



PICKLEBALL RULEBOOK

Introduction

The North American Ismaili Games (NAIG) is a premier regional sporting event that brings together athletes from across North America in a spirit of excellence, sportsmanship, and healthy competition, aligned with international standards.

Beyond competition, NAIG serves as a platform for unity, belonging, and shared growth—fostering meaningful connections and collective pride across regions. The Games are designed to be inclusive and accessible, enabling participation across age groups, skill levels, and regions.

NAIG also promotes lifelong active living and continuous improvement, while extending its impact through complementary programming such as development clinics, leadership forums, mentorship, and community engagement.

Highlights

Pickleball is played either as doubles (two players per team) or singles.

The same size playing area and rules are used for both singles and doubles.

For detailed rules, refer to the [2026 USAP Rulebook](#)

Pickleball is a paddle sport played using a special perforated ball on a 20-foot-by-44-foot court with a tennis-type net. The court is divided into right/even and left/odd service courts and non-volley zones (Kitchen). (See Figure illustrated below)

The ball is served diagonally across the net to the opponent's receiving court using an approved motion. The ball is struck back and forth across the net until a player fails to return the ball in accordance with the rules.

Points are scored only by the serving side when the server or the server's team wins the rally, or the opposing side commits a fault. The server continues to serve, alternating service courts, until the serving side loses the rally or commits a fault.

The first side scoring 11 points and leading by at least a 2-point margin wins the game. A match is won by the first side to win two (2) out of three (3)

Special notes

Spin Serves

The server shall release the ball with one hand only (non-paddle hand). The server shall not impart spin or otherwise manipulate the ball with the hand, paddle,

or any part of the body immediately prior to striking the serve. Natural rotation of the ball resulting from the release is permitted. Spin applied to the ball by the paddle during the service motion is legal.

The Drop Serve

A serve made by dropping the ball and hitting the ball with the paddle after the ball bounces on the playing surface.

Wrong Score Called

The rules concerning what happens if the wrong score is called by a player or a referee have changed.

If a player thinks a wrong score has been called, a player may stop play to ask for a correction before the ball is served.

If it has been served, the rally is to be played out and the score correction (if any) is made before the next serve occurs.

A Dropped Ball

In unofficiated matches, it is not uncommon for a player to carry an extra ball. If an extra ball is carried, it must not be visible to the opponent.

If a player accidentally drops an extra ball during a rally, it will result in a fault.

Medical Timeouts Called by a Referee

If a referee, in the interest of player safety, determines that either medical personnel or the Tournament Director should be consulted for a player health issue, that timeout is not chargeable to the player as a medical timeout.

The player retains the right to call their own medical timeout later in the match, if needed.

Verbal Warnings

A referee may now issue verbal warnings for more than just profanity.

Any situation that could result in a Technical Warning may instead be addressed by the referee as a verbal warning.

Only one verbal warning per match, no matter what the infraction, may be issued to a team or player in singles.

Calling the Score After a 15 Second Warning

Instead of a referee calling the score immediately after the 15 second warning expires, the referee will call the score after the players are ready, or should be ready.

When to Assess a Technical Warning or Foul

Referees are empowered to issue Technical Warnings or Technical Fouls for various reasons but it has been unclear exactly when a technical should be announced.

The 2022 rules now make it clear that a referee will not stop a rally to call a technical warning or foul on an offending team.

Tournament Score for a Retirement

The score recorded for a player or team that elects to "retire" from a match has been revised to allow the actual score of the match for that team to be recorded. A team retiring may play additional matches in their bracket if any are warranted.

Official Rules

The Players

Pickleball is a game that requires cooperation and courtesy. A sense of fair play that involves giving the opponent the benefit of any doubt is essential to maintain the game's underlying principles of fun and competition. To that end:

All points played are treated the same, regardless of their importance; the first point of the match is as important as match point.

Either partner in doubles can make calls, especially line calls; there is no place in the game for one partner to tell another, "that was my call, not yours".

Players strive to cooperate when confronted with a situation not covered by the Rulebook. Possible outcomes can be a replay, allowing the rally to stand, or, in extreme cases, asking for a referee to resolve a dispute.

Where possible, rules accommodate players with various adaptive needs

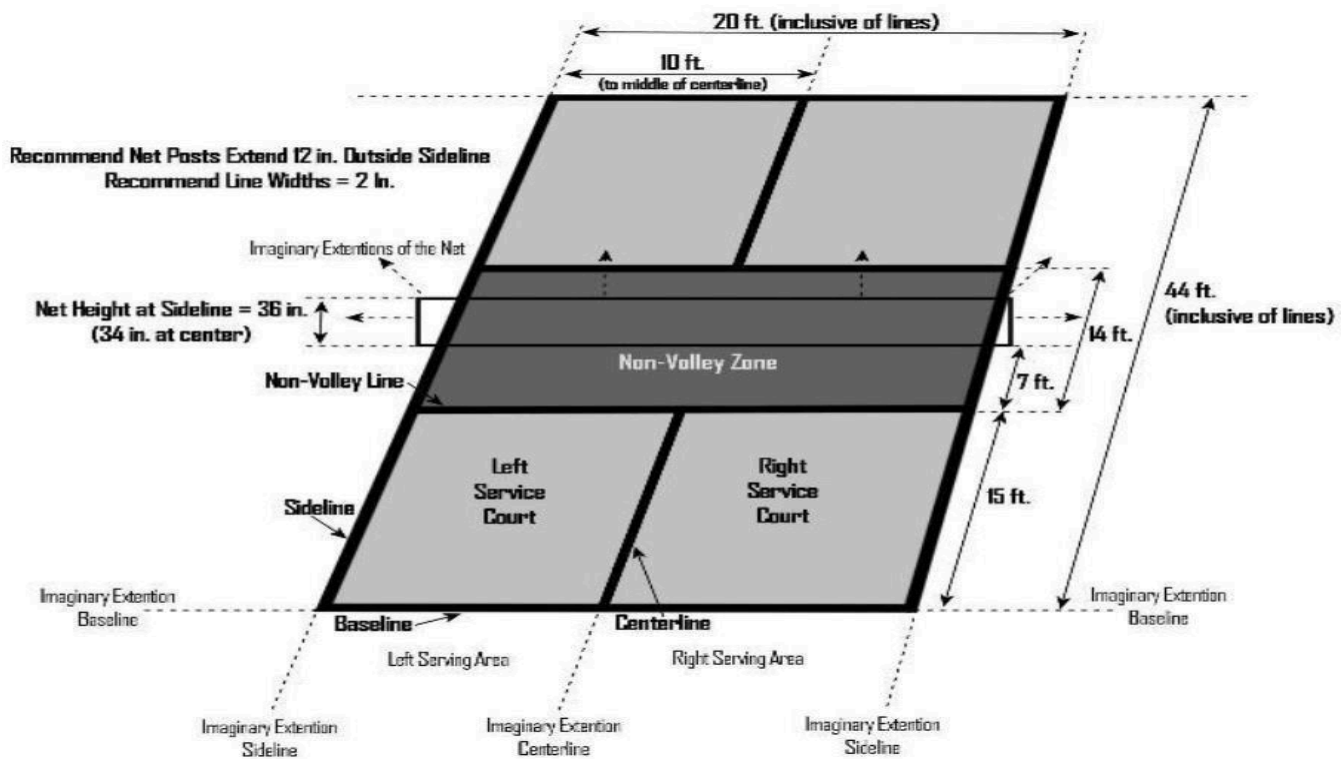
Unique Features

Two-Bounce Rule: After the ball is served, each side must make one groundstroke prior to volleying the ball.

Non-Volley Zone (NVZ): An area that extends 7 feet from the net on each side, within which a player is not allowed to strike the ball without it first bouncing. More specifically, the whole court from net to baseline is the same and can be freely used for all play with one exception: volleying. The first seven feet, the non-volley zone, cannot be used for volleying.

Court & Equipment

The diagram below is an illustration of a court:



Equipment

USA PICKLEBALL/IFP Approved Paddle List – Players are responsible for confirming that the paddle they are using for match play is approved and listed as “Pass” on the USA PICKLEBALL/IFP Approved Paddle List. The link for the approved equipment list below: <https://equipment.usapickleball.org/paddle-list/>

Violations

If at any point during the tournament it is determined that a player is using a paddle that violates any of the paddle specifications or is not listed on the USA PICKLEBALL/IFP Approved Paddle List as Pass, the following penalties apply:

If the violation is identified prior to the match starting, the player may switch to a paddle listed as Pass on the [USA PICKLEBALL/IFP Approved Paddle List](#) without penalty.

If the violation is identified after the match has started, the player or team forfeits only the match being played.

The Serve

The server's arm must be moving in an upward arc when the ball is struck.

Paddle contact with the ball must not be made above the waist level.

The head of the paddle must not be above the highest part of the wrist at contact.

A 'Drop serve' is also permitted, in which case none of the elements above apply.

At the time the ball is struck, the server's feet may not touch the court or outside the imaginary extension of the sideline or centerline, and at least one foot must be behind the baseline on the playing surface or the ground behind the baseline.

The serve is made diagonally crosscourt and must land within the confines of the opposite diagonal court.

Only one serve attempt is allowed per server.

Servers must release the ball from one of the server's hands or drop off the server's paddle face from any natural (unaided) height and hit the ball after the ball bounces.

There is no restriction on how many times the ball can bounce or where the ball can bounce on the playing surface. The server's release of the ball must be visible to the referee and the receiver. In matches without a referee, the server's release of the ball must be visible to the receiver. A replay shall be called before the return of serve if the release of the ball is not visible. The

rules for foot placement still apply.

The ball shall not be propelled (thrown) downward, tossed, or hit upward with the paddle.

If the drop serve is used, the ball may be struck with either a forehand or backhand motion without any other restriction. I.e The location restrictions of the ball and paddle do not apply.

If a referee cannot clearly see that a serve is legal, it is called a fault

Service Sequence

Both players on the serving doubles team have the opportunity to serve and score points until they commit a fault (except for the first service sequence of each new game*).

The first serve of each side-out is made from the right/even court.

If a point is scored, the server switches sides, and the server initiates the next serve from the left/odd court.

As subsequent points are scored, the server continues switching back and forth until a fault is committed and the first server loses the serve.

When the first server loses the serve, the partner then serves from their correct side of the court (except for the first service sequence of the game*).

The second server continues serving until his team commits a fault and loses the serve to the opposing team.

Once the service goes to the opposition (at side out), the first serve is from the right/even court, and both players on that team have the opportunity to serve and score points until their team commits two faults.

In singles, the server serves from the right/even court when his or her score is even and from the left/odd when the score is odd.

At the beginning of each new game, only one partner on the serving team has the opportunity to serve before faulting, after which the service passes to the receiving team.

Scoring

A coin is tossed, and the team that wins the toss decides whether to pick a court side or start the serve. If the toss winning team takes the first serve then the opposition team picks the court side for the match and vice-versa.

Points are scored only by the serving team.

Games are normally played to 11 points; win by 2. The first side scoring 11 points and leading by at least a 2-point margin wins the game. A match is won by the first side to win two (2) out of three (3)

When the serving team's score is even (0, 2, 4, 6, 8, 10...) the player who was the first server in the game for that team will be on the right-side court when serving or receiving; when the score is odd (1, 3, 5, 7, 9...) that player will be on the left-side court when serving or receiving.

Two Bounce Rule

When the ball is served, the receiving team must let it bounce before returning, and then the serving team must let it bounce before returning, thus two bounces.

After the ball has bounced once in each team's court, both teams may either volley the ball (hit the ball before it bounces) or play it off a bounce (ground stroke).

The two-bounce rule eliminates the serve and volley advantage and extends rallies.

Non-Volley Zone

The non-volley zone is the court area within 7 feet on both sides of the net.

Volleying is prohibited within the non-volley zone. This rule prevents players from executing smashes from a position within the zone.

It is a fault if, when volleying a ball, the player steps on the non-volley zone, including the line, and/or when the player's momentum causes them or anything they are wearing or carrying to touch the non-volley zone, including the associated lines.

It is a fault if, after volleying, a player is carried by momentum into or touches the non-volley zone, even if the volleyed ball is declared dead before this happens.

A player may legally be in the non-volley zone at any time other than when volleying a ball.

You can only hit the ball from inside the non-volley zone if it bounces inside the non-volley zone first.

The non-volley zone is commonly referred to as "the kitchen."

Line Calls

A ball contacting any part of any line within the correct service court, except the non-volley zone line, on a serve, is considered "in."

A serve contacting the non-volley zone line is short and a fault.

A ball contacting the playing surface completely outside of the court is "out."

Faults

A fault is any action that stops play because of a rule violation.

A fault by the receiving team results in a point for the serving team.

A fault by the serving team results in the server's loss of serve or side out.

Determining Service Team

Any fair method can be used to determine which player or team has the first choice of side, service, or receive. (Example: Write a 1 or 2 on the back of the score sheet.)

Timeout Rules

Standard Timeout: A player or team is entitled to two timeouts for 11- or 15-point games and three timeouts for a 21-point game.

Each timeout period may last up to 1 minute.

If a team has any remaining timeouts, any player on that team may call a timeout before the next serve occurs.

Before the serve occurs, if a team calls a timeout while having no timeouts

remaining, no penalty shall be called.

The referee will announce when there are 15 seconds remaining. At the end of the timeout period, the referee shall call "time in" and then call the score when all players are (or should be) ready to play.

Medical Timeout: A player needing medical attention during a match should request a medical timeout from the referee. Once the medical timeout has been requested, the following guidelines shall be used:

The referee shall immediately summon on-site medical personnel, or the Tournament Director if no medical personnel are present, to assess the situation and render appropriate first aid.

When medical personnel or the Tournament Director arrive, the referee shall start the 15-minute timer.

If medical personnel, or the Tournament Director if no medical personnel are present, determine that a valid medical condition exists, then that player will be allowed no more than 15 minutes for the medical timeout.

The timeout must be continuous and may last up to 15 minutes. If the player uses fewer than 15 minutes, the remaining time is lost, and no additional medical time will be available to the player during the match.

If the player cannot resume play after the 15-minute medical timeout period, the match will be declared a retirement.

If medical personnel, or the Tournament Director if no medical personnel are present, determine that no valid medical condition exists, the player or team will be charged a standard timeout, if available, and issued a technical warning.

Continuous Play

Play should be continuous, although players are permitted to quickly take a drink or towel off in between rallies as long as, in the judgment of the referee, the flow of the game is not adversely impacted. The referee shall call the score when play should be resumed

Equipment Timeout

Players are expected to keep all apparel and equipment in good playable condition and are expected to use regular timeouts and time between games for adjustments and replacement of equipment. If a player or team is out of timeouts and the referee determines that an equipment change or adjustment is necessary for a fair and safe continuation of the match, the referee may award an equipment timeout of up to 2 minutes.

Time Between Games:

The standard time between games is 2 minutes.

In between games of a match, players may take one or both of their upcoming game's timeouts. The players must inform the referee, or their opponents if there is no referee. If a team returns to play before one (or both) requested timeouts have started, the team retains the timeout(s) for the upcoming game. The normal two minutes in between games will be used before any team-allotted timeouts.

Time Between Matches

The standard time between matches is 10 minutes. If all players are ready to play prior to 10 minutes, the match may be started early.

In a championship match with a tie-breaker match: if the winner of the loser's bracket defeats the winner of the winner's bracket, then a tie-breaker match to 15 points must be played. The standard time between the championship match and the tie-breaker match is 10 minutes.

Other Timeout Rules

Before a match or between games: Neither medical nor regular timeouts may be taken before a match starts. A match cannot begin until all players are present and the starting score is called. timeout(s) may be used before the start of the second or third game in a two-out-of-three game match

Extenuating Circumstances: The referee may call a referee timeout to address extenuating circumstances that may require an extended interruption of play.

In the interest of safety, if the referee determines a potential medical situation exists (for example, heat exhaustion, heat stroke, etc.) and the player is unable to or refuses to call a medical timeout, the referee is authorized to call a referee timeout and summon medical personnel or the Tournament Director. Referee-requested medical timeouts will not be charged against the player.

Foreign substances on the court, such as debris, water, or other fluids, shall be removed or cleaned up.

Other Rules

Double Hit

Balls can be hit twice, but this must occur during an unintentional, continuous, single-direction stroke by one player. If the stroke made while performing the serve or during a rally is deliberately not continuous, not in a single direction, or the ball is struck by a second player, it is a fault.

Switching Hands

A paddle may be switched from hand to hand at any time.

Two-handed shots are allowed.

Plane of the Net

Crossing the plane of the net prior to striking the ball is a fault. After striking the ball, a player or anything the player is/was wearing or carrying may cross the plane of the net. The player may not touch any part of the net system, the opponent's court, or the opponent while the ball is still in play.

Exception: If the ball bounces into a receiving player's court with enough backspin or wind aid to cause it to return to the other side of the net, the receiving player may cross the plane of the net (over, under, or around the net post) to hit the ball. It is a fault if the receiving player (or anything the receiving player is wearing or carrying) crosses the plane of the net before the ball has first crossed back over the plane of the net to the opponent's side. It is a fault if the player touches the net system, the opponent's court, or the opponent while the ball is still in play.

The Net

The net and the wires or strings holding up the net are positioned (mostly) on the court. Therefore, if the ball strikes the top of the net or strikes the top net wire or string and lands inbounds, it remains in play.

If the ball travels between the net and the net post, it is a fault against the

striking player.

A player may travel outside the net post and cross the imaginary extension of the net after striking the ball, provided the player or anything the player is wearing or carrying does not touch the net system or the opponent's court surface.

A player may return the ball around the outside of the net post; the ball is not required to pass over the net but must travel outside the net post and land within the opponent's court.

The player must contact the ball on their side of the net and may not cross the plane of the net prior to striking the ball.

If a player hits the ball over the net into the opponent's court, and then the ball bounces back over the net and bounces a second time without being touched by the opponent, the striking player wins the rally.

For net systems with a horizontal bar that includes a center base:

Before going over the net, if the ball hits the horizontal bar or the center base, it is a fault.

Except on the serve, if the ball goes over the net and hits the center base, any part of the horizontal bar, or the ball gets caught between the net and the horizontal bar, a replay will be called. Other than on the serve, if the ball goes over the net, bounces on the court, and then performs any of the 3 above listed actions, a replay shall occur.

On the serve, if the ball hits the horizontal bar or the center base or gets caught between the net and horizontal bar after going over the net, it is a fault.

Any malfunction of a net system during play shall be considered a hindrance.

Injury and Bleeding

Injury

Should a serious accident occur while the ball is in play, the referee shall stop the match immediately and permit medical assistance to enter the court. A player may not resume play without approval of medical personnel.

Players who are injured but not bleeding will be given two (2) minutes to attend to their injury.

In the event of an injury for a doubles or mixed doubles team, a substitute is not allowed under any circumstances. If one of the players is unable to continue play, the doubles or mixed doubles team shall forfeit the game.

Bleeding

Any player suffering an injury that results in bleeding must leave the court for medical treatment unless the bleeding can be stopped within two (2) minutes.

Play shall be suspended immediately, lasting not more than two (2) minutes and the player shall receive medical treatment.