

An Official's View
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Every year, we offer two umpire's seminars — one at the U.S. Open and the other at the U.S. Nationals. The purpose of these seminars is to keep umpires and officials up-to-date. Case studies, actual situations, recommendations, new rules and regulations are some of the issues presented at these seminars.

Many umpires and officials cannot attend these seminars for various reasons. Therefore, I decided to use this article to reach those who did not attend the seminar. The theme is: if you cannot come to the seminar, the seminar will come to you.

The International Table Tennis Federation is deeply concerned about the quality of umpires and officials, and the ability to apply the rules and regulations of the game. There is a proposal which will be introduced at the coming BGM to form an ITTF Officials Committee, tailored after the USATT Officials Committee. They will appoint a task force to draft the duties for that committee.

The umpire's seminar this year dealt with several issues. The main one was the jurisdiction of the umpire before, during and after the match. Most umpires are aware of their duties during the match. However, the responsibility of umpires and officials extends far beyond that.

From the time an umpire or an official enters the venue, he or she is in a supervisory duty. Once a player enters the venue, he or she has to abide by the rules and regulations of the tournament.

If an umpire sees a player gluing a racket at the venue, that umpire is required to ask the player to leave the venue. Should an umpire see a player changing clothes in public, the umpire has to ask the player to go to the dressing room.

An umpire can ask a player to refrain from damaging or moving equipment in the venue. In the case that a player refuses to accept the request of the umpire, the umpire shall report to the referee, who may take necessary actions against the player.

An umpire can inspect the venue and bring to the attention of the referee inappropriate lighting, air conditioning, tables, nets, or barriers. At playing court, the umpire examines the surroundings, the table, net, player's clothes, rackets, numbers, assigned coaches, choice of serve and ends. All of these acts normally take place before the match.

During the match, an umpire is usually following the written rules and regulations published in the officials handbooks.

After the match, an umpire may face situations which require action. A player may jump on the table, in joy or in anger. Another may take his clothes off in a disrespectful manner. A losing player may throw his/her racket on the table, on the floor, in the surroundings, knock the barriers, argue, threaten, or insult the umpire or his opponent. Some players think that once the match is over, the umpire has no jurisdiction over them. That is not true. In a team match, the umpire can apply the penalty rule. In an individual match, the umpire has to get the attention of the player to refrain from such activities, to inform the referee of the incident, and to write the details on the score sheet. The referee may take the necessary actions toward that player.

Several situations were discussed during the seminar, such as the problem of glue testing (we still have no testing machines), and practicing with an illegal racket during the two-minute practice before the match. For more information on those two situations, please refer to *USATT Magazine*, May/June issue, page 16.

New issues erupted during the U.S. Open. The first one dealt with the choice of the match ball. The new rule states that players are not allowed to choose balls at the match table. However, if the players come before the match, they may be given the opportunity to choose balls in a different location. Players will choose two balls or three.

At the site of the table the umpire will take out one of the three balls and give it to the players as the match ball. In the case that the players did not choose the ball in advance, the umpire shall choose the ball from the box at random, and the players will have no right to object to it.

Another serious situation arose when some players asked for a redraw. According to the rules, a redraw has to be avoided whenever possible. It is allowed only if the absence of seeded players causes serious imbalance to the draw. The draw has two halves – the upper and lower halves. If, for example, three seeded players from the lower half officially withdrew from the tournament, that may cause an imbalance in the draw. Once the event starts, however, there will be no changes or redraws, according to the rules.

At the U.S. Open, we faced a difficult situation. First, we were not officially notified that certain players were not coming to the tournament, including the top two seeds. Since they were on opposite halves of the draw, there was no imbalance to the draw. The prominent players were aware of the situation. That is why none of them showed up at the jury meeting asking for a redraw. All that happened was informal talk asking us to violate or bend the rules, without any proof that the players were not coming.

To add to our predicament, one day before the U.S. Open, we started the North American Championships. There was a meeting between the representatives of the U.S. and Canada, and a special draw was made for the tournament. The next day, the representative from Canada asked for a redraw. The representative claimed that the #2 player from Canada had not shown up, had not registered at the hotel, and had not contacted any of them. To make a long story short, five minutes before the match, the Canadian player showed up and played his match.

I am sharing this story to emphasize the fact that there are rules for conducting a redraw, and they are very clear about when we can do what. The fact that someone will walk around in the arena with paper and pencil in hand trying to find out how many flies are in the arena, how many scratches are on the floor, and how many announcements are late, does not make that individual knowledgeable about the game. Nobuyuki Shirakawa, an international referee and a member of the ITTF Technical Committee, upon about the redraw request discussions, asked me to show the tournament rules book to those who were concerned. I did.

It is unfortunate that after four consecutive successful major tournaments (U.S. Opens and Nationals), all we hear are negativism by a few who make it their jobs to foster unfounded rumors about the draw, hard bat, etc. Our tournaments are unique. We are the only association that holds tournaments with 89 different events, on 82 tables, for 750 players, and allows each player to enter up to eight events.

Of course, there will always be some problems. That is why we are there. We need help. If you see something lacking, help us to do it. And if you can do it, go ahead, we will sincerely appreciate that.

We need umpires and officials. Come join us, take the exams on the local, regional, national and international levels. If not, you can still volunteer to help others run the tournament, and apply whatever you want to contribute to make the tournament succeed.

Destructive negativism has no place in progressive achievements. It will not help the tournaments, USATT, or the players who we are preparing for international levels. Please let us come together to pave the road for a successful USATT.