



*Pickleball Rules & Handbook*

**Introduction**

**Born Sports League** was founded with the vision to strive to make the world a better place through sports by bringing together a diverse and inclusive community to have fun, creating a sense of belonging and acceptance, and giving back to the communities in which we play. The purpose of BSL is to engage members of the LGBTQ+ community, friends, and allies in healthy, active sports and activities by creating and managing structured games, leagues and tournaments in a safe, consistent, and organized fashion.

Our mission is to bring together LGBTQ+ and ally people to build community through organized sports and create an experience that is inclusive, supportive, affordable, fun, and gives back to the community.

**Born Sports League** follows these principles in order and in precedence. At no time shall any higher ranked principal be compromised for the sake of another by any official, team, or player.

- 1) **Safety:** All measures will be taken so that any and all activities rank safety as the league's number one priority.
- 2) **Participation / Inclusion:** All people are welcome in BSL games and activities, and participation is fundamental to all involved.
- 3) **Respect:** All people affiliated with BSL, its teams or its events shall treat each other with dignity and respect at all times, both on and off the field.
- 4) **Fun:** The purpose of BSL in its core, is to foster a fun, philanthropic, social environment.
- 5) **Honesty / Fair Play:** It is expected that all players, teams and officials shall adhere to a strict honor code at all times.
- 6) **Competition:** While BSL games and activities keep score and award champions, at no time shall any player, team, or official allow the competitive nature inherent in sports take precedence over any of the above founding principles.



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## **Section 0 – General Policies & Definitions**

### **1: General Interpretation and Dispute Resolution**

- 1.1. These rules are intended to provide players with a common understanding and general dispute resolution procedures in the event of any disagreements about outcomes of certain events during gameplay.
- 1.2. Should any Player have any disagreement with interpretation of these Rules, the Player must alert the Pickleball Director within a reasonable time frame of the event under which the disagreement arose, not to exceed the below parameters:
  - 1.2.1. On Court Disputes need to be raised before leaving the venue on the day of the match
  - 1.2.2. Admin disputes within 48 hours after the match concludes
- 1.3. Failure to object to a Player's interpretation of these Rules within the time limit will result in no change in the outcome. However, BSL Board of Directors will take the objection under advisement for the next season.
- 1.4. Should a Player object to an interpretation of these Rules, the BSL Board of Directors will confer on the objection and come to a timely determination prior to the start of the next week's Matches.
- 1.5. The BSL Board of Directors' decision on the interpretation of the Rules is final for that season. The BSL Board of Directors will make a determination as follows:
  - 1.5.1. The BSL Board of Directors will make a determination on how to interpret a rule in question if it is ambiguous. If it is determined in the BSL Board of Directors' sole discretion that the rule is not ambiguous, the BSL Board of Directors will enforce the rule as written.
  - 1.5.2. If the rule in question is determined to be ambiguous, the BSL Board of Directors will interpret and enforce the rule in question in the least-penalizing manner possible at the BSL Board of Directors' sole discretion.
  - 1.5.3. All decisions regarding a rule interpretation will be final and binding on all Players for the remainder of the Season.

### **2: General Definitions**

- 2.1. These general definitions are to apply to any interpretation of the below rules of BSL Pickleball Rules & Handbook. Any specific definition outlined in a specific provision below will override these general definitions.
- 2.2. The below definitions are only intended to apply to the terms used in this Born Sports League's Pickleball Rules & Handbook. No definition is to be construed to apply to any other sport's handbook, Born Sports League's other agreements, or any other document.
- 2.3. "BSL" means Born Sports League.
- 2.4. "BSL Board of Directors" means the current Board of BSL.

- 2.5. “Game” means a sequence of points during which the same team serves, and is won by the first team to win at least eleven points and have a lead of two points over the opposing team.
- 2.6. “Match” is a completed contest where one team wins by a majority of games.
- 2.7. “League” means BSL.
- 2.8. “Pickleball Director” means the appointed Director for Pickleball for that respective season.
- 2.9. “Player” means an individual registered to play with a Team during a Season or a Substitute temporarily registered to play for a Team during a Match.
- 2.10. “Season” means a group of Matches and championship Matches over a predefined period of weeks as announced by League Officials.
- 2.11. “Sports Officials” means the Pickleball Director or the BSL Board of Directors.
- 2.12. “Substitute” means any individual who was not originally signed up with a Team at the beginning of the Season and is temporarily signed up to play on a Team for one Match. Substitutes are only permitted in accordance with Rule 6.5 described below.
- 2.13. “Team” means any group of Players participating in a BSL Pickleball event, contest, or related activity.
- 2.14. “Warning” means any Yellow Card or Red Card as set forth in Rule 3.7.2.

## **Section II - BSL League Principles & Conduct**

### **3: BSL League Principles**

#### **3.1. Sportsmanship**

League Officials, Players and any of their guests shall conduct themselves in a sportsmanlike manner at all times, including both on and off the field. BSL expects the highest level of respect from anyone affiliated or attending our events and conduct unbecoming will not be tolerated at any time.

#### **3.2. Agreement**

3.2.1. By participating in this BSL event or activity, each Player agrees:

- a) To be governed by the rules as presented by BSL, both as written and in the spirit and intent of said rules as determined at the sole discretion of the BSL Directors.
- b) To accept any decisions or penalties imposed by said rules at the sole discretion of the BSL Board of Directors.
- c) To respect all aspects of the League’s priorities.
- d) To treat all materials, equipment, and venues with great care including the environment in which we are playing. This includes, but is not limited to, garbage, foul language, smoking, illegal substance, weapons, and alcohol policies and damage to property.

### **3.3. Drug & Weapons Policy**

- 3.3.1. Born Sports League is a drug and weapon-free zone, and any use or distribution of any illegal substances or the possession of any weapons of any kind while attending or engaging in any BSL sponsored events is strictly prohibited.
- a) **Alcohol:** While may or may not be regulated by venue restrictions, any public intoxication will not be tolerated and is subject to disciplinary actions, including ejection from the venue for the remainder of the day.

### **3.4. Venue Rules**

- 3.4.1. All rules and policies put in place by the venue must be respected and will be strictly enforced. (Such as, no pets, no smoking, no loud music, no alcohol, etc.)

### **3.5. Discrimination**

- 3.5.1. BSL has a strict no-discrimination policy. If anyone feels they have been discriminated against for any reason they are to report it to the Pickleball Director immediately. Any person affiliated with an BSL event making racial, ethnic, religious, or sexual orientation slurs or actions are subject to disciplinary proceedings up to and including dismissal from the league.

### **3.6. Bullying & Taunting**

- 3.6.1. Teasing, shouting, arguing, cheering against, complaining, name-calling, excessive swearing, verbally or physically abusing or intimidating Players or BSL Board of Directors in any way (even if intended as a joke, but not received in that manner) will not be tolerated under any circumstances, regardless if it occurs in-person, off venue, or on-line. Off-the-field behavior, including at social events, public spaces, or even on social media that project any Players, Substitutes, Teams, or BSL Board of Directors in an aggressive or highly negative light will be considered the same as behavior on the field, and is subject to the same disciplinary policies and procedures.
- 3.6.2. This rule will be construed at the sole discretion of the BSL Board Directors.

### **3.7. Disciplinary Policies**

- 3.7.1. These policies apply to any infraction listed.
- 3.7.2. These policies will also apply to any unlisted infraction that is deemed unsportsmanlike by the BSL Board of Directors or is contrary to the BSL core philosophy and principles.
- a) The Pickleball Director and BSL Board of Directors may issue Warnings.
- b) Only BSL Board of Directors or Sport Officials appointed by the BSL Board can issue Yellow or Red Cards at any time.
- c) Players receiving a Yellow Card must sit out the remainder of the Match.
- d) All “Yellow Cards” remain in place for 6 months from date of issue.
- e) Upon a second occurrence of unsportsmanlike conduct within the 6-month window for a Yellow Card, the Player shall receive a “Red Card,” and will be ejected from the venue for the remainder of the day, and receives additional

two “game day” suspensions to be enacted upon the next occurring game days (which may occur in a future season). This player will also lose eligibility to participate in the next occurring tournament, both internally and among BSL sponsored traveling teams.

- f) After the Red Card has been issued, any additional infraction within its 6-month window will constitute a charge of gross misconduct and will be subject to long-term suspension or permanent ejection from the league as determined by the Pickleball Director and/or BSL Board of Directors.
- g) Players receiving suspensions or ejections may apply, in writing, for reinstatement following a 6-month waiting period.
- h) These rules apply equally to any Substitutes.

### **3.8. Injury Policies**

3.8.1. Safety is and will always be the number one priority for Born Sports League and the following policies are in place for everyone’s well-being.

- a) Injured Players or Substitutes may be replaced at any time and can exit a game at any time without penalties.
- b) Any injury that incapacitates a Player or Substitute, even if momentarily, will stop active play immediately.
- c) Any injury to the head that causes any dizziness or unconsciousness must be reported immediately to the attending Pickleball Director who must stop game play to assess the situation. Emergency medical officials will be called for any head-related injuries.
- d) Any injured Player or Substitute that is actively bleeding must exit the field of play and cannot return until the bleeding has stopped or has been treated and covered.
- e) Injured Players or Substitutes that require medical attention must provide a doctor’s note verifying that they are recovered and physically capable prior to returning to active play.

## **Section III – Pickleball Basics**

### **4: Court & Equipment**

#### **4.1. Pickleball Court:**

4.1.1. Pickleball is a paddle sport played with a perforated ball on a 20-foot-by-44-foot court with a tennis-type net. The court is divided into right and left service spaces, as well as a non-volley zone, commonly referred to as “the kitchen.” The net height is 36 inches at the sidelines and 34 inches at the center. The court includes 7-foot non-volley zones (kitchen) on both sides of the net, as well as 15-foot service areas. Court markings must follow official USA Pickleball dimensions.

#### **4.1.2. Court Lines & Areas:**

4.1.2.1. **Baselines:** The lines parallel to the net at each end of the court.

4.1.2.2. **Sidelines:** Sidelines. The lines perpendicular to the net on each side of the court.

4.1.2.3. **The Kitchen:** The kitchen is a 7-foot area on either side of the net where players are not allowed to hit the ball directly out of the air (volley), meaning they must let the ball bounce before hitting it. The kitchen prevents players from standing directly at the net and spiking the ball with ease.

4.1.2.4. The centerline, baselines, and sidelines are considered in, but if the ball lands on the kitchen line, then it is a fault

#### **4.2. Pickleball Paddles & Balls:**

4.2.1. Players are encouraged to bring their own pickleball paddle. The venue may have paddles available to rent, but availability is not guaranteed, and a rental fee may apply. Players are allowed to bring their own pickleballs. The game ball may be switched out during the match, provided both Teams' Captains agree. Players must use USA Pickleball-approved paddles that conform to official size and material regulations. Paddles cannot exceed 17 inches in length and must not contain alterations affecting gameplay. The ball must be an official outdoor or indoor pickleball, made of a perforated polymer material, and approved by USA Pickleball. Players are encouraged to bring their own equipment, though venue rentals may be available.

#### **4.3. Uniforms:**

4.3.1. While teams are welcome to create and wear custom shirts for league play, **Born Sports League strongly encourages the inclusion of the official BSL logo** on all custom apparel. Visibility of the BSL logo helps promote league identity, unity, and community pride across all teams. To request a high-quality version of the logo, please email [info@bornsportsleague.com](mailto:info@bornsportsleague.com).

## **Section IV – Teams**

### **5: Teams**

#### **5.1. Number of Players:**

5.1.1. Each Team will consist of at least 4 but no more than 8 registered Players. Teams must have a minimum of 2 Players per Team for each Game.

#### **5.2. Team Names:**

5.2.1. While a Team's name may be suggestive or include double entendre, a Team's name that is deemed offensive or disrespectful in any way are not allowed.

#### **5.3. Team Events:**

5.3.1. Teams may organize chat rooms, social media accounts, practices, or events. However, the Born Sports League code of conduct extends to those locations as well and must be followed in the same manner.

#### **5.4. Player Rotation**

- 5.4.1. No Player is permitted to play more than 2 Games in a row during a Match.
- 5.4.2. In the event that a Team only has two Players, or that Team incorrectly rotates Players throughout the Match and permits a Player to play three Games in a row during a Match, the offending Team will be penalized with an automatic loss.
- 5.4.3. The automatic loss will be assessed against the offending Team at a 11-0 score prior to the beginning of the third consecutive game, at an eleven point scoring loss differential against the offending Team.
- 5.4.4. After receiving a loss, the offending Team's play orders will be reset to zero, i.e., each Player will be determined to have played in zero Games after receiving a penalty.
- 5.4.5. Should the Teams reach another third game where a Team's Players have to play a third game in a row, another penalty will be assessed and the Team's play orders will be reset again.

#### **5.5. Beginner & Lower/Upper Intermediate Team Composition:**

- 5.5.1. To ensure fairness and enhance the League's overall experience, a Team in the Beginner or Lower/Upper Intermediate Divisions can only retain a maximum of 50% of its roster in the same division for the next season if any of the following conditions are met:

- a) The Team has kept more than 50% of its roster from the previous Season and has won the End of Season Tournament for two consecutive Seasons.
- b) The Team goes undefeated in all non-forfeited Matches for a Season and wins the End of Season Tournament for that Season.

Note: These rules do not apply to the Advanced Divisions.

How to Meet the 50% Roster Limit:

- The Team moves up a division if a higher division exists.
- The Team splits into two new teams that stay in the same division, with each new team keeping 50% or less of the original roster.
- The Team splits into two Teams, with only one remaining in the same division, and that Team retains 50% or less of the original roster.

### **Section V – Players**

#### **6: Player Eligibility:**

##### **6.1. Player Eligibility:**

- a) Must be 18 years or older.
- b) Must have signed liability and conduct forms.
- c) Must have paid registration (or Substitute) fees.

##### **6.2 Team Captain**

- a) Each Team shall have one official "Captain" representing their Team. This "Captain" may be substituted should the registered Captain be absent.

### **6.3 No Show:**

- a) Players who no-show, without warning or contact, twice during a regular Season are subject to removal and replacement by the Team's Captain with Pickleball Director's Approval. Players removed from a Team for this reason are not eligible for refunds.

### **6.4 Absenteeism:**

- a) Players who miss three or more regular season game days, regardless of the reason, are subject to removal and replacement by the Team's Captain with Pickleball Director's Approval. Players removed from a roster for this reason are not eligible for refunds.

### **6.5 Substitutions**

- 6.5.1 Substitutes may play on any Team under the following restrictions:
  - 6.5.1.1 A Substitute must not be actively playing in a Tournament Match at the time of substitution.
  - 6.5.1.2 Interleague substitutes may only play in their registered division or in a higher division. Under no circumstances may a player substitute in a lower division than the one in which they are registered. No exceptions.
  - 6.5.1.3 All Substitutes must sign a waiver prior to playing in any Game. If the Substitute is not an approved inter-league Substitute, they must also pay a \$10 "per day" substitute fee prior to participation.
  - 6.5.1.4 Each Team may only use Substitutes to reach a minimum of three Players for each Game.
  - 6.5.1.5 All Substitute Players must be recorded on the official score sheet prior to play, including the Substitute's full name and the division in which they are rostered.
  - 6.5.1.6 If a Substitute is found to have played in a lower division than the one in which they are rostered, they will forfeit the entire match.

## **Section VI - Pickleball Fundamental Rules**

### **7: Fundamental Rules:**

#### **7.1. Starting the Match:**

- 7.1.1. The Match should begin within 5 minutes of the scheduled start time, or within 5 minutes following the conclusion of the previous Match. Teams unable to take the court within 5 minutes will forfeit the Match, and the Match will be canceled.

### **7.2. Starting Serve:**

- 7.2.1. Captains will play a short contest of Rock, Paper, Scissors. The winner can choose to either serve first or receive first. If the winner chooses to serve, the other Team will serve first in the next Game.

### **7.3. Match Format:**

- 7.3.1. Teams will play as many Games as possible within a 50-minute time slot, including a 10-minute warm-up.

### **7.4. Scoring:**

- 7.4.1. Teams are in charge of keeping their own score. At the end of the Game, Captains are responsible for verifying and initialing or signing the score as confirmation the sheet is correct. Disputes will only be accepted in accordance with Rule 1.5.
- 7.4.2. Scoring System:
  - 7.4.2.1. Only the serving Team can score points.
  - 7.4.2.2. Games are played to 11 points, win by 2.
  - 7.4.2.3. The score must be announced before the ball is served. In doubles, the score is announced using a 3-number system: server's score, receiver's score, serve number (either 1 or 2, for the first or second server on the team).

## **Section VII - Pickleball Match Rules**

### **8: Match Play Rules:**

#### **8.1. Serving:**

- 8.1.1. Serving Position: The server must stand behind the baseline, on the right side of the court when serving the first point of each match. After each point, the server switches sides with their partner, alternating between the right and left sides of the court.
- 8.1.2. Placement: The serve is made diagonally, from the right side of the server's court to the opponent's right service court, and vice versa when on the left side. If the serve lands within the kitchen, the serve is considered out.
- 8.1.3. Serve Rotation: Each Player on a Team serves once before switching to the other Team. The first server continues serving until their Team loses a point, after which the second Player on that Team serves. **Exception:** For the first point of every Game, the Team that serves first only receives one serve.
- 8.1.4. Underhand Serve: The serve must be underhand, meaning the paddle must contact the ball below the server's waist (navel level or lower).
- 8.1.5. Let Serve: If the ball hits the net and lands in the service court, the ball is still in play, and the rally continues as usual.
- 8.1.6. Faults: If the serving Team commits a fault (e.g., serving out of bounds or into the net), they lose their serve.
- 8.1.7. Bounce Requirement (Drop Serve Option):  
If using a drop serve, the ball must be released and allowed to fall naturally—it cannot be thrown or driven downward to create a more favorable bounce. The ball

may bounce only once before being struck. While drop serves are allowed, all other serving rules (placement, positioning, etc.) still apply.

**8.1.8. Ball Release (No Spin / No Force Rule):**

The ball must be released naturally from the server's hand. The server may not throw or forcefully propel the ball downward or upward in an attempt to generate added speed or spin. The ball must be dropped or lightly tossed without imparting spin. Only one hand may release the ball.

**8.2. Double Bounce Rule**

8.2.1. The ball must bounce once on each side of the court before Players can start volleying. The receiving team must let the ball bounce before returning it, and the serving team must let the return bounce before playing it.

**8.3. The Kitchen Rules:**

8.3.1. Volleys: Players cannot volley (a ball that hasn't bounced) the ball while standing inside the kitchen. Players must be outside the kitchen when hitting the ball in the air.

8.3.2. Entering the Kitchen: A Player can step into the kitchen at any time, but they cannot hit a volley from within it. If a Player hits a volley from inside or over the line of the kitchen, it's a fault. *See Rule 8.4.*

8.3.3. A Player may stay inside the kitchen to return a ball that has bounced. There is no violation if a Player does not exit the kitchen after hitting a ball that bounces.

**8.3.4. Momentum Into the Kitchen**

8.3.4.1. Stepping into the kitchen after contact due to forward movement will result in a fault

8.3.4.2. Any part of the body, clothing, or paddle touching the kitchen or kitchen line as a result of the volley will result in a fault

8.3.4.3. Losing balance and falling into the kitchen after a volley will result in a fault

**8.4. Faults: A fault occurs when:**

- A. A serve doesn't land in the correct service box.
- B. A Player volleys the ball while standing in the kitchen.
- C. The ball is hit out of bounds.
- D. A player's momentum carries them into the kitchen
- E. The ball bounces twice on the same side.
- F. A Player steps on or over the baseline while serving.
- G. A Player's ball makes contact with a permanent object before bouncing on the court—for example, the ceiling.
- H. A Player or a Player's paddle makes contact with the net system and/or the net posts when the ball is live.
- I. If the teams disagree on the fault, the team will replay the serve

- J. Ball Hits Players - When the ball contacts a player or anything that is worn or carried by the player, except the player's paddle or the player's hands below the wrist joint while in contact with the paddle, it is a fault against that player.
- K. **Note:** Spectators are not permitted to make or influence line calls. The four players on the court are responsible for calling lines on their respective sides.

### **8.5. Time Expiration:**

- 8.5.1. Time expires after 50 minutes (excluding the 10-minute warm-up). The Match will end when the Pickleball Director that day calls time.
- 8.5.2. All play by both Teams must cease when time is called by the Pickleball Director.
- 8.5.3. The winner of the Match will be the Team that has won more completed Games.
- 8.5.4. A new Game must be started within five minutes after the previous Game concludes. Teams must serve the ball within a reasonable amount of time and not delay the Game.
  - 8.5.4.1. Any delay of game should be reported to the Pickleball Director for a determination of whether a Team is intentionally delaying. Should a Team be determined to be intentionally delaying the Game, the Pickleball Director will assess a penalty in their sole discretion based on the circumstances.
- 8.5.5. If time is called and the Teams are in the middle of a Game, that Game's winner will be determined as described below:
  - 8.5.5.1. If a Team is winning an incomplete Game by six or more points, that Team will be declared the winner of that Game.
  - 8.5.5.2. If no Team is winning by six or more points, no winner will be declared of that Game.
  - 8.5.5.3. As a result, no game will end in a tie, however, a match can end in a tie.

### **8.6. Stacking**

- 8.6.1. **Definition:** Stacking is a legal strategy in doubles pickleball where partners position themselves on the court to maintain a preferred player alignment (e.g., forehand middle or skill balance), regardless of serving order
- 8.6.2. **General Allowance:** Stacking is permitted in all BSL Pickleball matches, provided the following rules are followed
  - 8.6.3. **Serving Team Stacking**
    - 8.6.3.1. At the moment of the serve, the server must be positioned in the correct service court based on the score (right court when the serving team's score is even, left court when odd).
    - 8.6.3.2. The Server's partner may stand anywhere on their side of the court, including outside the court boundaries
    - 8.6.3.3. After the serve is struck, both players may move freely to their preferred positions
  - 8.6.4. **Receiving Team Stacking**

8.6.4.1. At the moment the serve is struck, the receiving player must be positioned in the correct service court based on the serving team's score

8.6.4.2. The receiving player's partner may stand anywhere on their side of the court, including outside the court boundaries

8.6.4.3. After the return of the serve, both players may move freely

**8.6.5. Correct Positioning Responsibility**

8.6.5.1. Each Team is responsible for ensuring their players are in the correct positions at the time of serve and return

8.6.5.2. If a team is discovered to be in an incorrect position before the serve, the error must be corrected with no penalty

8.6.5.3. If the serve has already occurred and a team is found to have been in an incorrect position at the time of serve, the serving team shall lose the serve. The serve shall move to the next player in the serving order, whether that is the partner on the same team or a player on the opposing team.

**Section VIII - Pickleball Tournament Regulations**

**9: Tournament Details:**

**9.1. Timing:**

9.1.1. Following each regular season, and on special occasions, Born Sports League may host a special Pickleball tournament under these guidelines.

**9.2. Rules:**

9.2.1. Tournament Matches will be scored as the best 3 out of 5 Games played.

9.2.2. Tournament Matches are not timed.

9.2.3. Tournament Games will still be played to 11 points, win by 2.

**9.3. Eligibility:**

9.3.1. To play in the tournament, each Player must qualify under these guidelines.

a) Play on a competing team: As a regular roster Player but not a Substitute.

b) Tournament Substitutions: No Substitutes are allowed during tournament play, at least 2 rostered Players must be present in order to compete.

**9.4. Seeding:**

9.4.1. Tournament seeds will be based on regular season (or pool play) placings.

9.4.2. Seeding two-way ties are broken:

A. First by direct Game-to-Game record.

B. Total points scored.

C. Least points scored.

9.4.3. The BSL Board of Directors along with the BSL Pickleball Director reserve the right to organize the tournament into divisions at their discretion, based on the results of the regular season.

**9.5. Home Team:**

9.5.1. Higher seed team is the “Home” team and shall serve first.

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February 15th, 2025 - Document (Proposal Stage) Created

February 16th, 2025 - Revised Team Player Game Play Rotation Rules

July 9<sup>th</sup>, 2025 – Added Section 0. Added 4.3. Revised 5.4, 6.5, 8.3, 8.4, 8.5, 9.2 & 9.4.3.

September 24, 2025 - Added 8.4I Line call clarification

March 2nd, 2026 – Revised 1.2, Added 4.1.2.4, Revised 8.4, Added 8.6, Revised 6.5

April 10th, 2026 - Added 8.1.7, Added 8.1.8, Added 8.3.4, Revised 5.5, Revised 8.4

