

## **An Official's View**

**By Wendell Dillon, Chair of USATT Officials Committee**

Umpires really took it in the chops in the U.S. Open Issue. After reading Tim Boggan's article, which was properly labeled Senior Events and Umpiring, I thought it was time for a response.

I accept the validity of some of Tim's comments. An umpire should never brag about the number of faults called; that is inexcusable. Serves at the end of a game require extra attention by both the player and the umpire. The player can't get a free pass to serve illegally but the umpire should also give any benefit of doubt to the server. If the player uses a serve that has been accepted earlier in the game/match, game point isn't the time to call a fault. However, if the player uses a new, clearly illegal serve, perhaps to disrupt or surprise the receiver, it must be called.

The umpire cannot "let them play" because the players don't care. If an umpire is assigned to a match the umpire must enforce the rules. Enforcement should be consistent and I agree with Tim that we need to work on consistency.

The point penalty system (PPS) was adopted several years ago to control player misconduct. Before the PPS the referee had to accept poor behavior or default the player. The PPS has accomplished its purpose. Tim gave some good examples where the PPS should have been used.

**Umpire evaluations.** After 30 years with the international umpire program the ITTF decided it was time to improve umpire performance and consistency. The Umpires and Referees Committee (URC) has developed high standards for umpires working world title events. The program has been very successful in improving the quality of umpiring at the world championships. Like other sports, evaluation of umpires at the table is essential to improving performance. Unfortunately a few umpires improperly react by being exceptionally strict when being evaluated. I seriously doubt that any legal serve was faulted.

The most contentious element of a match is the service. It seems that the ITTF changes the service rule more frequently than any other. The purpose of the changes is to ensure that the ball is served without imparting spin except by the racket and that the serve can be seen by the receiver.

At the world championships many players serve illegally until they are faulted. These world-class players want to get as much advantage as they can from the serve. Once the illegal serve is penalized, they correct it.

A problem in USATT is that many players don't have enough experience with umpires to develop consistently legal serves. Umpires need to work on consistency and players and coaches need to work on developing legal serves so they won't be surprised when they have an umpired match.