

Official's View

Top Players and Their Performances

By Dr. Azmy

[Note: The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of USATT or its officers.]

Chatting with one of the USATT board members, who has been a good friend of mine through the years, we touched on some concerns about our top players' performances. The issue is the constant conflict between players and umpires due to some inadequate performances. He suggested to me that I should write a report about each of the top players after every major tournament. However, I cannot do that unless I am authorized by the board to do such a thing. Therefore, this article will talk in general about some of the problems which could affect our players when they travel to international tournaments.

The Serve

Some of our top players serve in a way that is questionable if not simply incorrect. The rule requires the ball to be resting on a stationary flat hand before it is tossed in the air at least 6 inches.

Some of our top players do not adhere to the concept of a flat hand. Cupping is a common act by many players. Others raise their hands up and even roll the ball a little before they toss in the air. A frequent problem is when a player raises his hand very high but fails to toss the ball in the air 6 inches. It seems that the players believe that raising the hand is sufficient enough. And there is another top player who does not adhere to the idea of a stationary hand whatsoever. One can see the ball coming from his pocket to be tossed in the air by his fingers. Sometimes his hand is upside down before it is tossed in the air. Some players have a habit of twisting their hand while throwing the ball in the air, causing it to spin. We can all see the serve is illegal when a player throws it almost directly into his racket. But when the ball makes a circle in the air after a high toss many players think it is all right. However, this is the same effect as throwing directly into the racket. The rule says near vertical. From their point of view some players say it does not affect anything. Or the opponent is not effected and not complaining. Unfortunately, for the umpire all those serves are not conforming to the rule.

The Net

Some players come to the table and the first thing they do is touch the net with their fingers. Apparently they are testing the tension of the net. Others may hit the net with their rackets. Strangely enough they may do that after they lose a point, but they never bother to do that when they are winning. In any case when there is an umpire at the court the player should not touch the net at all. In fact every time a player touches the net, the umpire has to check it again, and the player may get a warning. If a player doubts the height or the tension of the net, all he has to do is to ask the umpire to check it.

The Racket

The rule states that an approved legal rubber has to cover the striking side of the racket. However, some players present a racket to the umpire with rubber extending beyond the wood of the racket, or receding away from the wood. In both situations the racket is illegal. Then we have the problem of the colors. The rule is simple: the two sides of the racket have to be of different colors, cherry red and black, even if one of the sides is not used to strike the ball. The racket has

to be above the table during the serve. If it swings under the table, then it is a fault.

The Table

A common habit these days is for the player to go to the side of the table and streak the table with his hand, apparently wiping the sweat out of his palm. But that smears the surface of the table with sweat and sometimes an oily substance. To add to the problem the stretched hand often touches the net, which is another violation.

Clothes

Once a player is on the rise, he suddenly does not want to tuck his shirt in his shorts. Somehow they consider it a symbol of their achievement. Another problem arises when the player wants to practice in his training suit. Once a player is on the court he has to wear the clothes and the number, if required, which he will use during the match. You can see this by looking in one of the international table tennis magazines.

Misbehavior

Some players feel they never make a mistake. If they lose a couple of points or a game, they throw their racket on the table or sometimes in the barriers. Others may utter unacceptable language. Lately, we see some who argue with the umpires or even say unkind statements to them. Watch the tapes of the prominent International players and learn the discipline, concentration, composure, and most of the time the calmness and sportsmanship.

What Could Be Done

Two suggestions come to my mind.

1. Players should not accept such behavior from their opponents while they are practicing.
2. The most important one is the role of the coaches. It is important that the coach discourage bad habits before they become costly, when umpires are judging them.

There is no umpire who likes to take unnecessary points from any player. Many times the players themselves are not aware of their mistakes. They have been playing that way all the time. Some of them will face an umpire stating to him that they have been playing that way all the time and nobody called it before.

Do not be surprised if there is a time when an efficient umpire will call all the rules. It is time to prepare our players for the International Arena.