10 RULES OF TABLE TENNIS

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Abstract. This article examines 10 key rules of table tennis based on the official rules of the International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF). It covers the main aspects of the game, including the serve, return, order of play, scoring points, lets, rules for touching the table and net, equipment requirements, and the expedite system. The article aims to familiarize both beginners and more experienced players with the fundamental rules to ensure fair and competent play. The significance of each rule is analyzed, and examples of its application are provided.

Keywords: table tennis, ping-pong, rules of the game, ITTF, serve, return, point, let, game, match, equipment, expedite system.

Introduction

Table tennis, or ping-pong, is one of the most popular and dynamic sports in the world, requiring not only excellent physical fitness, reaction time, and coordination but also a clear knowledge of the rules. Adherence to the rules ensures the fairness of competitions, helps avoid disputes, and makes the game understandable and exciting for both participants and spectators. Despite its apparent simplicity, table tennis has several nuances regulated by the official rules of the International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF). In this article, we will break down 10 fundamental rules that every player should know.

Main Part

10 Key Rules:

1. The Serve. *Rule:* Service shall start with the ball resting freely on the open palm of the server's stationary free hand. The server shall then project the ball near vertically upwards, without imparting spin, so that it rises at least 16cm after leaving the palm of the free hand. The server shall strike the ball on its way down so that it

touches first his or her court, and then, after passing over or around the net assembly, touches directly the receiver's court. From the start of service until it is struck, the ball shall be above the level of the playing surface and behind the server's end line, and it shall not be hidden from the receiver by the server or his or her doubles partner [1].

For example, Player A serves. They toss the ball insufficiently high (less than 16cm) or hide the ball with their hand during the strike. The umpire or the receiving player (in a game without an umpire) calls a fault, and the point is awarded to the receiver. This is one of the most complex and frequently violated rules, especially at the amateur level. The requirements for the height of the toss, visibility of the ball, and absence of spin on the toss are intended to give the receiver a fair chance to return the serve and prevent the server from gaining an unfair advantage.

2. The Return. *Rule:* the ball, having been served or returned, shall be struck so that it passes over or around the net assembly and touches the opponent's court, either directly or after touching the net assembly [1].

For example, Player B returns the ball served by Player A. The ball hits the net and falls onto Player B's side of the table. Player A wins the point. However, if Player B's ball touches the net but goes over and touches Player A's court, the play continues. This basic rule defines the essence of the rally. It's important to remember that touching the net during a return (unlike a serve, see rule 5) does not result in a let, provided the ball ultimately lands on the opponent's court.

3. The Order of Play. *Rule:* In singles, the server shall first make a service, the receiver shall then make a return and thereafter server and receiver alternately shall each make a return. In doubles, the server of the serving pair shall make a service, the receiver of the receiving pair shall make a return, the partner of the server shall then make a return, the partner of the receiver shall then make a return and thereafter each player in turn in that sequence shall make a return [1].

For example, In a doubles match, pair A1/A2 plays against B1/B2. A1 serves, B1 receives. Then A2 must hit, followed by B2, then A1 again, and so on. If A2 hits instead of A1 after B2's return, pair A1/A2 loses the point. This rule ensures a clear

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sequence of shots, which is especially important in dynamic doubles play where players must coordinate their actions and movements.

4. A Point. _Rule:_ Unless the rally is a let, a player shall score a point if: an opponent fails to make a correct service; an opponent fails to make a correct return; the ball, after it has been served or returned by an opponent, passes over his or her court or beyond his or her end line without touching his or her court; an opponent obstructs the ball (touches the ball before it has passed over or touched his or her court, provided the ball is travelling towards the playing surface); an opponent strikes the ball twice successively; an opponent, or anything an opponent wears or carries, moves the playing surface; an opponent, or anything an opponent wears or carries, touches the net assembly; an opponent's free hand touches the playing surface; in doubles, an opponent strikes the ball out of sequence; as provided under the expedite system [1].

For example, Player A executes a powerful shot. Player B attempts to return the ball but misses, and the ball does not touch the table. The point is awarded to Player A. Another example: during a rally, Player B accidentally touches the net with their hand. The point is immediately awarded to Player A. Knowing how points are scored is fundamental to the game. Most situations are intuitive (missing the ball, hitting the net), but some, like touching the table with the free hand or incorrect sequence in doubles, require special attention.

5. A Let. _Rule:_ The rally shall be a let: if in service the ball, in passing over or around the net assembly, touches it, provided the service is otherwise correct or the ball is obstructed by the receiver or his or her partner; if the service is delivered when the receiving player or pair is not ready, provided that neither the receiver nor his or her partner attempts to strike the ball; if failure to make a service or a return or otherwise to comply with the Laws is due to a disturbance outside the control of the player (e.g., the lights suddenly go out); if play is interrupted by the umpire or assistant umpire [1].

For example, Player A serves. The ball touches the net but goes over and lands on Player B's side of the table. This is a «let», and the serve is replayed. If the ball,

after touching the net, had fallen onto the floor or Player A's side, A would have lost the point. The «let» rule for a serve touching the net is one of the most well-known. It gives the server a second chance on a technically correct serve that was affected by the net. It's crucial to distinguish this from touching the net during a return (see rule 2), which is not grounds for a let.

6. A Game. *Rule:* A game shall be won by the player or pair first scoring 11 points unless both players or pairs score 10 points, when the game shall be won by the player or pair first subsequently gaining a lead of 2 points [1].

For example, The score is 10-10. Player A wins the next rally, score 11-10. Play continues. Player A wins the next rally as well, score 12-10. Player A wins the game. If, at 11-10, Player B had won the rally, the score would have become 11-11, and play would continue until a 2-point lead is established. The scoring system up to 11 points (previously 21) makes the game more dynamic and tense. The rule requiring a 2-point advantage at 10-10 ("deuce") adds intrigue to the end of the game.

7. A Match. *Rule:* A match shall consist of the best of any odd number of games (e.g., best of 3, 5, or 7). The winner is the player or pair who wins more than half the maximum possible number of games [1].

For example, A match is played as the best of 5 games. Player A wins the first 3 games. The match ends with a score of 3-0 in favor of A, even though the 4th and 5th games were not played. The match format determines the overall duration and strategy of the game. Players must manage their energy for the entire match, not just a single game.

8. Touching the Table or Net. *Rule:* A player loses a point if they, their racket, or anything they wear or carry touches the net assembly while the ball is in play. A player also loses a point if their free hand touches the playing surface while the ball is in play [1].

For example, While trying to reach a short ball, Player A leans on the table with their free hand (the one not holding the racket). Play stops immediately, and the point is awarded to the opponent. These rules are designed to prevent gaining an

advantage by leaning on the table or interfering with play near the net. Touching the table with the racket hand (up to the wrist) is permitted.

9. Equipment (Racket and Ball). _Rule:_ The racket may be of any size, shape, or weight, but the blade shall be flat and rigid. At least 85% of the blade by thickness shall be of natural wood. An adhesive layer within the blade may be reinforced with fibrous material. A side of the blade used for striking the ball shall be covered with either ordinary pimpled rubber (pimples outwards or inwards) in a single layer or sandwich rubber. The covering material on one side shall be bright red and on the other black. The ball shall be spherical, with a diameter of 40mm, weigh 2.7g, be made of celluloid or similar plastics material, and be white or orange, and matt [1].

For example, A player arrives at a competition with a racket that has black rubber on both sides. The umpire will not allow the use of such a racket as it does not comply with the rules. Equipment standardization ensures a level playing field for all players and predictable ball behavior. The requirement for different colored rubbers allows the opponent to more easily identify the type of spin imparted on the ball.

10. The Expedite System. _Rule:_ The expedite system shall come into operation if a game is unfinished after 10 minutes' play (or at any time requested by both players or pairs). Once the expedite system is in operation, each player shall serve for 1 point in turn. If the receiving player or pair makes 13 correct returns in a rally, the receiver shall score a point. The system remains in operation until the end of the match [1].

For example, A game has been in progress for 10 minutes, the score is 8-8. The umpire announces the implementation of the expedite system. Now, each player serves only one point in turn. In one rally, Player B (the receiver) successfully returns 13 shots from Player A. The rally stops, and the point is awarded to Player B. This rule was introduced to combat excessively long games, especially involving defensive players. It encourages more active play and ensures games conclude within a reasonable timeframe.

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Conclusion

Knowing and understanding the rules of table tennis is an integral part of the game, allowing not only for fair competition but also for greater enjoyment of the process. The 10 rules discussed cover the main aspects of the game, from the serve to determining the match winner. Adherence to these rules, whether in a friendly match or an official tournament, fosters respect between opponents and enhances the overall culture of table tennis. Remember that a detailed study of the official ITTF rules will help resolve any disputes and provide a deeper understanding of all the intricacies of this fascinating game.

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