PART 2—THE CODE

THE PLAYERS' GUIDE TO FAIR PLAY AND THE UNWRITTEN RULES OF TENNIS

***The Code* is not part of the ITF Rules of Tennis. Players shall follow *The Code*, *except* to the extent to which an official assumes some of their responsibilities. This edition of *The Code* is an adaptation of the original.**

PREFACE

When a serve hits a player's partner who is stationed at the net, is it a let, fault, or loss of point? Likewise, what is the ruling when a serve, before touching the ground, hits an opponent who is standing *back* of the baseline? The answers to these questions are obvious to anyone who knows the fundamentals of tennis, but it is surprising the number of players who don't know these fundamentals. All players have a responsibility to be familiar with the basic rules and customs of tennis. Further, it can be distressing when a player makes a decision in accordance with a rule and the opponent protests with the remark: "Well, I never heard of that rule before!" Ignorance of the rules constitutes a delinquency on the part of a player and often spoils an otherwise good match.

What is written here constitutes the essentials of *The Code*, a summary of procedures and unwritten rules that custom and tradition dictate all players should follow. No system of rules will cover every specific problem or situation. If players of goodwill follow the principles of *The Code*, they should always be able to reach an agreement, while at the same time making tennis more fun and a better game for all. The principles set forth in *The Code* shall apply in cases not specifically covered by the **ITF Rules of Tennis** or the **USTA Regulations**.

Before reading this, the following question may come to mind: Since there is a book that contains all the rules of tennis, is there a need for *The Code*? Isn't it sufficient to know and understand all the rules? There are a number of things not specifically set forth in the rules that are covered by custom and tradition only. For example, if there is doubt on a line call, the opponent gets the benefit of the doubt. This result cannot be found in the rules. Further, custom dictates the standard procedures that players will use in reaching decisions. These are the reasons a code is needed.

—Col. Nick Powel

PRINCIPLES

1. *Courtesy is expected.* Tennis is a game that requires cooperation and courtesy.
2. *Points played in good faith are counted.* All points played in good faith stand. For example, if after losing a point, a player discovers that the net was four inches too high, the point stands. If a point is played from the wrong court, there is no replay. If during a point, a player realizes that a mistake was made at the beginning (for example, service from the wrong court), the player shall continue playing the point. Corrective action may be taken only after a point has been completed.

Shaking hands at the end of a match is an acknowledgment by the players that the match is over.

WARM-UP

3. *Warm-up is not practice.* A player should provide the opponent a 5-minute warm-up (ten minutes if there are no ballpersons). If a player refuses to warm up the opponent, the player forfeits the right to a warm-up. Some players confuse warm-up and practice. Each player should make a special effort to hit shots directly to the opponent. (If partners want to warm each other up while their opponents are warming up, they may do so.)

4. *Warm-up serves and returns are taken before first serve of match.* A player should take all warm-up serves before the first serve of a match. A player who returns serves should return them at a moderate pace in a manner that does not disrupt the server.

MAKING CALLS

5. *Player makes calls on own side of net.* A player calls all shots landing on, or aimed at, the player's side of the net.

6. *Opponent gets benefit of doubt.* When a match is played without officials, the players are responsible for making decisions, particularly for line calls. There is a subtle difference between player decisions and those of an on-court official. An official impartially resolves a problem involving a call, whereas a player is guided by the principle that any doubt must be resolved in favor of an opponent. A player in attempting to be scrupulously honest on line calls frequently will keep a ball in play that might have been out or that the player discovers too late was out. *Even so, the game is much better played this way.*

7. *Ball touching any part of line is good.* If any part of a ball touches a line, the ball is good. A ball 99% out is still 100% good. A player shall not call a ball out unless the player clearly sees space between where the ball hits and a line.

8. *Ball that cannot be called out is good.* Any ball that cannot be called out is considered to be good. A player may not claim a let on the basis of not seeing a ball. One of tennis' more infuriating moments occurs after a long hard rally when a player makes a clean placement and an opponent says: "I'm not sure if it was good or out. Let's play a let." Remember, it is each player's responsibility to call all balls landing on, or aimed at, the player's side of the net. If a ball cannot be called out with certainty, it is good. When a player says an opponent's shot was really out but offers to replay the point to give the opponent a break, it seems clear that the player actually doubted that the ball was out.

9. *Either partner may make calls in doubles.* Although either doubles partner may make a call, the call of a player looking down a line is more likely to be accurate than that of a player looking across a line.

10. *All points are treated same regardless of their importance.* All points in a match should be treated the same. There is no justification for considering a match point differently from a first point.

11. *Requesting opponent's help.* When an opponent's opinion is requested and the opponent gives a positive opinion, it must be accepted. If neither player has an opinion, the ball is considered good. Aid from an opponent is available only on a call that ends a point.

12. *Out calls reversed.* A player who calls a ball out shall reverse the call if the player becomes uncertain or realizes that the ball was good. The point goes to the opponent and is not replayed. However, when a receiver reverses a fault call on a serve that hit the net, the server is entitled to two serves.

13. *Player calls own shots out.* With the exception of the first serve, a player should call out the player's own shots if the player clearly sees the ball out regardless of whether requested to do so by an opponent. The prime objective in making calls is accuracy. All players should cooperate to attain this objective.

14. *Partners' disagreement on calls.* If one partner calls the ball out and the other partner sees the ball good, the ball is good. It is more important to give opponents the benefit of the doubt than to avoid possibly hurting a partner's feelings. The tactful way to achieve the desired result is to tell a partner quietly of the mistake and then let the partner concede the point. If a call is changed from out to good, the principles of **Code § 12** apply.

15. *Audible or visible calls.* No matter how obvious it is to a player that an opponent's ball is out, the opponent is entitled to a prompt audible or visible out call.

16. *Spectators never make calls.* A player shall not enlist the aid of a spectator in making a call. No spectator has a part in a match.

17. *Prompt calls eliminate two chance option.* A player shall make all calls promptly after a ball has hit the court. A call shall be made either before the player's return shot has gone out of play or before an opponent has had an opportunity to play the return shot.

Prompt calls will quickly eliminate the "two chances to win the point" option that some players practice. To illustrate, a player is advancing to the net for an easy put away and sees a ball from an adjoining court rolling toward the court. The player continues to advance and hits the shot, only to have the supposed easy put away fly over the baseline. The player then claims a let. The claim is not valid because the player forfeited the right to call a let by choosing instead to play the ball. The player took a chance to win or lose and is not entitled to a second chance.

18. *Let called when ball rolls on court.* When a ball from another court enters the playing area, any player on the court affected may call a let as soon as the player becomes aware of the ball. The player loses the right to call a let if the player unreasonably delays in making the call.

19. *Touches, hitting ball before it crosses net, invasion of opponent's court, double hits, and double bounces.* A player shall promptly acknowledge when:

- A ball in play touches the player;
- The player touches the net or opponent's court while a ball is in play;
- The player hits a ball before it crosses the net;
- The player deliberately carries or double hits a ball; or
- A ball bounces more than once in the player's court.

The opponent is not entitled to make these calls.

20. *Balls hit through net or into ground.* A player makes the ruling on a ball that the player's opponent hits:

- Through the net; or
- Into the ground before it goes over the net.

21. *Making calls on clay courts.* If any part of a ball mark touches a line on a clay court, the ball shall be called good. If only part of the mark on a court can be seen, this means that the missing part is on a line or tape. A player should take a careful second look at any point-ending placement that is close to a line on a clay court. Occasionally a ball will strike the tape, jump, and then leave a full mark behind the line. If a player hears the sound of a ball striking the tape and sees a clean spot on the tape near the mark, the player should give the point to the opponent.

A player is not required to show an opponent the mark. The opponent shall not pass the net to inspect a mark.

SERVING

22. *Server's request for third ball.* When a server requests three balls, the receiver shall comply when the third ball is readily available. Distant balls shall be retrieved at the end of a game.

23. *Avoid foot faults.* Players should not foot fault because it violates the **ITF Rules of Tennis**. It is a foot fault when a foot just touches the line, even when the player does not follow the serve to the net..

24. *Calling foot faults.* The receiver or the receiver's partner may call foot faults only after all reasonable efforts, such as warning the server and attempting to get an official to the court, have failed and the foot fault is so flagrant as to be clearly perceptible from the receiver's side.

25. *Service calls in doubles.* In doubles the receiver's partner should call the service line, and the receiver should call the sideline and the center service line. Nonetheless, either partner may call a ball that either clearly sees.

26. *Service calls by serving team.* Neither the server nor server's partner shall make a fault call on the first service even if they think it is out because the receiver may be giving the server the benefit of the doubt. There is one exception. If the receiver plays a first service that is a fault and does not put the return in play, the server or server's partner may make the fault call. The server and the server's partner shall call out any second serve that either clearly sees out.

27. *Service let calls.* Any player may call a service let. The call shall be made before the return of serve goes out of play or is hit by the server or the server's partner. If the serve is an apparent or near ace, any let shall be called promptly.

28. *Obvious faults.* A player shall not put into play or hit over the net an obvious fault. To do so constitutes rudeness and may even be a form of gamesmanship. On the other hand, if a player does not call a serve a fault and gives the opponent the benefit of a close call, the server is not entitled to replay the point.

29. *Receiver readiness.* The receiver shall play to the reasonable pace of the server. The receiver should make no effort to return a serve when the receiver is not ready. If a player attempts to return a serve (even if it is a "quick" serve), then the receiver (or receiving team) is presumed to be ready.

30. *Delays during service.* When the server's second service motion is interrupted by a ball coming onto the court, the server is entitled to two serves. When there is a delay between the first and second serves:

- The server gets one serve if the server was the cause of the delay;
- The server gets two serves if the delay was caused by the receiver or if there was outside interference.

The time it takes to clear a ball that comes onto the court between the first and second serves is not considered sufficient time to warrant the server receiving two serves unless this time is so prolonged as to constitute an interruption. The receiver is the judge of whether the delay is sufficiently prolonged to justify giving the server two serves.

SCORING

31. *Server announces score.* The server shall announce the game score before the first point of a game and the point score before each subsequent point of the game.

32. *Disputes.* Disputes over the score shall be resolved by using one of the following methods, which are listed in the order of preference:

- Count all points and games agreed upon by the players and replay only disputed points or games;
- Play from a score mutually agreeable to all players;
- Spin a racket or toss a coin.

HINDRANCE ISSUES

33. *Claiming a hindrance.* A player who claims a hindrance must stop play as soon as possible.

34. *Talking when ball is in play.*

- Singles players should not talk during points.
- Talking between doubles partners when the ball is moving toward them is allowed.
- Doubles players should not talk when the ball is moving toward their opponent's court.
- When talking interferes with an opponent's ability to play a ball, it is a hindrance.

For example, if a doubles player hits a weak lob and yells "get back" and the yell distracts an opponent who is about to hit the ball, then the opponent may claim the point based on a deliberate hindrance. If the opponent chooses to play the lob and misses it, the opponent loses the point because the opponent did not make a timely claim of hindrance.

For example, if a player yells after an injury or getting stung by a bee, this is an unintentional hindrance that would entitle the opponent to claim a let.

35. *Body movement.* A player may feint with the body while a ball is in play. A player may change position at any time, including while the server is tossing a ball. Any other movement or any sound that is made solely to distract an opponent, including, but not limited to, waving arms or racket or stamping feet, is not allowed.

36. *Let due to unintentional hindrance.* A player who is hindered by an opponent's unintentional act or by something else outside the player's control is entitled to a let only if the player could have made the shot had the player not been hindered. A let is not authorized for a hindrance caused by something within a player's control. For example, a request for a let because a player tripped over the player's own hat should be denied.

37. *Grunting.* A player should avoid grunting and making other loud noises. Grunting and other loud noises may bother not only opponents but also players on adjacent courts. In an extreme case, an opponent or a player on an adjacent court may seek the assistance of an official. Grunting and the making of loud noises that affect the outcome of a point are hindrances. Only an official may rule that these actions are hindrances and order that a let be played or a loss of point, depending on whether an official had previously warned the offending player.

38. *Injury caused by player.* When a player accidentally injures an opponent, the opponent suffers the consequences. Consider the situation where the server's racket accidentally strikes the receiver and incapacitates the receiver. The receiver is unable to resume play within the time limit. Even though the server caused the injury, the server wins the match by retirement.

On the other hand, when a player deliberately injures an opponent and affects the opponent's ability to play, then the opponent wins the match by default. Hitting a ball or throwing a racket in anger is considered a deliberate act.

WHEN TO CONTACT OFFICIAL

39. *Withdrawing from match or tournament.* A player who has decided not to play a match or a tournament shall notify the Referee immediately.

40. *Stalling.* Stalling violates the continuous play principle of the **ITF Rules of Tennis**. A player who encounters a problem with stalling should contact an official. The following actions constitute stalling:

- Warming up longer than the allotted time;
- Playing at about one-third a player's normal pace;
- Taking more than 90 seconds on the odd-game changeover or more than 2 minutes on the set break.
- Taking longer than the time authorized during a rest period;
- Starting a discussion or argument in order to rest;
- Clearing a missed first service that doesn't need to be cleared; or
- Excessive bouncing of a ball before any serve.

Stalling is subject to penalty under the Point Penalty System.

41. *Requesting officials during play.* While normally a player may not leave the playing area, the player may contact an official for assistance. Some reasons for contacting an official include:

- Stalling;
- Flagrant foot faults;
- A medical or bleeding timeout;
- A scoring dispute; or
- A pattern of bad calls.

A player may refuse to play until an official responds.

BALL ISSUES

42. *Retrieving stray balls.* Each player is responsible for removing stray balls and other objects from the player's end of the court. Whenever a ball is not in play, a player must honor an opponent's request to remove a ball from the court or from an area outside the court that is reasonably close to the lines. A player shall not go behind an adjacent court to retrieve a ball or ask a player on an adjacent court to return a ball while a point is in play. When a player returns a ball from an adjacent court, the player shall wait until the point is over on the court where the ball is being returned and then return it directly to one of the players, preferably the server.

43. *Catching a ball.* If a player catches a ball in play before it bounces, the player loses the point regardless of where the player is standing.

44. *New balls for third set.* When a tournament specifies new balls for a third set, new balls shall be used unless all players agree otherwise.

MISCELLANEOUS

45. *Clothing and equipment malfunction.* If clothing or equipment, other than a racket, becomes unusable through circumstances outside the control of a player, play may be suspended for a reasonable period. A player may leave the court after a point is over to correct the problem. If a racket or string is broken, a player may leave the court to get a replacement, but the player is subject to code violations under the Point Penalty System.

46. *Placement of towels.* Towels are to be placed on the ground outside the net post or at the back fence. Clothing or towels should never be placed on a net.