

An Official's View

By Dr. Azmy

The 46th World Table Tennis Championships and the New Rules

The championships took place in Osaka, Japan, the land of giving. It is a culture where every time you meet a person, that person has to give you a gift. Even when they give a card they have to hold it with their ten fingers, and with a slight bow. They always try to show their appreciation to you just for your being there.

Osaka and all the hosts in Japan put on a fantastic show of great hospitality, generosity, friendship and warmth. Punctuality, order and cooperation gave the tournament an air of finesse. Added to all that was a richness in all aspects. Rumors have it that they spent \$20 million on the tournament.

The championships were attended by 99 associations. The tournament took place in three different venues, all of which were equally suitable. The tournament was run by a Referee and eight Deputy Referees. The work was almost every day from 8:30 am to 9:30 pm. There were 142 umpires, 70 from Japan and 72 from foreign countries. The officials were treated royally. They occupied one of the most luxurious hotels, which was the closest hotel to the venue. Realizing that they have to be in the arena before anyone else, and that they leave after everyone else, it took less than 15 minutes by bus to arrive at the venue. The buses were always available and promptly on time.

The level of play keeps getting higher and higher. It is impossible to describe the superb performance of the players. The officials, volunteers and the umpires ran the tournament smoothly. However, due to the Japanese traditions, some players got away with faulty serves, and some coaching was not prevented. The polite manners of the Japanese umpires hindered them from giving cards to the players and coaches. Many games went to expedite due to delays between rallies. We have witnessed a new table tennis dance, which some players performed between every point, jumping up and down, right and left for a long time. Others chose to roam the floor of the court several times each time they lost a point.

Racket testing was conducted on 213 rackets, 107 male players and 106 female players. Four cases ended by changing the rackets. One was almost defaulted for cutting the rubber eliminating the name of the manufacturer. I am reporting that part of the tournament to warn our players that racket testing and illegal rackets are not allowed. I am sure that other writers will give full description of the actual play. Therefore, I will go to the important rule changes by the ITTF.

Two main rules were changed and several others were interpreted. The important ones are the change of the serve, the 11-point game, and putting aside the age limits for umpires.

I am proud to announce the change to the service rule. It will take effect on **September 1, 2002**. It was USATT that 10 years ago asked for a change in the service rule, hoping to make it simpler and easier so players can return serves successfully and start the rally. There will probably be some amendments added before the time of its application. Here is the main addition to the service rule:

2.6.5 When the ball is struck, no part of the body or clothing of the server or his doubles partner shall be within or above the triangular area formed by the net and imaginary lines between the ball and the net posts.

The following 11-point game rules will affect us sooner as they start **September 1, 2001**. That means we have to make a decision soon about its application at the U.S. Nationals this December.

2.11 A Game

2.11.1 A game shall be won by the player or pair first scoring 11 points unless both players or pairs score 10 points, when the game shall be won by the first player or pair subsequently gaining a lead of 2 points.

2.12 A Match

2.12.1 A match shall consist of the best of any odd number of games.

2.13 The Order of Serving, Receiving and Ends

2.13.3 After each 2 points have been scored the receiving player or pair shall become the serving player or pair and so on until the end of the game, unless both players or pairs score 10 points or the expedite system is in operation, when the sequence of serving and receiving shall be the same but each player shall serve for only 1 point in turn.

2.13.6 The player or pair serving first in a game shall receive first in the next game of the match, and in the last possible game of a double match the pair due to receive next shall change their order of receiving when first one pair scores 5 points.

2.13.7 The player or pair starting at one end in a game shall start at the other end in the next game of the match and in the last possible game of a match the players or pairs shall change ends when first one player or pair scores 5 points.

2.15 The Expedite System

2.15.1 Except where both players or pairs have scored at least 9 points, the expedite system shall come into operation if a game is unfinished after 10 minutes play or at any earlier time at the request of both players or pairs.

2.15.3 If the expedite system is introduced, or if a game lasts longer than 10 minutes, all subsequent games of that match shall be played under the expedite system.

3.4.4 Intervals

3.4.4.1 Play shall be continuous throughout a match except that any player is entitled to

3.4.4.1.1 an interval of up to 1 minute between successive games of a match;

3.4.4.1.2 brief intervals for toweling after every 6 points from the start of each game and at the change of ends in the last possible game of a match.

The concern of everybody is how many games will constitute a match? This has actually been left to the organizers of any tournament, provided that is clearly stated in the entry form. Any variety of number of games in different events or in the same event is possible. The possible number of games is best of five, seven, nine, etc. A best of five, under the new rule, will theoretically include at least 33 points, compared to the current best of three which includes at least 42 points. The same could be said about a best of seven, which includes at least 44 points, and a best of nine, which includes at least 55 points, in comparison with our existing best of five, which includes at least 63 points. If we want to shorten a match, a best of five in the new system will do it. If we want a longer match, then a best of seven will give at least 44 points, which could replace the existing best of three. In the case of the existing best of five, both the new best of seven and best of nine will give fewer points.

Discussing this issue with several officials from different associations and with some of the U.S. players, coaches and team officials, there is a tendency to go for the best of seven. Others recommended the best of five in all events, except for the Semis and the Finals and the Men's and Women's Open, which all could be best out of seven.

Best of Luck, pick your pick.

I am afraid that this article is getting too long. So I will add some more interpretations of the rules in the next article. All of these new rules and interpretations will be discussed in the coming seminar at the U.S. Open on Wednesday at 9:00pm. It is required for all umpires, but players, coaches, and anyone else is welcome to attend.