



GLOBAL PICKLEBALL  
FEDERATION

# **USA PICKLEBALL OFFICIAL REFEREE CASEBOOK**

# **2024 USA Pickleball Official Referee Casebook**

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USA PICKLEBALL ASSOCIATION**

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## FOREWORD

The 2024 USA Pickleball Official Referee Casebook is the official supplement to the USA Pickleball and IFP Official Rulebook. The Casebook is intended for those who officiate the sport, those who are learning to officiate and those players and fans that desire a better understanding of the rules of pickleball.

The Casebook contains accounts of actual scenarios where there was a question as to what rules apply to the situation and the appropriate ruling. Players, referees, and fans can contribute scenarios for possible inclusion in the Casebook. Those scenarios appropriate for the Casebook will then be submitted to the USA Pickleball Rules Committee for consideration. Only those scenarios whose rulings and interpretations have been approved by the Rules Committee will be included in the Casebook.

Proposed scenarios may be submitted at any time via email to the USA Pickleball Director of Officiating.

### Format

The Casebook is divided into two Sections. Section I, 2024 Casebook Topics, contains new topics that have been approved since the previous Casebook edition. Section II contains existing topics from the previous edition. The existing topics have been edited where necessary to reflect the 2024 rules and rule numbers.

Each Casebook item is uniquely numbered by year (e.g., Case 1-23 was first case in 2023 (deleted in August 2023 based on a mid-year rule change), Case 2-23 is the second case in 2023, Case 1-21 was the first case in 2021, etc.) Each is labeled by topic in order to identify the essential topic. All applicable rule numbers are then identified. There is no attempt to arrange the cases numerically by rule number, as there are often multiple rules related to the scenario. The description of the topic is intended to be the primary identifier for the reader to navigate the Casebook.

Each scenario is described in detail followed by the appropriate ruling. Some topics will have a 'Comment' paragraph, which is intended to give additional information related to the scenario or insight into the ruling and the spirit and intent of the rules.

Scenarios will always consist of teams playing doubles unless otherwise noted. In doubles, Team A will have A1 and A2 as partners while Team B will consist of B1 and B2 as partners. Any scenario action by the referee or players that is not specifically mentioned as being illegal can be assumed to be legal. For example, if the scenario begins with "Player A2 served. ", and nothing more was noted about the serve or server, the assumption is that the score was correctly called, the server and receiver were both correct and ready, and the serve was legal.

### Navigation Tools

Each entry in the Table of Contents is a hyperlink. Clicking anywhere on the topic name takes the reader to that specific case. The referenced rule number in each case is a hyperlink to the [2024 USA Pickleball/IFP Official Rulebook](#).

The index lists rule numbers in numerical order and the cases to which the rule is applicable for those who wish to search for all cases that relate to a specific rule.

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No new cases at this time.

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## SECTION I – 2024 CASEBOOK TOPICS

No new cases currently

## SECTION II – EXISTING CASEBOOK TOPICS

### CASE 4-23: COIN FLIP TO DETERMINE MATCH WINNER

**Applicable Rule(s):** [13.H.4](#); [13.A.1](#)

**SCENARIO:** In a doubles match, 2 out of 3 games, only one of the four players is present at the 10-minute mark. All of the appropriate notifications were made for second and/or final call. At 10 minutes, both teams are assessed a game forfeit. At 15 minutes, three of the four players have not reported, so both teams are assessed a match forfeit. How is the match winner determined?

**RULING:** The Tournament Director, or the Tournament Director's designee, will conduct a coin toss to determine the match winner.

**COMMENT:** The rules do not provide a formal tiebreaker method for this rare situation. Since a winner must be determined, a coin toss is a fair and equitable way to determine the winner.

**NOTE:** *The scenario would be the same if none of the players reported in time, if only one player reported in time, or if only one player from each team reported in time.*

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### CASE 5-23: RESCINDING A REQUESTED MEDICAL TIME-OUT

**NOTE:** *The ruling on this case has been revised for 2024 based on the USA Pickleball Rules Committee's action to require that the medical time-out be assessed. The case previously stated that neither a medical time-out or a regular time-out would be assessed.*

**Applicable Rule(s):** [10.B](#)

**SCENARIO:** A player requests a medical time-out and the referee summons the medical personnel. After several minutes, and before medical personnel have arrived, the player declares she can resume play. The player claims that a medical time-out should not be assessed because medical personnel have not arrived yet. The opponent claims that the medical time-out should be assessed or, at the very least, a regular time-out should be assessed.

**RULING:** The player is assessed the medical time-out. Play is resumed in accordance with Rule 10.A.5.

**COMMENT:** The player requested a medical time-out, medical personnel were summoned, and the player benefitted from the play stoppage. The medical time-out is therefore charged to the player.

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## CASE 6-23: PADDLE TOSS OR THROW

**NOTE:** The purpose of this casebook entry is to provide better consistency on how the referee addresses paddle tosses, throws or drops. It is reasonable and appropriate to allow players to vent a certain level of frustration without penalty, which can include some paddle tosses, even mildly aggressive ones. The referee is still authorized to determine whether the paddle toss was unsportsmanlike or, combined with other circumstances, warrants an appropriate penalty.

**Applicable Rule(s):** under Rule [13.G.1](#), [13.G.1.i](#), [13.G.2.a](#)

13.G.1 authorizes the referee to issue a verbal warning for behavior that could escalate to a level that calls for a more severe penalty, or behavior that should not be repeated.

13.G.1.i authorizes the referee to issue a technical warning for minor unsportsmanlike behavior.

13.G.2.a authorizes the referee to issue a technical foul for an aggressive or reckless paddle throw that shows disregard for consequences but which does not strike another person or damage property.

**SCENARIO ONE:** After a timeout has been called, a player at the NVZ casually tosses their paddle to the baseline to mark their position for the next rally.

**RULING:** This is allowed. **No penalty is assessed.**

**SCENARIO TWO:** After losing a rally, the player yells 'Timeout!'. Clearly frustrated, they toss the paddle with some aggression from the NVZ to the baseline to mark their position for the next rally, then they storm off the court. The paddle may bounce, but it lands at the baseline and does not come close to any players or court fixtures.

**RULING:** No penalty is assessed, unless the referee determines that the action rises to the level of 'minor unsportsmanlike' behavior and **assesses a verbal warning or technical warning.**

**SCENARIO THREE:** After losing a rally, the player throws their paddle with some force at their feet directly in front of them. The paddle bounces loudly once or twice but stays in the general location of the player. No other players are around. The court is not damaged.

**RULING:** Since the paddle was thrown with some force, it is appropriate in this situation **to assess a verbal warning** for minor unsportsmanlike behavior, **or a technical warning** if the referee determines that the extent of force of the throw and the player's body language rises to the level that warrants the more severe penalty.

**SCENARIO FOUR:** After losing a rally, the player yells 'timeout' then throws their paddle with some force against the fence by their towel or water bottle, hard enough to be easily seen and heard. Spectators are on the other side of the fence. The paddle lands by their towel or water bottle.

**RULING:** It is appropriate in this situation **to assess a technical warning** for minor unsportsmanlike behavior **or a technical foul** if the referee determines that the extent of force

of the throw and the player's body language rises to the level that warrants the more severe penalty.

**SCENARIO FIVE:** After losing a rally, the player throws their paddle with some force against a wall, fence, or the net. The paddle rebounds in an obvious random direction.

**RULING:** It is appropriate in this situation **to assess a technical foul** for throwing the paddle with negligent disregard for the consequences.

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## **CASE 7-23: PLAYER ACTIONS AFTER THE SCORE IS CALLED**

**Applicable Rule(s):** [3.A.7](#); [4.B.8](#); [13.C.5.h](#); [13.G.1.e](#)

**SCENARIO ONE:** The referee calls the correct score. As the server starts their service motion but before the serve is hit, the receiver says "Wait, wait" and says they did not hear the score and therefore did not know if the correct score was called. The server claims that a distraction should be called because they were about to hit the ball to make the serve. What should the referee do?

**RULING:** The referee will stop play and re-call the score to start play.

**COMMENT:** The referee must always first acknowledge the play stoppage and then deal with the reason. In this case, asking for clarification of the score before the serve is hit is a legitimate question. This does not constitute a distraction since the question and its timing is common to the game and, since the serve was not hit, it did not interfere with the server's ability to hit the ball.

**SCENARIO TWO:** After the referee has called the score and before the ball is served, one of the receivers says "Wait, wait" and the receivers begin talking to each other without saying anything else to the referee. The referee stops play and asks why they said, "Wait, wait" and is told they needed to talk to each other. Nothing occurred that would constitute a hinder. What should the referee do?

**RULING:** The referee will stop play, issue a delay of game warning, and re-call the score to start play.

**COMMENT:** As in Scenario One, the referee must acknowledge the play stoppage and deal with the reason. In this case, when the player's actions constitute an unreasonable delay, the referee will issue a warning and recall the score to start the rally. The extent of warning (i.e., VW or TW) is the referee's discretion based on the circumstances involved.

**NOTE:** In Scenario Two, if the play stoppage occurred after the ball was served and before the return of serve, the referee would call a fault because the only allowable reason to stop play after the serve is hit and before the return of serve is to question or clarify the score call or for a hinder.

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## CASE 8-23: RE-ESTABLISHING AFTER CONTACTING THE NON-VOLLEY ZONE

**Applicable Rule(s):** [9.D](#)

**SCENARIO:** All four players are dinking at the NVZ. Player A1 attempts a high lob causing Player B1 to hit a volley in return. During the execution of the volley, Player B1 has her right foot on the ground outside the NVZ while the left foot is still touching the NVZ. Her left foot pushes off from the NVZ line back and away from the NVZ and the edge of her left heel touches the ground outside of the NVZ before hitting the volley. No other portion of either foot is now touching the NVZ.

**RULING:** There is no NVZ fault. The volley shot was legal.

**COMMENT:** After a player contacts the NVZ, Rule 9.D states that a volley shot cannot be made until *“both feet have made contact with the playing surface completely outside the non-volley zone.”* In this case, which is a typical push-off from the NVZ, once the entire foot is clear of the NVZ and any part of the player’s second foot touched the ground outside the NVZ before the volley was struck, the volley shot was legal. The rule does not require that the entire foot be placed on the ground in order to satisfy Rule 9.D.

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## CASE 9-23: QUESTIONABLE SERVE, SERVED BALL LANDS OUT

**Applicable Rule(s):** [4.A.9](#)

**SCENARIO:** A player makes a serve with a service motion that the referee deems questionable and intends to call for a replay under Rule 4.A.9. The served ball lands outside the receiver’s service court. Which action takes precedence, the replay or a service fault for serving out of bounds?

**RULING:** The action that the referee observes as the basis for a replay under Rule 4.A.9 occurred before the ball landed out of bounds. Therefore, calling for the replay takes precedence.

**COMMENT:** This is same as would apply if the player made a serve that the referee is certain was illegal and warrants a service fault call. In both cases, the referee must not wait for the serve to land before making the call. It is expected that the referee’s call, whether it is a replay or a fault, will be made promptly and decisively before the served ball lands.

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## CASE 13-23: LINE CALL APPEALS AFTER A DEAD BALL

**Applicable Rule(s):** [6.C.7. 6.C.3](#)

**SCENARIO:** Players A1 and A2 are playing against B1 and B2. Player A1 serves to B1. The ball lands near the feet of B1, who plays the ball. The return of serve by B1 goes over the net and lands wide, whereupon A2 calls the ball out. Player B2 then asks the referee if they saw the serve that landed at the feet of B1, questioning whether or not A1’s serve hit out of bounds.



**RULING:** The referee cannot rule on the player's question because Team B never made an 'out' call of the serve. Team B cannot play the ball (as they did), and then question the serve by A1 after the outcome of player B1's return of serve is known/determined. Rule 6.C.7 provides that any 'out' call by Team B must be made before either the ball becomes dead or before Team A plays the ball. Neither happened in this case. The return of serve by B1 became dead as soon as the ball bounced and Team A called it 'out', so any 'out' call by Team B of A1's serve was required before Team A called B1's return of serve 'out'.

**COMMENT:** There are two underlying principles in this scenario. The first is that line call appeals to the referee can only be made when the ball is dead. Questioning the referee about balls that have bounced during live play will be ignored by the referee. The second is the two-chance option. Some refer to this by the idioms 'two bites of the apple' or 'having your cake and eating it too'. No matter what it is called, it results in an unfair advantage if allowed to occur.

Here is why it is unfair: If a player chooses to keep the ball in play by returning the shot and to not make an 'out' call in the proper time frame, the player has made their choice and must live with the result of their decision. If the player's shot results in a fault (landing out of bounds, going into the net and hitting the ground, hitting a permanent object, etc.), they cannot now go back in time and ask the referee for a second chance to win the rally.

Complicating this scenario for some is Rule 6.C.3, specifically the fourth sentence:

"A player who does not make a call may appeal to the referee to make the call if they did not clearly see the ball land."

The fourth sentence in Rule 6.C.3 was written to apply in the case where a ball lands, and it subsequently becomes dead because no play is made on the ball. We now have a dead ball and an 'in' ruling which the player may appeal to the referee. In the scenario above, if Team B had not returned the serve, instead letting it become dead by bouncing twice, then they could have invoked Rule 6.C.3 and asked the referee to rule on the bounce being 'in' or 'out' because Team B did not see where the ball landed. Alternatively, Team B could have made an 'out' call on A1's serve and then either appealed their call to the referee, appealed their call to the opponent, or overruled their 'out' call to their disadvantage if they thought it was actually 'in'.

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## **CASE 14-23: DUAL NVZ MOMENTUM FAULTS**

**Applicable Rule(s):** [9.B.1](#); [9.C](#)

**SCENARIO:** Player A is near the non-volley zone (NVZ) and volleys the ball toward Player B but starts to windmill in an effort to stop his momentum from the volley. Player B, also near the NVZ, then volleys a return shot and begins to windmill to stop her momentum. With both players simultaneously trying to stop their momentum, Player B fails and steps into the NVZ after which Player A fails and steps into the NVZ. Which player committed the fault?

**RULING:** Player A is charged with the fault.

**COMMENT:** When both teams commit a fault, the referee will call the fault that was committed first. When momentum is involved in a volley shot, Rule 9.B states that the “act of volleying” includes the span of time during which momentum occurs. The infraction is the faulty act of volleying. The act of volleying starts when the volley is struck and ends when contact with the NVZ occurs. In this scenario, the fault is assessed against Player A because their act of volleying started before Player B’s started. The fact that Player B’s act of volleying ended first is irrelevant.

**NOTE:** There are several observations and variations of this scenario that are notable:

1. The referee’s priority is to focus on the player that first initiated a volley, in this case Player A. The correct call depends on the outcome of that player’s act of volleying. The referee can rely on their peripheral vision to detect Player B’s volley and momentum situation, and other action that may occur.
  2. In this case, Player A eventually contacted the NVZ and therefore is called for the fault. If Player A had eventually regained control of their momentum without contacting the NVZ, then they did not commit a fault and Player B would be called for their NVZ momentum fault. If both players eventually regained control of their momentum without contacting the NVZ, then neither will have committed a fault and the outcome of the rally will be determined by how the ball became dead (i.e., the ball was out, hit into the net, hit a permanent object, bounced twice, etc.)
  3. The momentum condition from a volley continues through any subsequent dead ball or play stoppage. If play stops for any reason, including an out call, a dead ball, or the referee calling Player B’s NVZ fault, the referee must observe the outcome of Player A’s momentum to determine the correct fault call as described in #2 above.
  4. In the original scenario, when the referee observes Player B’s NVZ fault, the referee must announce Player B’s NVZ fault while continuing to watch Player A’s momentum. A player may perceive this as stopping play, but the momentum conditions continue as explained in #3 above and the referee will eventually determine which fault takes precedence as explained in #2 above.
  5. In the original scenario, if Player B was in contact with the NVZ when their volley was struck, the outcome would be the same. Their volley will have ended even sooner than if they had a momentum issue, but the fault call remains against Player A based on when each act of volleying started.
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## **CASE 15-23: RECEIVER’S PARTNER POACHES THE SERVE**

**Applicable rule(s):** [4.B.9.a](#)

**SCENARIO:** Players are correctly positioned to start the rally per rule 4.B.7. The served ball clips the net, just barely clears the non-volley zone (NVZ) line and lands in the correct service court. The receiver’s partner, positioned at the NVZ line, reaches over and hits the ball back over the net. What is the call?

**RULING:** The referee will stop play, call a replay, and issue a warning.

**COMMENT:** Per rule 4.B.9.a, it is a replay when the incorrect receiver returns the ball. A warning is appropriate to prevent intentional abuse of the rule. The extent of warning is the referee's discretion based on the circumstances involved

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## **CASE 1-22: DEFLECTING NET CONTACTS A PLAYER**

**Applicable Rule(s):** [11.L.5.d](#); [7.G](#)

**SCENARIO:** Player A1 is dinking with Player B1. Player A1 hits a dink that takes them into the non-volley zone very close to the net. Player B1 goes to return the ball but hits it hard into the net, causing the net to stretch and touch Player A1's paddle. The ball drops on Player B1's side without going over the net.

**RULING:** Because the net moved and flexed to the point it contacted Player A1, this should be considered a hinder in accordance with Rule 11.L.5.d (net malfunction). A replay should be granted.

**COMMENT:** Players should have a reasonable expectation that court equipment will function as designed and that the equipment will not move or flex excessively during play. Players cannot be expected to anticipate how much a net can flex from an independent, transient action. Such transient actions include a ball hitting the net or the wind blowing hard enough that the net billows out. Play should normally continue, but if the net malfunctions to the point that it contacts a player, then a replay should be granted. Replays are also granted for other transient, unexpected net malfunctions, such as when a temporary net moves from its normal position on the court due to wind or the ball hits the center pole if it protrudes up through the top of the net.

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## **CASE 2-22: BALL CONTACTS A PLAYER'S HAT**

**Applicable Rule(s):** [7.H](#); [11.H](#)

**SCENARIO:** A player makes a quick move to make a play on the ball. In the process, the player's hat slips off her head. The ball hits the hat before the hat lands on the court.

**RULING:** Because the hat has not yet landed on the court, the hat is still considered part of the player, even though it is not on the head. Accordingly, it is a fault on the player whose hat was hit by the ball. (*Rule 7.H*) If the hat lands on the court before being hit by the ball, the hat becomes part of the court, and the ball remains in play. (*Rule 11.H*)

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## **CASE 3-22: CALLING TIME-OUT TO GET THE REFEREE'S ATTENTION**

**Applicable Rule(s):** [4.B.8](#); [10.A](#)

**SCENARIO:** A player wants to get the referee's attention quickly to ask a question and says "time-out". The referee hears the time out call and starts to follow standard time-out

procedures. The player tells the referee that he just wanted to ask a question before the serve and not take an official time-out.

**RULING:** Since the player was just trying to get the referee's attention, the referee should answer the player's question and recall the score to resume play.

**COMMENT:** In this scenario, the phrase "time-out" is just being used to get the referee's attention and not to call for an official time-out. While other phrases are preferred to get the referee's attention, the referee should not charge a time-out to the player when their intention is to simply ask a question or make an appeal.

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## **CASE 5-22: BALL TRAVELS BETWEEN THE NET AND NET POST AFTER LANDING**

**Applicable Rule(s):** [7.C](#); [11.I.1](#)

**NOTE:** Rule 7.C establishes a fault for hitting the ball under the net or between the net and the net post. The question arises what happens after a shot hits the opponent's court with enough backspin to travel back between the net post and net. Is it fault on the striking player? This case answers the question.

**SCENARIO:** Team A hits a ball across the net. The ball lands in bounds on Team B's court but with enough backspin (or due to the wind) that the ball travels back through the gap between the net and the net post.

**RULING:** Team A has executed a legal shot by hitting the ball across the net and in bounds. Team B must make a play on the ball before the ball either hits a permanent object, bounces twice, or otherwise becomes dead. In this scenario, Team B did not make a play before the ball traveled through the gap between the net and net post. Team B may, however, reach over, under or around the net to make a play on the ball as provided for in Rule 11.I.1.

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## **CASE 6-22: RECORDING THE PENALTY FOR A TECHNICAL FOUL**

**NOTE:** These scenarios examine what happens when a technical foul and a fault happens in close proximity to one another. They describe how to record the penalty based on the timing of the technical foul in relation to the fault. The timing is important because of the impact on which player serves and from what position.

**Applicable Rule(s):** [13.G.2.a](#); [13.G.2.b](#); [13.G.3.e](#); [3.A.43](#)

**SCENARIO ONE:** Player A1 is serving with the score 0-8-2 and serves the ball into the net. The ball hits the ground and the referee announces "side out." Player A1 then turns and aggressively throws the paddle in frustration causing it to break. The referee appropriately announces "technical foul, unsportsmanlike conduct." (*Rule 13.G.2.a*)

**RULING:** The service fault results in a side out, so the referee must determine which event to record first, the technical foul penalty or the side out. In this case, the rally ended before Player A threw the paddle, so the proper sequence is to record the side out first and then record the technical foul penalty. The moment the rally ended, the status of play immediately became

Player B1 (who is Team B's starting server) serving from the right service area with the score 8-0-1. Since Team A had a score of zero, one point is awarded to Team B. (*Rule 3.A.43*) The serve still belongs to Player B1, but since the point was awarded to them after the side out occurred, the score is now 9-0-1 and Player B1 must serve from the left service area. This breaks with the convention that the first server after a side out always serves from the right service area, but it is consistent with how a technical foul that occurs at any other point in a game would be recorded. A point added to or subtracted from a serving team's score does not affect who the server is. The serving team simply reacts to the change in points by adjusting the server's position. The same holds true in this case. Player B1 was the correct server after the side out (before the technical foul), so B1 remains the server after the technical foul is recorded and serves from the left service area.

**SCENARIO TWO:** Player A1 serves with the score 0-8-2. Team B returns the serve. Player A2 then mishits a very high third shot lob that is clearly going to be out of bounds. While the ball is in the air, Player A2 in frustration screams an extremely objectionable profanity. By rule, the referee must always wait until the rally ends to call a technical foul. (*Rule 13.G.3.e*) So here, after Team B makes the "out" call the referee announces "technical foul" first and then "side out." (*Rule 13.G.2.b*)

**RULING:** As with Scenario One, the referee must determine which event to record first, the technical foul penalty first or the side out. In this case, the Player A2 uttered the profanity before the rally ended, so the proper sequence is to record the technical foul penalty first and then record the side out. One point is added to Team B, giving them nine points. The side out is then recorded, which means the serve goes over to Team B with the score 9-0-1. Player B1 is Team B's starting server, so the next rally begins with Player B2 serving from the right service area at 9-0-1.

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## **CASE 1-21: MULTIPLE SIMULTANEOUS FAULTS**

**Applicable Rule(s):** [4.A.4.b](#); [4.A.9](#); [4.M.7](#); [4.M.10](#)

**SCENARIO:** The score is called, and the server's foot simultaneously touches the baseline and uses an illegal service motion, both of which the referee sees. What should the referee do?

**RULING:** The referee must immediately call "*Service foot fault; and illegal service motion.*" This approach informs the player both infractions. It may appear sufficient to identify one of the faults since only one fault is charged to the team for scoring purposes. However, both faults must be called.

**COMMENT:** The guiding principle is that the referee must identify all violations as soon as they are realized. For example, if only the service foot fault was called, the player would not know they need to correct the illegal service motion and might commit the same fault on the next rally.

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9.C	<a href="#">14-23</a>	13.H.4	<a href="#">4-23</a>



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F E D E R A T I O N

