formal type of competition.

VOLLEY – During play, a stroke made by hitting the ball before it has touched the ground.

For more on the USTA, go to USTA.com

For more on QuickStart Tennis, go to USTA.com/QuickStart

TIE-BREAK SYSTEM OF SCORING

The tie-break system of scoring may be adopted as an alternative to traditional scoring, provided the decision is announced in advance of the match.

Set Tie-Break

The Set Tie-Break occurs when the score reaches 6-all in a set (i.e., each player or team has won six games).

Singles: In a set tie-break, the first player to win 7 points, and lead by at least a two-point margin, wins the set. If the score of the tie-break reaches 6 points-all, the game is extended until someone reaches the two-point margin. Consecutive numerical scoring (1, 2, 3, 4, etc.) is used.

The player whose turn it is to serve is the server for the first point, which is served into the deuce court. The opponent is then the server for the second and third points, with the second point served into the ad court and the third point served into the deuce court.

Thereafter, each player has two serves—with the first of these two serves going into the ad court—until the set has been decided. Players change ends of the court after every six points and at the conclusion of the tie-break.

Doubles: The same procedures for singles apply to doubles. The player whose turn it is to serve is the server for the first point. Thereafter, each player shall serve in rotation for two points, in the same order followed previously in that set.

Match Tie-Break

The Match Tie-Break is similar to the set tie-break except that the winner is the first to reach 10 points by a margin of two. It may be used in lieu of a third or final set to determine the winner of the match.

Receiving Positions: A doubles team may change receiving positions at the start of the tie-break.

Change of Ends: Players change ends at the start of the tie-break only if an odd-game changeover is due. During the tie-break, players change ends after every 6 points.

Rest Period: There are no rest periods permitted during the tie-break, except that if an odd-game changeover is due players may take the normal 90 seconds on the changeover.