

Official's View

By Dr. Azmy

The Players, Gentlemen, The Players!

Our concern, gentlemen, should always be the welfare of our players. The performance of our players is at stake. It is rather surprising to see that some players, and sometimes many players, do not hear about rule changes. It is also frustrating for young developing players to bloom and blossom and at their first appearance on a national or international level to find out that their serves are questionable, if not illegal. It is not unusual to hear a player screaming at an umpire, "I have been playing all these years and this is the first time an umpire faulted my serve." The tragedy will mount when the coach of that player will start defending the improper serves of his player.

The conclusion is that many of the mistakes of players come from improper coaching.

In the last two years, since the new change of the service rule regarding the position of the free hand, I have written about the new rule, even with a diagram. At the Nationals and International tournaments, I insisted that a copy be placed in the players' packages. However, this is the least solution. In a way it is too late. A player who did not hear about the change of the rule, or did not enforce it during his/her practice, will find it difficult to adhere to it and follow it during the heat of a match. This weekend I was the referee for the Western Open, and believe it or not, some high level players were arguing with me that their serves were legal because the ball was not hidden from the opponent, and that the position of the free arm has nothing to do with it. I had to show them a copy of the rule and the diagram to settle the dispute. The faults of the players regarding the rules are a product of their coaches.

Forgive this long introduction, but behind it is the controversy surrounding the issue of asking coaches to take the club umpire exam.

1. One should consider it just a tool of information, as all coaches will be aware of the new rule changes. After all, it is an open book exam. The issue of translation for non-English speakers can be arranged. We do have competent senior umpires and officials from every corner of the world. When there is a will, there is a way.
2. Some people will say the rules are posted on the Internet. Not every player has a computer, and of those who do, not every one will go online to look for rule changes.
3. We also offer umpire seminars about twice a year, at the U.S. Nationals and the U.S. Open. These are open to the public and the coaches are always welcome to attend them. They are usually offered on Wednesday night after the matches are over.

Let us consider these steps as a chance for cooperation between coaches and umpires. This will render a great service to all our players, from beginners to national and international level players.