

Officials View

By Dr. Azmy

I was pleased to learn that we had nearly 900 players at the U.S. Nationals, a record. And it was an experiment to add the U.S. Open Paralympics with the Nationals, which added another 139 players. It was inspirational to see the athleticism of Paralympics athletes from around the world. However, it placed a severe strain on the umpires; we didn't have enough to handle both tournaments as well as we would have liked.

We need more umpires to work our major tournaments. We have recently increased the travel subsidy that should make it possible for more umpires to travel to tournaments. At the Nationals we used a few club umpires and they worked out very well. Club umpires who wish to work the major tournaments should get as much experience as possible locally. For future tournaments we will invite club umpires that are recommended by local referees.

Now that the rules have been changed to encourage wheelchair players to compete in all events, umpires must be familiar with the new wheelchair rules.

In the last article we discussed the let situation when a wheelchair player is receiving the serve. The ball is a let if it comes to a stop on his side of the table, or after bouncing it returns toward the net, or (in singles) it leaves over the sidelines.

- If, after it bounces on the table, he tries to hit it and misses it completely, and then it crosses the sidelines, it is still a let as long as he did not touch it at all.
- If, after it bounces on the table, it crosses the sidelines and he then strikes it and makes a good return, it is still a let because once it crosses the sideline the ball is a let. The same applies if he strikes it and he does not make a good return; the ball is a let.
- Suppose that after it bounces toward the sidelines he strikes the ball before it crosses the sideline. In this case the ball is in play and the rally continues.

Suppose in a doubles event two wheelchair players are playing against two standing players:

- After the serve and receive, either wheelchair player can make other returns.
- If a wheelchair player plays doubles with a standing athlete they must alternate returns.
- If a wheelchair crosses the imaginary middle line their opponent wins the point.

On the wheelchair player's side, the wheelchair rules apply. On the standing player's side, the regular players' rules apply, which means they have to alternate returns.

Let me conclude the wheelchair discussion with a final word of advice. Most regular tables are not wheelchair qualified. That may create some difficulties when wheelchair players play in a regular event. It is recommended that wheelchair players sign a waiver of liability before they play on a regular table.

Here are questions that have been asked by umpires. The first is very common. The umpire says the ball hit the table. Player A, who lost the point, argues that the ball did not hit. In the middle of the argument, Player B admits that the ball missed the table. What should the umpire do? The umpire should reverse the call.

Umpires sometimes face difficult situations as a match begins. Suppose a player wants to practice:

- in his training suit.
- with a different shirt.
- with a different racket.

The umpire should ask the player to take off his training suit, play with the same racket that has been inspected for the match, and wear the same shirt. If the player refuses the umpire should call the referee.

In a doubles match, players A & B are playing against Y & X. In the middle of a rally A drops his racket on the floor, and then grabs his partner's racket and makes a good return. Y is confused and fails to make a good return. Who gets the point and why? When A grabbed his partner's racket, he changed his racket although it wasn't damaged. Their opponents win the point and no further action is required.