

Language of Racquetball and The Rules of the Game

Common Racquetball Terms

Racquetball has developed in a short time into a game of national interest. Many of the terms and language used in racquetball are similar to those used in handball, tennis and squash. In order to understand and communicate with other racquetball players, the following list of terms are considered important.

Ace - a serve untouched by the receiver

Advantage position - the position on the court where a player can hit most shots and control the game. It is approximately five feet back of the short line in the middle of the court

Backcourt - the area back of the short line

Backhand - hitting the ball from the non dominant side

Backswing - taking the racquet back in preparation for beginning the swing.

Blocking - preventing the opponent from hitting the ball by moving some part of the body between the opponent and the ball.

Court - the playing area.

Crotch ball- a ball hitting at the juncture of the service wall and ceiling, floor, or sidewall or in the corners.

Cutthroat - a game involving three players with each player playing against the other two.

Dead ball- a ball that is no longer in play.

Defensive player - the receiver

Doubles - two players playing against two other players

Drive - hitting the ball hard to the front wall so that it rebounds on a relatively straight line.

Error - failure to successfully return a ball during play

Fault - an infraction of the service rule

Follow-through - the continuation of the swing of the racquet after the ball has been hit

Foot fault - illegal position of the server's feet on the serve

Forehand - hitting the ball from the dominant side

Frontcourt - the area in front of the service line

Game - the winning of twenty-one points, constituting a game.

Half volley - hitting the ball just after it bounces from the playing surface.

Handout - a loss of serve

Hinder - unintentional interference with an opponent during play, resulting in replay of point

Illegal server- failure to serve the ball in accordance with the playing rules.

Kill - a ball hit so low to the front wall that it is practically unplayable.

Lob- a ball hit high and gently on the front wall, which rebounds in a high arc to the back wall.

Match - the winning of two out of three games.

Offensive player - the server

Pass- a ball hit to the side and out of the reach of an opponent.

Placement - a shot hit to the spot where it was intended, which cannot be returned.

Rally - the playing time between the serve and the end of the point.

Receiver - the receiver of the serve

Screen - interference with opponent's vision in attempting to play the ball.

Screen ball - a served ball that passes so close to the server that the receiver's view of the ball is obstructed; this ball should be replayed.

Server - the player hitting the ball to the front wall to begin the play of the point.

Serve-out - a player losing the serve in accordance with the rules.

Service box - in doubles, the area in which the server's partner must remain until the serve has passed the short line.

Service line - in four-wall racquetball, a line parallel to and five feet in front of the short line. In one-wall racquetball it is a line parallel to and nine feet back of the short line.

Service zone - the area between and including the service line and the short line.

Shadow-serve - a served ball passing so close to the server's body on the rebound that the receiver is unable to pick up the flight of the ball.

Short - a serve failing to rebound past the short line.

Short line - in four-wall racquetball, a line midway between and parallel with the front and back walls. In one-wall racquetball, a line parallel to and sixteen feet from the front wall.

Sidelines - the lines marking left- and right-hand boundaries of the court in one-wall and three-wall racquetball.

Side out - loss of service by player in singles or both players in doubles.

Straddle ball - a ball going between the legs of a player

Volley - playing the ball in the air before it has bounced.

The Game

1. Players. Racquetball may be played by two players (singles), three players (cut-throat), or four players (doubles).
2. Description. The game is played with a racquetball and a ball in a four-wall, or three-wall court.
3. Game score. A game is won by the side first scoring twenty-one points. Points are scored only by the serving side when it serves an ace or wins a volley.
4. Match score. A match consists of the best two out of three games.

Serving Regulations

1. Serve. The serve shall be determined by a toss of a coin. In informal play contestants can rebound the ball from the front wall with the player landing closest to the short line winning the serve. The server of the first game also serves first in the third game, if any. Prior to each serve the server calls the score, giving the server's score first.
2. Position of server. The server may serve from anywhere in the service zone with no part of either foot extending beyond either line of the service zone. The server must start and remain in the service zone until the served ball has passed the short line. Stepping on the line is allowed.
3. Violation. A violation of the serve is called a fault and is an illegal serve. Two illegal serves in succession result in a serve-out.
4. Method of serving. The ball must be dropped to the floor within the service zone and struck with the racquet on the first bounce, hitting the front wall first and on the rebound hitting the floor back of the short line, either with or without touching one sidewall. The server shall not serve until his opponent is ready.
5. Service in doubles. In doubles the side starting each game is allowed only one serve-out. Thereafter, in that game, both players on each side are permitted to serve until a serve-out occurs. The service order established at the beginning of each game must be followed throughout the game. Servers do not have to alternate serves to their opponents. Serving out-of-order or the same player serving both serves is a serve-out.
6. Partner's position (four-wall). During the serve, the server's partner is required to stand erect within the service box with his back to the side-wall and both feet on the floor until the ball passes the short line. Failure to take this position during a serve is a foot fault.
7. Dead ball serves. A dead ball serve results in no penalty and the server is given another serve. They do not cancel any previous illegal serve and occur when an otherwise legal serve:
 - a) Hits the server's partner on the fly on the rebound from the front wall while the server's partner is in the service box.

- b) Passes too close to the server or the server's partner and obstructs the view of the returning side. This is called a screen ball. Any serve passing behind the server's partner and the sidewall is automatically a screen ball.
 - c) Hits any part of the court that under local rules is recognized as a court hinder. This must have been agreed upon before the start of the match.
8. The following serves are faults and any two in succession results in a handout:
- a) Foot faults are the result of the server leaving the service zone before the served ball passes the short line or the server's partner leaving the serves box before the served ball passes the short line.
 - b) Short serve is any served ball that hits the front wall and on the rebound hits the floor in front of the back edge of the short line, either with or without touching one sidewall.
 - c) Two-side serve is any ball served that first hits the front wall and on the rebound hits two sidewalls on the fly.
 - d) Ceiling serve is any served ball that touches the ceiling after hitting the front wall either with or without touching one sidewall.
 - e) Long serve is any served ball that first hits the front wall and rebounds to the back wall before touching the floor.
 - f) Out-of-court serve is any ball going out of the court on the serve.
9. Out serves. Any of the following serves results in a handout:
- a) Bounces means the player cannot bounce the ball more than three times while in the service zone before striking the ball. A bounce is a drop or throw to the floor, followed by a catch. The ball may not be bounced anywhere but on the floor within the serve zone. Accidental dropping of the ball counts as one bounce.
 - b) Missed ball is any attempt to strike the ball on the first bounce that results in a total miss or in touching any part of the server's body other than the racquet.
 - c) Nonfront serve is any served ball that strikes the server's partner or the ceiling, floor, or sidewall before striking the front wall.
 - d) Touched serve is any served ball that on the rebound from the front wall touches the server or touches the server's partner while any part of the player's body is out of the service box or if the server's partner intentionally catches the served ball on the fly.
 - e) Out-of-order serve is when either partner in doubles serves out of order.
 - f) Crotch serve occurs if the served ball hits the crotch in the front wall and is considered the same as hitting the floor and is an out. A serve that hits the crotch in the back wall is good and is in play.
10. Changes of serve. A server is entitled to continue serving until:
- a) There is an out serve.
 - b) Two fault serves are made in succession.
 - c) The server hits his partner with an attempted return before the ball touches the floor the second time.
 - d) The server or partner fails to keep the ball in play by returning hit as required.
 - e) The server or partner commits an avoidable hinder.

Playing Regulations

- 1. Return of service (four-wall):
 - a) The receiver(s) must remain at least five feet back of the short line until the ball is struck by the server.

- b) A legally served ball must be returned on the fly or after the first bounce to the front wall either directly or after touching the sidewall(s), ceiling, or back wall. A return touching the front wall and floor simultaneously is not a good return.
 - c) In returning a service on the fly, no part of the receiver's body may cross the short line before making the return.
 - d) Failure to legally return the service results in a point for the server.
2. Playing the ball. A legal return of service or of an opponent's shot is called a volley. The following rules must be observed. Failure to do so results in a serve-out or point.
- a) The ball must be hit with the racquet in one or both hands. The safety thong must be around the wrist at all times. Only the racquet head can strike the ball. Switching hands to hit a ball is an out.
 - b) Hitting the ball with the arm, hand, or any part of the body is prohibited.
 - c) In attempting a return, the ball may be touched only once. If a player swings at the ball but misses it, he or his partner in doubles may make a further attempt to return it until it touches the floor a second time.
 - d) In doubles both partners may swing at and simultaneously strike a ball.
 - e) Any ball struck at in play which is returned to the front wall and then on the rebound or on the first bounce goes out of court is a dead ball.
 - f) Any ball not returned to the front wall, but which goes off a player's racquet into the gallery or into any opening in a sidewall, either with or without touching the ceiling, sidewall, or backwall, shall be an out or point against the players failing to make the return.
3. Dead ball hinders (point replayed). It is a hinder if a player unintentionally interferes with an opponent, preventing him from having a fair opportunity to hit the ball. Each player must get out of the opponent's way immediately after he has struck the ball and:
- a) Must give the opponent a fair opportunity to get to and/or strike at the ball. If a player in attempting to get into position goes in the wrong direction and the opponent stands still, this does not constitute a hinder.
 - b) Must give the opponent a fair view of the ball provided, however, interference with the opponent's vision in the following the flight of the ball is not a hinder.
 - c) Must allow the opponent an opportunity to play the ball from any part of the court.
 - d) Must allow the opponent to play the ball to any part of the front wall and to either sidewall or the backwall in three-- and four-wall courts
 - e) Must avoid unnecessary interference with an opponent or unnecessary crowding, even though the opposing player is not actually prevented from reaching or striking the ball, as it is a hinder.
- Other hinders:
- a) A returned ball striking an opponent on the fly on its return to the front wall.
 - b) Hitting any part of the court that under local rules is a dead ball.
 - c) A ball rebounding from the front wall on the serve so close to the body of the server that the opponent is interfered with or prevented from seeing the ball. (called a straddle ball).
 - e) Body contact with an opponent that interferes with his seeing or returning the ball.
 - f) Any other unintentional interference that prevents an opponent from seeing or returning the ball.
 - g) It is not a hinder when a player hinders his partner
 - h) A player is not entitled to a hinder unless the interference occurred on the back-swing and such a call must be made immediately.
5. Avoidable hinders (serve-out or loss of point). An avoidable hinder results in an out or a point, depending upon whether the offender was serving or receiving. The following are classified as avoidable hinders:
- a) Failure to move occurs when a player does not move sufficiently to allow an opponent to hit the ball.

- b) Blocking is when a player moves into a position effecting a block on the opponent about to return the ball, or, in doubles, one partner moves in front of an opponent as his partner is returning the ball.
 - c) Moving into ball is caused when a player moves in the way and is struck by the ball just played by an opponent.
 - d) Pushing is deliberately pushing or shoving an opponent during a volley.
6. Safety. The safety thong must be around the wrist at all times. The racquet may not be switched from one hand to the other. Both hands may be used on the racquet together in striking the ball.
 7. Prior to each serve the server should call the score, giving the server's score first.