

## **TENNIS RULES TALKING POINTS**

### **OBJECTIVE:**

By promoting greater understanding and awareness of the rules of tennis, tennis commentators can both help promote the sport and enhance the popularity and educational value of televised tennis matches.

Set forth below are several scenarios that could arise during the course of a tennis match that will provide the broadcast team an opportunity to explain or highlight a particular rule of tennis.

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### **I. Suggested Lead-Ins**

1. For all the tennis players watching at home...
2. To clarify what just happened...
3. The applicable rule here is that...
4. For the fans at home, this is a situation where the rules of the [ATP][WTA] Tour differ from USTA regulations that would apply at a grass roots level tournament or league match.
5. Here's a great learning opportunity for the viewers...

## II. Rule-Related Questions and Answers

### A. Scoring

Q: Where did the scoring system love-15-30-40-game come from?

A: As Bud Collins so eloquently discusses in his “History of Tennis” masterpiece, the term “love” and its application in tennis as the equivalent of “zero” likely originated from the French word “l’oeuf” meaning egg (as in goose egg). An alternative explanation, however, has been suggested by Heiner Gillmeister in “Tennis, A Cultural History,” to trace the term back to the Dutch word “lof” which means “honor” or “to play for the honor” (omme lof spellen).

The quartered face of a clock likely explains the 15-30-40 (45 was possibly abbreviated down to 40 somewhere along the way).

The term “deuce” derives from the French term “deux” (meaning “two”).

Q: Just a question of semantics, but what is the difference between changing “sides” and changing “ends”?

A: These two terms get mixed up all the time, but from one point to the next, players are changing sides (from the deuce side to the ad side), and on odd game changeovers, the players change ends.

Q: Why doesn’t tennis adopt a simpler numeric scoring system: 1-2-3-game?

A: Actually, that is being done more frequently all over the place in a variety of settings, including World Team Tennis. The USTA specifically allows numeric scoring to be used in tournaments in the U.S.

### B. Making Calls

Q: What exactly does it mean to foot fault? How do players deal with foot faults in an unofficiated match?

A: According to Rule 18 of the ITF Rules of Tennis, a foot fault occurs when the server does one of the following during the service motion:

1. touches the baseline or the court with either foot (NOTE: this is probably the most common type of foot fault);
2. touches the area outside the imaginary extension of the sideline with either foot;

3. touches the imaginary extension of the centre mark with either foot; or
4. changes position by walking or running (but slight movements of the feet are permitted).

Without a chair umpire and a team of linespeople to take care of these issues, calling foot faults is a problem at the grassroots level in unofficiated matches. Under the Code (The Players' Guide for Unofficiated Matches), a receiver who feels the server is foot faulting must go through a three-step process:

1. Warn the server that he or she is foot faulting.
2. Try to find an official to come observe your match and call foot faults (NOTE: This will likely only be an option in a USTA-sanctioned tournament).
3. If no official is available, then the receiver may call flagrant foot faults.

Q: Whose job is it to call a double bounce or "not up" in a match with no officials?

A: It is up to the player hitting the ball (or attempting to hit the ball) to call it on himself. So if your opponent ever attempts to claim a point by saying the ball bounced twice on your end of the court, you should say, "Sorry pal, but that's my call."

Q: Who can call a "let" during a point?

A: On the serve, any player can call a service let. When a ball from another court rolls onto the playing area, either you or your opponent may call a let. In the case of a hindrance (such as a player's loud grunting, yelling, or body movements made solely to distract an opponent), a player may call a let so long as he could have made a play on the ball and did not cause the hindrance himself (e.g., a ball falls out of his own pocket).

### C. **Misconduct**

Q: Are players at grassroots-level tournaments penalized the same way for misconduct as players on the pro tours?

A: Not exactly. The pro tours maintain their own codes of conduct and point penalty systems. Under the USTA's Point Penalty System, violations are penalized in the following order:

First Offense:	Point
Second Offense:	Game
Third Offense:	Default

Note, also, that under USTA Regulations, an immediate default is possible for flagrantly unsportsmanlike acts.

Q: What's the deal with grunting and shrieking under the rules?

A: Under the Code (The Players' Guide for Unofficial Matches), a player should avoid grunting and making other loud noises. It can be considered a hindrance and, depending upon the circumstances, could result in either a let or loss of point.

**D. Miscellaneous**

Q: In unofficial matches, players are responsible for calling their own lines, but what happens when a player calls a ball out and then overrules himself?

A: When in doubt, the call must be "good." When a player immediately corrects an erroneous "out" call on his own (i.e., before being questioned by an opponent), if he had returned the ball in play, then the players play a let, otherwise the opponent wins the point.

Q: What would happen if you are serving and hit your opponent with your serve on the fly (i.e., before it bounces)?

A: You win the point...a small reward for horrible aim (or poor sportsmanship if you did it intentionally).

Q: What happens if a ball falls out of your opponent's pocket during a point?

A: Then you may call a let and replay the point, but only if you stop playing the point and call the let promptly. Also, note that the player with the defective pocket is not allowed to call a let in that situation.

Q: Can a player reach across the net to hit a shot?

A: No, if a player makes contact with a ball heading toward her before it crosses over the net, then she loses the point. However, there is no

prohibition against the follow through of the racket crossing the net (after contact has been made).

Q: What is the Coman Tiebreak Procedure and how is it different from what the pros do?

A: During tiebreaks on the pro tour, players change ends after every six points. Several years ago, the USTA approved the use of a new tiebreak procedure called the Coman Tiebreak Procedure—named after legendary tennis official John Coman. Under the Coman Tiebreak Procedure, players change ends after the first point and then after every four points thereafter. The idea was to enhance fairness and minimize the impact of sun, wind, and similar elements on the outcome of the tiebreak. In a doubles match, following the Coman Tiebreak Procedure also has the benefit of guaranteeing that each player will serve from the same end of the court as she did during the set.

Q: Can a player take a bathroom break anytime?

A: In a true emergency (as determined by the official), a player can take a bathroom break anytime. Otherwise, it is recommended that bathroom breaks be limited to set breaks and odd game changeovers.

Q: Why don't players sit down as they change ends after the first game of a set?

A: Because they are not supposed to take a break as they change ends following the first game of a set. With the advent of the two minute set break that was adopted a number of years ago, the 90-second break following the first game of a set was eliminated. But if you watch carefully, players really push the envelope on this rule and officials do not strictly enforce this rule.