

An Official's View

You Can Make a Difference

By Dr. Azmy

Rules changes affect players, coaches and officials in different ways. However, we have to accept and follow them as long as they are in effect.

This article deals with a proposal, and I repeat, just a proposal. It pertains to the Service Rule. That means as long as the existing service rule is in effect we have to follow it as players, enforce it as umpires, respect it as coaches and support it as officials.

The service rule has raised a lot of discussions, to say the least, if not a lot of complaints from every corner in the world.

USATT was the first association to ask for a simple easy rule for the service, a long time ago. Unfortunately, its proposals were rejected year after year. Even when the ITTF Rules Committee supported the USATT resolutions, they were rejected at the BGM.

Once again we at USATT are trying to introduce a proposal that we hope will make the rule easier to apply and clearer to understand. The main purpose of the service rule is to make the ball visible to the receiver. If we adhere to the spirit and letter of the rule, we can think about simple ways to write it. One suggestion is to state that during the service the ball has to be visible to the umpire **AND** assistant umpire. If the ball is visible to the umpire and assistant umpire, logically it will be visible to the receiver. That unfortunately was introduced and rejected several times.

The USATT is now leading the process to introduce a new proposal. We need everybody's help. Those who are not happy with the current service rule can now make a difference. All players, coaches, umpires, and officials can send letters to the President and the executive board members of the ITTF, asking them for their support of the proposal. Any individual who has any contact with foreign associations can ask his friends in these associations to support the proposal. **WE ACTUALLY NEED A LETTER AND EMAIL CAMPAIGN TO GO ALL OVER THE TABLE TENNIS WORLD.**

Service Rule Proposal

“During the serve, from the time of its start, no part of the server's body or his partner will be above or between the ball (and its horizontal extension line) resting on the palm of his flat hand, and his end line of the table.”

Justification

1. This guarantees the visibility of the ball to the opponent, umpires, and the audience.
2. The end line has been a focal point during the service for years, as the ball has to be behind and above the end line.
3. It is easy for players to understand and apply.
4. It gives players the flexibility to serve forehand as well as backhand serves.
5. It creates conformity to the rule on both sides of the table. As it is now, when we have only one umpire, a serve can be legal on one side of the table but could be ruled illegal on the other side of the table, because the umpire cannot see it.
6. It is easier for umpires to apply, and see the ball all the time, regardless if the umpire is working alone or with an assistant umpire.
7. The eyes of the umpires are already watching the end line to see that the ball is behind and above it.

8. It avoids all the confusion and misinterpretation of the rule regarding the triangle and space above it, the position of the free arm, etc.
9. It stands by itself, like all other rules, without any references to the receiver or the umpires.