



USAPA/IFP Line Judge Guide

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Introduction and Purpose

Line judges play an important role in officiating pickleball medal matches [Rule 14.C]. The job entails more than staring at the assigned line and calling balls “out.” Although calling the assigned line is the primary responsibility, a line judge is a vital component of the officiating team and at any time may be asked for his/her opinion regarding other actions that occur during the match [Rule 14.I].

Generally, line judges are used only during medal matches [Rule 14.E.a], and even then it may be only during Gold Medal matches. This typically is due to a shortage of people willing to line judge -- not to mention *qualified* people willing to line judge. One reason for the shortage is that medal matches routinely take place later in the day when players who have been eliminated from competition have departed the venue. Another reason is the absence of documented standards and procedures that clearly explain the line judge’s tasks. This *Line Judge Guide* is intended to change that.

This Line Judge Guide contains the USAPA/IFP standards and procedures for line judging and the responsibilities of referees working in unison with line judges. Duplicate information is contained in the *USAPA Referee Handbook* and *Referee Trainer Guide*.

In many cases the need for line judges is filled by pleading for anyone not playing in a match to man a line judge position. Due to a shortage of line judge candidates the person who ultimately volunteers may or may not be qualified. Generally, lack of qualification is overlooked just to fill the position.

This Guide provides detailed instruction for how to competently perform line judging tasks. It is the intent of this Guide to establish standardization and consistency in how line judges are trained and how they perform their duties on the court. This will result in more knowledgeable and better prepared line judges, and standardization in how pickleball tournaments are officiated. Well trained and better prepared line judges will eliminate much of the frustration often experienced by players, spectators and referees alike during medal match competition. Having clear, concise instruction should increase the number of players and spectators willing to volunteer to line judge. And those who do will be better able to perform the tasks in a standardized and consistent manner.

To test your knowledge of line judging standards and procedures take the 25-question *Line Judge Quiz* at usapa.org under the *Rules & Referees/Rules Test* dropdown menu.

Referees Working with Line Judges

The referee is responsible for controlling all aspects of the match; that includes overseeing the line judges. Prior to the match the referee should review with line judges their responsibilities and reiterate the line-calling procedures. Line judges should be reminded that out of habit players often continue to make their own “out” calls and that the line judge should not be influenced by that or spectators blurting out line calls.

At the beginning of each game and after timeouts and other breaks in the game referees are to confirm the readiness of each line judge. Play should not resume until all line judges are in position and prepared to make line calls.

Before the match line judges should be instructed to be alert and aware of all action on the court. In situations in which the referee did not have a clear, certain view, or the line judge had a better view, the referee is encouraged to seek the opinion of the line judge(s); they are an important part of the officiating team.

Line judges who do not make their calls **loudly, clearly and immediately**, and **both verbally and visually**, should be reminded of the standard procedures. The referee, in concert with the tournament director, has the authority and responsibility to replace any line judge who does not perform to standards [Rule 14.L]. Accurate line calls are imperative.

Line Judge Code of Conduct

Like referees, line judges must adhere to a *Code of Conduct*. It is important that line judges:

- Be professional.
 - Avoid overfriendliness with players and spectators while on duty.
 - Treat players, referees and spectators with respect.
 - Avoid emotional reactions, either positive or negative, to the play of either side.
 - Do not comment, either positively or negatively, regarding the play of either side.
 - Avoid anger or confrontation if challenged.
 - Avoid being argumentative.
- Be attentive and alert, and devote full attention to the match being judged.
- Do not converse with spectators during the match.
- Turn off cell phone while on duty.
- Make all calls impartially, fairly and consistently.
- Refrain from volunteering to line judge a match in which a spouse, playing partner or close friend are participating.

Line Judge Positioning and Responsibilities

Line Judge Positioning

The tournament director and/or referee coordinator determine the number of line judges for each match and, along with the referee, their positioning.

1. A line judge may be assigned to each baseline and each full sideline (4 line judges).
2. A separate line judge may be assigned for each half of each sideline, plus baseline judges (6 line judges).
3. A line judge may be assigned to each baseline and an additional referee assigned opposite the lead referee. In this configuration the referees call the sidelines on their respective sides of the court (2 baseline judges and 2 referees). This configuration typically is used only when the court layout prohibits placing a line judge at the end of each sideline.

Line judges should sit or stand directly in line with the assigned boundary line. Look over a fence rather than through it, if possible. Secondary to focusing on the line, be alert and aware of the action on the court in case the referee seeks your opinion.

Ball Line Calls

Line judges make “out” calls for their assigned line. If the ball contacts the line or lands inside the line it is not out and no call is made. If the ball contacts the playing surface outside the line (away from the court) it is out and an “out” call is made.

Aside from making the appropriate ball line calls, depending on the line you are assigned, watch for the following:

Service Foot Faults

- Baseline judges call service foot faults when during the serve, when the ball is struck, the server’s feet:
 - Touch the court, including the baseline [Rule 4.D.3]
 - Touch the area outside the imaginary extension of the centerline [Rule 4.D.2]
- Sideline judges call sideline service foot faults when during the serve, when the ball is struck, the server’s feet:
 - Touch the area outside the imaginary extension of the sideline. [Rule 4.D.1]

Although line judges are charged with calling service foot faults, the ultimate, overriding responsibility lies with the referee.

Appeals in Motion: Players have the option of raising their non-paddle hand above their head to signal that at the end of the rally they plan to appeal something that occurred during a rally. You should be aware of this option and mentally make note if you see an appeal in motion signaled. At the same time you should make a mental note of any occurrence that might warrant an appeal – uncalled double bounce, ball contacting player’s body, etc.

When the player appeals at the end of the rally you may be asked by the referee for an opinion regarding the appeal signal and/or the occurrence being appealed. The referee may not have seen the appeal signal or may not have been in the best position to observe the activity being appealed. If you did observe the above and have input to the resolution, **if asked** by the referee, share that information. Do not offer an opinion unless asked by the referee.

Sideline NVZ Faults

Sideline judges should be the referee's second set of eyes watching for NVZ sideline violations when a player goes around or through the NVZ to volley a ball [Rule 9.D]:

- **Referee has the responsibility to call a violation, but may seek the opinion of a line judge.**
- Jumping across NVZ -- cannot touch NVZ or post/net – line judges watch sideline for NVZ foot faults.
- Stepping through NVZ -- both feet must contact surface outside NVZ before ball can be legally contacted – line judges watch sidelines for NVZ foot faults.
- There are other elements that come into play with this type of action; elements that the line judge may not be in a position to see. Therefore, **the line judge expresses an opinion only when solicited by the referee.**

Around the Post Shots

When a player returns a ball around the net post the line judge(s) on the destination side should rule on whether the ball is in or out, just like any over-the-net shot. [Rule 12.K] Be prepared because this type of action happens fast!

Server/Receiver in Wrong Position

If the line judge notices that the server and/or receiver are in the incorrect position (based on the score and first-server band) and the referee does not, at the conclusion of the rally the line judge should immediately, but discretely, share that fact with the referee. [Rules 5.B.3 and 5.B.7]

Communicating the Call

Out or In

Line judges call only balls that are “out,” by signaling both **verbally** and with the appropriate **hand signal**. [Rule 14.E]

- It is important to call every ball that is out, regardless of whether you feel it is obvious; the referee may be concentrating on the volleying player's feet at the NVZ and not see the ball land.
- Loudly and clearly say “out.”
- Signal with a raised arm outstretched in the out-of-bounds direction. [Rule 14.E]
 - Arm signals are important for the referee to confirm that the “out” call came from the line judge and not a spectator or player. If no call – verbal and/or signal – is made it is assumed by the referee, players and spectators that the ball was “in.”
- Make your calls **immediate** and with confidence.
- **Do not call balls “in.”** If it was close, but not out, and the referee or a player seeks your confirmation (may just be via a glance in your direction) **signal** that the ball was “in” by extending both arms outstretched forward and downward with palms facing down. [Rule 14.E] Do not verbally make an “in” call.

Blocked From A Line Call: If your view is blocked and you do not clearly see the ball contact the playing surface:

- Do not make a call.
- Place your hands over your eyes to signal the referee that the ball was blocked from your view.
- If no one else on the officiating team (the referee or another line judge) clearly saw the ball land, it is considered “in” unless all players agree that the ball was out; the referee will determine and communicate the final decision.

Disputed Calls

As the line judge you are positioned where you look directly down the line.

- For your line you have the best and most exact view of anyone on the court.
- Never solicit, be influenced by or acknowledge the opinions of players or spectators.
- Do not be intimidated by spectators or players who might call a ball out. You, not the players, are responsible for making the line calls.

Players have the option to appeal your call to the referee.

Overruling: The referee does have the authority to overrule a call made by a line judge.

- This rarely occurs if the line judge is alert and following standards and procedures.
- If the referee has a good angle and clearly sees a ball differently from the line judge, the call may be overruled.
- If a call is overruled, forget it and continue to make the calls the way you see them. You have the best seat in the house for your assigned line.

Questions regarding *Line Judge Standards and Procedures* should be directed to training@usapa.org.

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