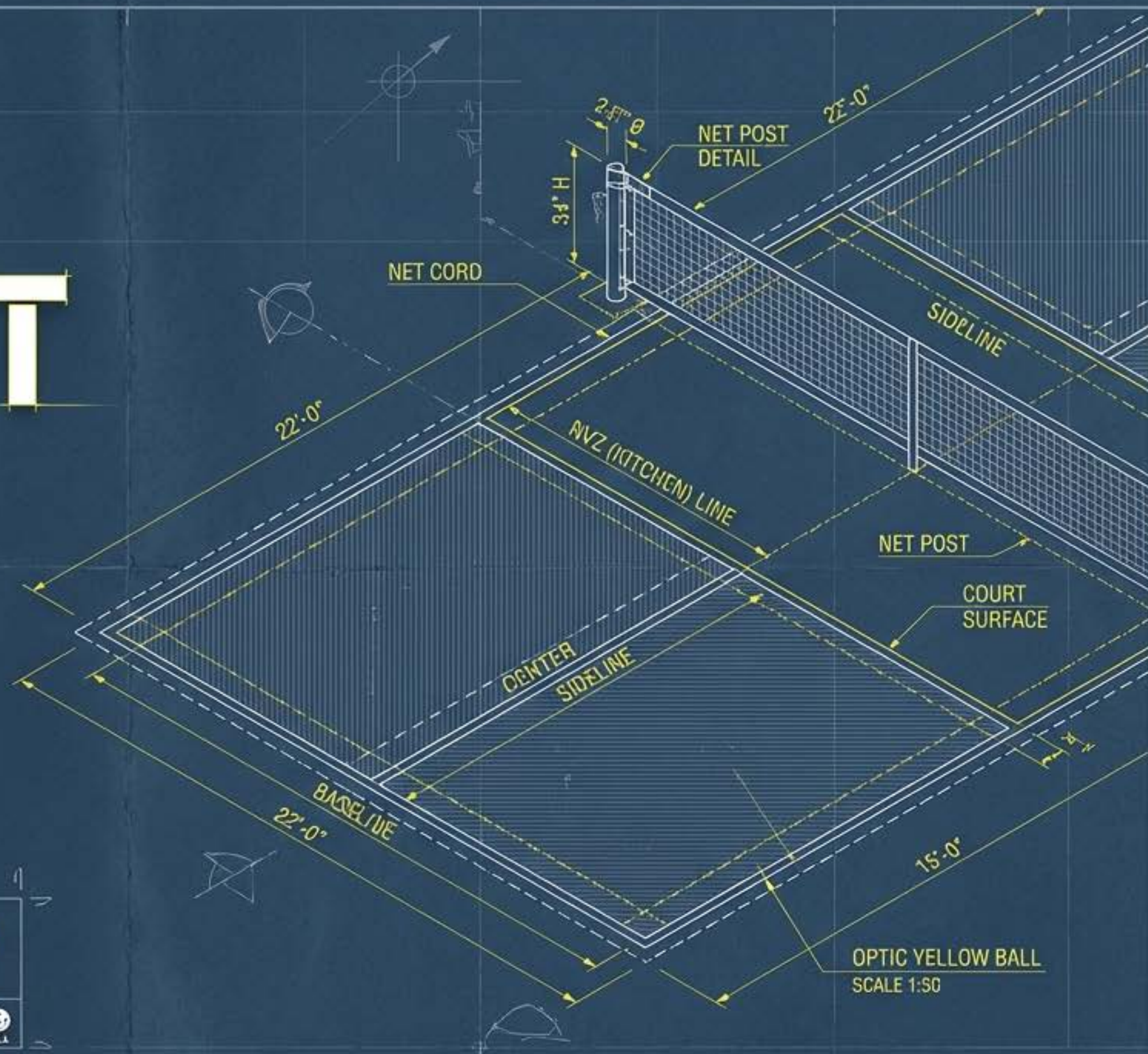


# THE BLUEPRINT OF PLAY

## A Visual Guide to the 2025 USA Pickleball Official Rules

Derived directly from the official **USA Pickleball Rulebook** to provide an intuitive, visual manual for recreational players, competitors, and officials.

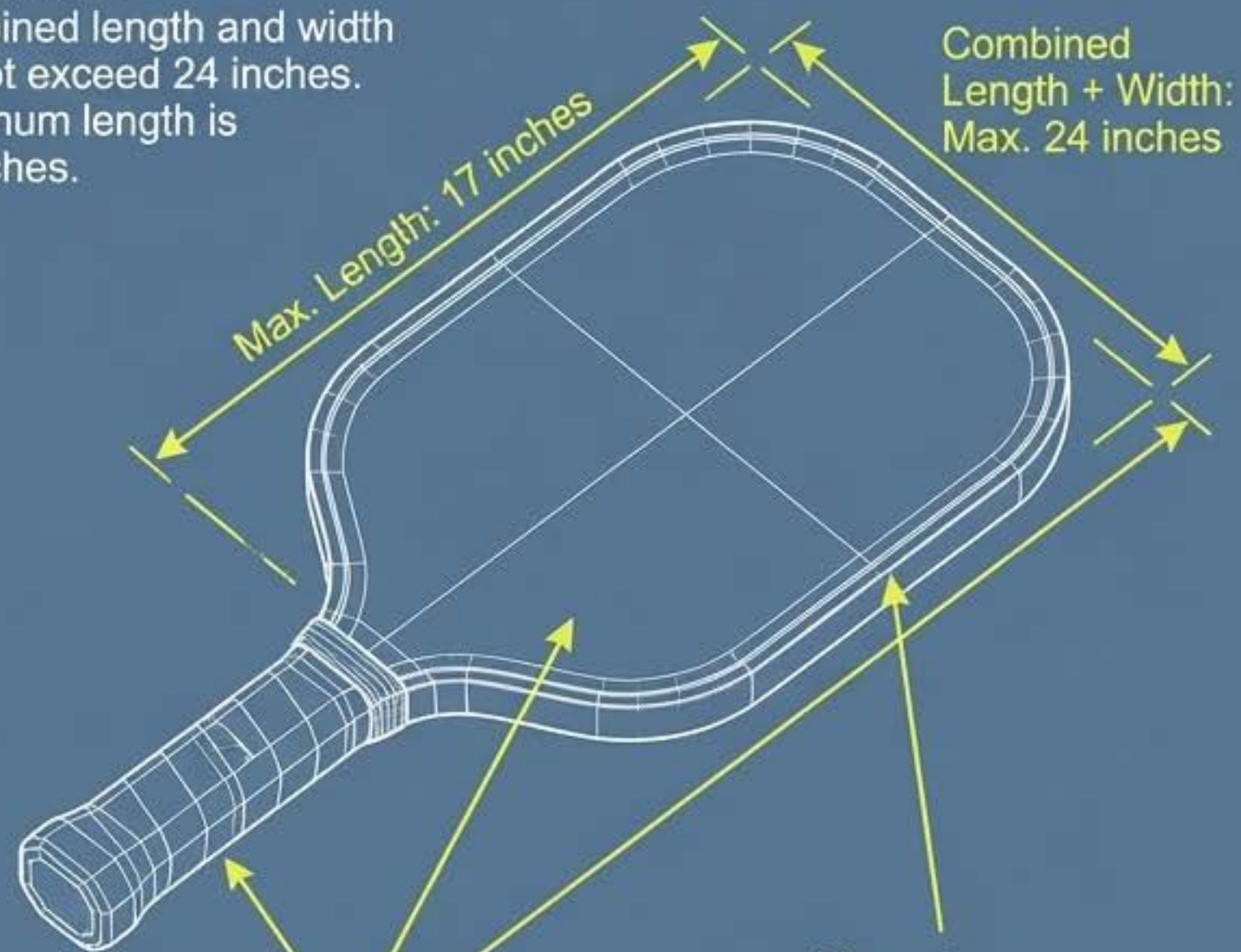




# Equipment Specifications and Constraints

## Size Limits:

- Combined length and width cannot exceed 24 inches. Maximum length is 17 inches.



## Surface Constraints:

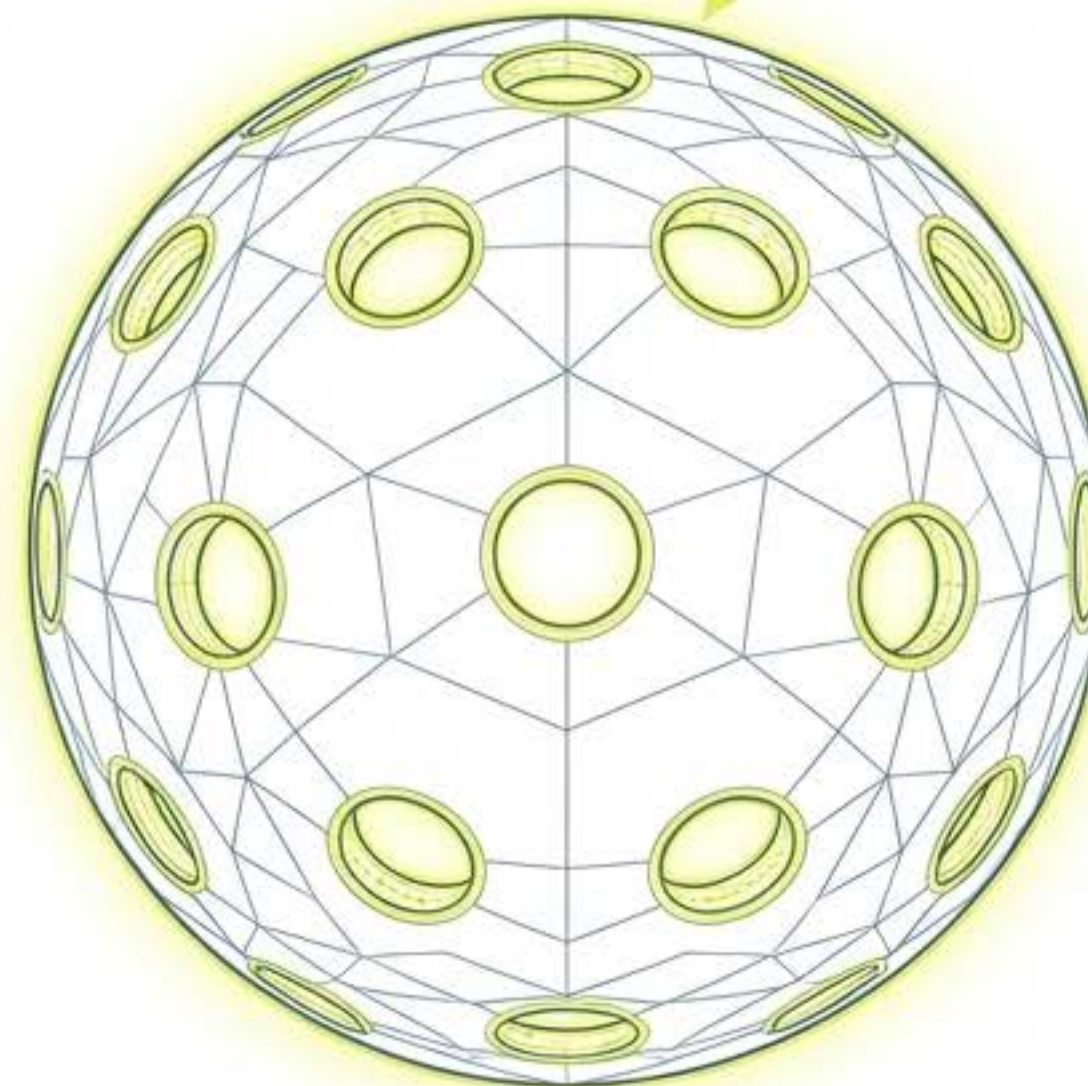
- No delamination, holes, cracks, rough textures, or anti-skid paint.
- Cannot be adversely reflective.

## Alterations:

- Edge guard tape, lead tape, and grip adjustments are legal.
- Aftermarket graphics are illegal.

## Design:

- Smooth surface with 26 to 40 circular holes.



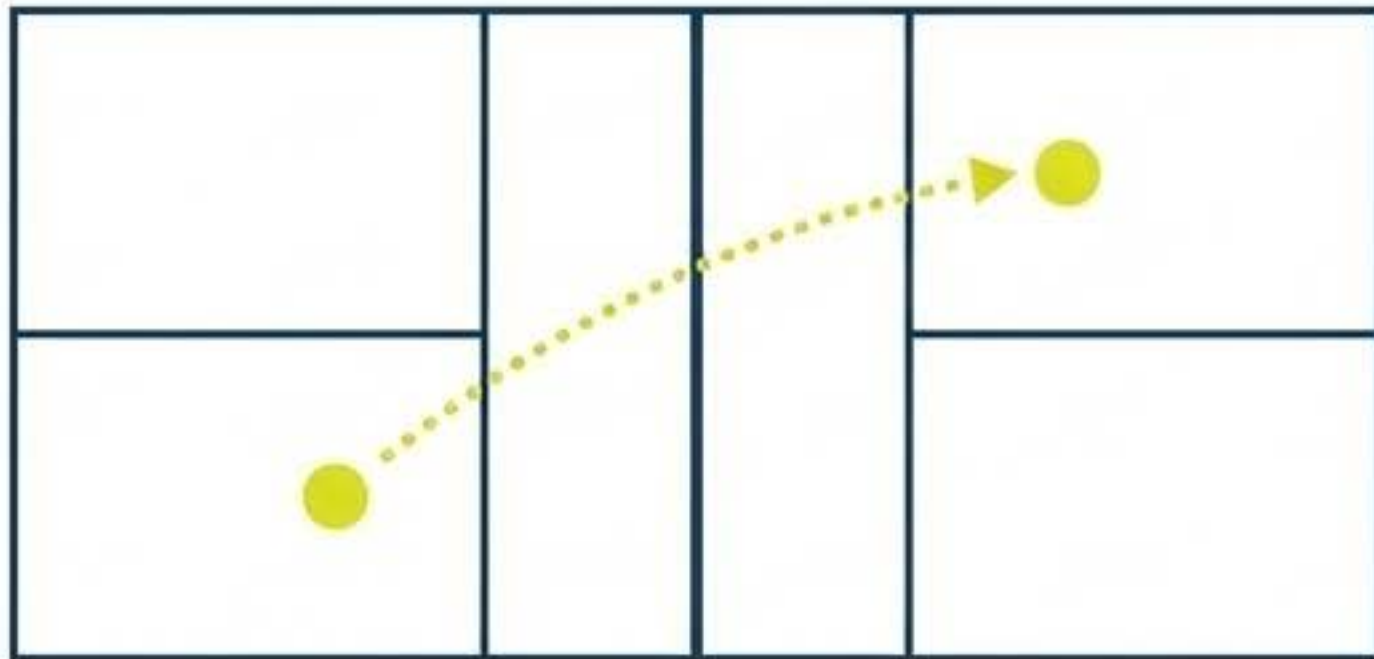
## Construction:

- Durable, non-compressible material, uniform in color.
- Must have the manufacturer's logo visible.

# Player Positioning and the Start of Play

**The Cross-Court Rule:** The server must always serve diagonally to the opposite service court. The ball must clear the NVZ and its lines.

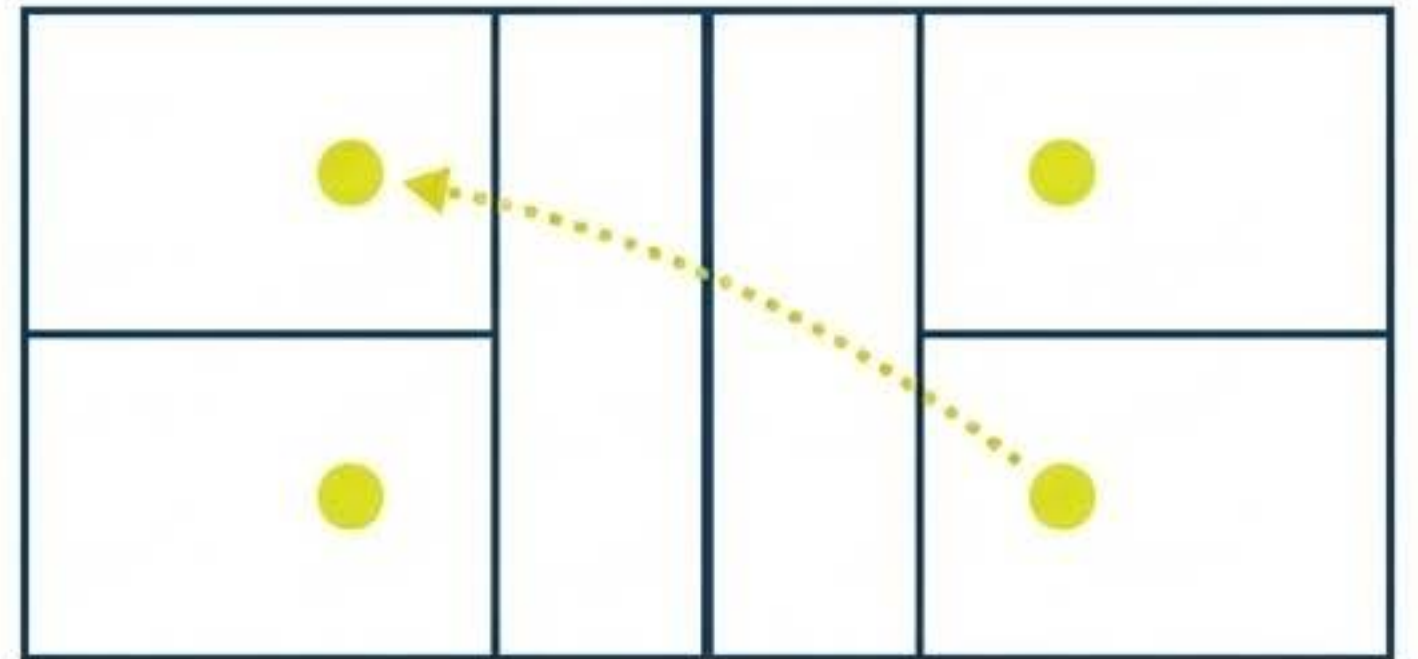
## Singles Positioning Logic



If the server's score is Even (0, 2, 4), they serve from the Right court.

If Odd (1, 3, 5), they serve from the Left court.

## Doubles Positioning Logic





Team starts on the Right side.

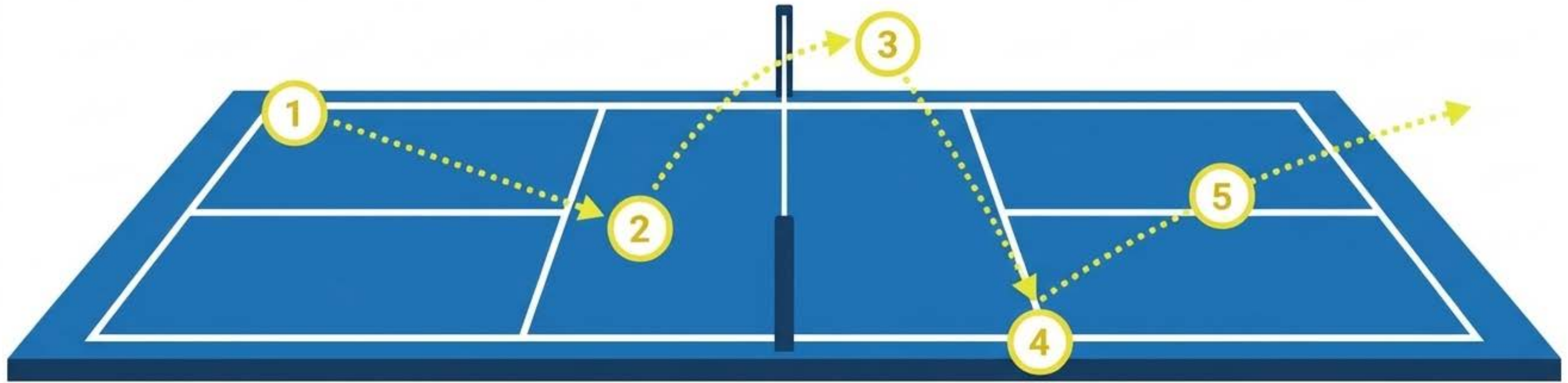
First server alternates sides until a fault.

Upon side out, service begins with the player correctly positioned on the Right side according to the team's total score.

# The Serving Matrix: Volley vs. Drop

	The Volley Serve (Hit out of the air)	The Drop Serve (Hit after a bounce)
Mechanics	Server's arm must move in an upward arc. 	Ball must be dropped from an unaided height (no throwing down or tossing up). 
Arc Restrictions	Highest point of the paddle head cannot be above the highest part of the wrist. Contact must be below the waist.	None. The upward arc, wrist, and waist restrictions do NOT apply.
Spin Constraints	Releasing hand must not impart manipulation or spin (natural gravity roll is legal).	Same as volley; no imparted spin on the drop.

# The Two-Bounce Rule Timeline



## 1. The Serve

Server strikes the ball diagonally.

## 2. Bounce One

The ball must bounce once in the receiver's service court.

## 3. The Return

The receiver hits a groundstroke back across the net.

## 4. Bounce Two

The serving team **MUST** let the return bounce once on their side.

## 5. Free Volleying Unlocked

After this second bounce is struck (the Third Shot), both teams may now hit groundstrokes or volleys for the remainder of the rally.

# The Engine of the Rally: Doubles Scoring Logic

## Phase 1: First Server

- Team wins rally = 1 point, server switches sides.
- Team loses rally = No point, ball passes to partner.

## The 3-Number Score:

Called as [Serving Team Score] – [Receiving Team Score] – [Server Number]. Example: 0-0-2.

**Exception (The Start):**  
The very first service turn of the game is initiated by Server 2 (starts at 0-0-2). A single lost rally results in an immediate Side Out.

**Side Out**

## Phase 2: Second Server

- Partner serves from current position.
- Wins rally = 1 point, switches sides.
- Loses rally = Side Out.

# Match Formats and Provisional Rally Scoring

## Tournament Formats

- **Standard Format:** Best two-of-three games to 11 points (win by 2).
- **Alternatives:** One game to 15 or 21 points (win by 2).
- **Draw Types:** Single Elimination, Double Elimination, Round Robin, Pool Play.

## The Scoring Engine

<b>Traditional (Side-Out) Scoring</b>	Points are scored only by the serving side. A lost rally by the server results in a change of server or side out.
<b>2025 Provisional Rally Scoring</b>	<b>A point is scored on every rally</b> , regardless of who served.



### **The Rally Game Point Exception:**

Under Rally Scoring, the game-winning point can only be scored when serving.

# The Physics of the Rally

## Around the Post (ATP):

A ball traveling wide outside the net post may be returned below the height of the net. It does not need to travel over the net.

## The Plane of the Net:

Crossing this vertical plane prior to striking the ball is a fault. Crossing it after striking the ball (follow-through) is legal.

**Double Hits:** Hitting the ball twice is legal only if it occurs during a continuous, single-direction stroke by one player.

# The Unique Constraint: The Non-Volley Zone

## The Golden Rule:

All volleys (hitting the ball out of the air) must be initiated completely outside the NVZ.

## The Boundary Lines:

The NVZ line itself is part of the NVZ. Touching the line during a volley is a fault.

7x20 FT



**Groundstrokes are Free:** A player may enter the NVZ at any time to hit a ball that has bounced. There is no violation for standing in the zone, only for volleying.

**Clearing the Zone:** If a player touches the NVZ, they cannot hit a volley until both feet have made contact completely outside the NVZ.

# The Momentum Physics Model



**Frame 1 (Contact):** Striking ball mid-air outside NVZ. (Legal)

**Frame 2 (Follow-Through):** Ball has passed opponent. Player is landing.

**Frame 3 (The Fault):** Foot touches NVZ line.

## The Momentum Rule Explained

- Volleying ends only when the player regains balance and control of forward motion.
- If momentum carries a player into the NVZ, it is a fault—even if the ball becomes dead before they touch the zone.
- **Wheelchair Exception:** Front wheels may touch the NVZ during a volley.

# The Code of Ethics for Line Calling

## The Benefit of the Doubt

Any questionable call must be resolved in favor of the opponent. Any ball that cannot be clearly called out will be considered in.

## Promptness

Out calls must be promptly signaled by voice and/or hand signal before the opponent hits the return or the ball becomes dead.



## Clear Visibility

Players shall not call a ball out unless they clearly see a space between the line and the ball.

## Appeals & Deferrals

If a player asks the opponent's opinion on a line call, they lose their right to make a subsequent call. If the opponent cannot make a clear call, the ball is in.

# Boundaries and Infractions: The Anatomy of a Fault

## Dead Ball Triggers



**Service Faults:** Server foot fault, ball lands in NVZ, hits a permanent object, or uses an illegal motion.



**Net Infractions:** Player, apparel, or paddle touches the net system or net posts while the ball is live.



**The Two-Bounce Violation:** Failure to let the serve bounce, or failure to let the return bounce.



**Body Contact:** The ball contacts a player or anything they are wearing (except the paddle hand below the wrist).



**Double Bounces:** Failure of a standing player to return the ball before it bounces twice.

# The Pacing of Play



# The Time-Out Diagnostic



## Standard Time-Out

- **Allotment:** Two per 11/15-pt game (Three for a 21-pt game).
- **Duration:** Up to 1 minute.
- **Call Timing:** Must be called before the next serve occurs.



## Medical Time-Out

- **Process:** Referee summons medical personnel to determine validity.
- **Duration:** Up to 15 continuous minutes.
- **Penalty:** If invalid, team loses a standard time-out and receives a Technical Warning. Only one allowed per match.



## Equipment Time-Out

- **Criteria:** Granted by referee for fair and safe continuation (e.g., broken paddle).
- **Duration:** Reasonable duration as determined by referee.
- Minor adjustments (tying shoes) happen between rallies without a time-out.

# Tournament Formats and Match Finality

**Double Elimination:** Losers drop to a consolation bracket. Consolation winner plays winner's bracket winner for Gold.

**Single Elimination:**  
Win or go home.

**Round Robin:**  
Ranked by matches won.  
Tie-breakers:  
1. Head-to-head,  
2. Point differential.

**Retirement:** Team stops playing a current match. Scores are recorded to ensure a 2-point margin. Can play future matches.

**Withdrawal:** Team removes themselves from the entire bracket and all future matches.

**Forfeit:** Referee or Director imposed end of match due to rule violations or absence.

# The Officiating Responsibility Table

**Line Calls**

## **Non-Officiated Play**

Players call their end of the court.

**NVZ &  
Service  
Foot  
Faults**

Players call on their own end; may point out opponent faults (disagreements result in a replay).

**Other  
Rule  
Faults**

Player committing the fault resolves it. Opponents can only point it out.

## **Officiated Play**

Players call baseline/sideline on their end. Referee/Line Judges assist or overrule.

Referee exclusively calls NVZ infractions, short serves, and foot faults.

Referee identifies and enforces all other faults.

# The Officiating Team and Rulings

**Tournament Director**

**Head Referee**

**Referee**

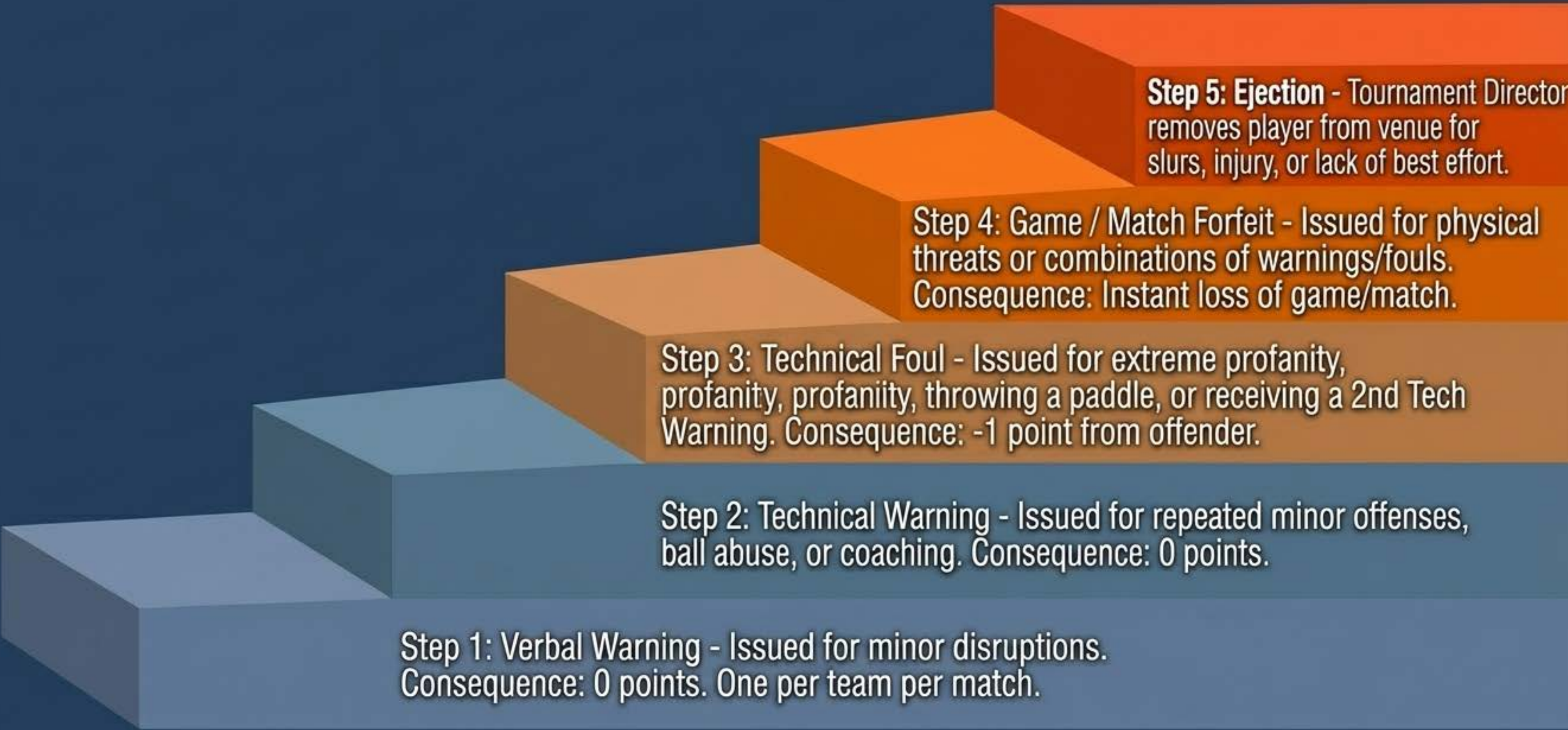
**Line Judges**

**Referee Duties:** Inspect paddles and net height (34 inch center). Call the score to start each rally. Enforce time-outs, NVZ faults, and player conduct.

**Line Judges:** Loudly call out with outstretched arm signal. If a line judge is blinded, the referee can make the call if seen clearly.

**Challenging Rulings:** Players may challenge a referee's rule interpretation.  
**Risk:** If the referee was correct, the challenging team loses a time-out and receives a Technical Warning.

# The Behavioral Escalation Ladder



**Step 1: Verbal Warning** - Issued for minor disruptions.  
Consequence: 0 points. One per team per match.

**Step 2: Technical Warning** - Issued for repeated minor offenses, ball abuse, or coaching. Consequence: 0 points.

**Step 3: Technical Foul** - Issued for extreme profanity, profanity, profanity, throwing a paddle, or receiving a 2nd Tech Warning. Consequence: -1 point from offender.

**Step 4: Game / Match Forfeit** - Issued for physical threats or combinations of warnings/fouls.  
Consequence: Instant loss of game/match.

**Step 5: Ejection** - Tournament Director removes player from venue for slurs, injury, or lack of best effort.

# The Spirit of the Sport

The Guiding Principles of the USA Pickleball Rulebook



## Courtesy & Cooperation

All points are treated equally. Prompt line calls eliminate the “two-chance option”. Benefit of the doubt always goes to the opponent.



## Integrity of Design

Protecting the unique constraints—the Non-Volley Zone and the Two-Bounce Rule—that define the sport’s identity and prevent any single type of play from dominating.



## Competition

Ensuring fair play across all levels, from recreational parks to professional stadiums, maintaining the sport’s balance of accessibility and high-level athletic strategy.

# Official USA Pickleball Reference

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- These rules are formulated and interpreted by USA Pickleball, the National Governing Body of American pickleball.
- All decisions by USA Pickleball are final to preserve the traditional nature, character, and skills required for the sport.
- For the complete 82-page legal text, rule interpretations, and future updates, consult the official 2025 rulebook at [usapickleball.org](https://usapickleball.org).