

USTA PNW LEAGUES - Sportsmanship Handbook

Tennis has always been a sport where much of the competitive play is done without on-site officials. As a result, players are faced with the unique challenge of self-officiating their matches. While many of us are familiar with the general rules of tennis, we are often not aware of the traditions that serve as an umbrella and shield players from unsportsmanlike behavior. This shield, or umbrella, is referred to as THE CODE. The Code demands exceptional behavior from ALL PLAYERS to ensure fair play, because Fair Play is Fun Play!

As a USTA league player, you must do your part to protect and defend The Code, otherwise, our sport becomes less fun for all. Your behavior both on and off the tennis court impacts others. Playing by The Code leaves a positive mark on others and the game of tennis!

How Do I Play By The Code?

Here are some basic principles of The Code. Learn them and play by them and you will never walk off a tennis court without knowing you represented yourself and your team well.

1. Courtesy and Cooperation is expected.
2. Provide your opponent with a cooperative warm-up.
3. If you are the server, clearly call out the score before the start of each point.
4. Make line calls audible, visible, and immediate, so they are clear to your opponent.
5. Wait to serve until your opponent is ready.
6. Applaud your opponent's good shots.
7. Always give your opponent the benefit of the doubt.
8. A ball touching any part of the line is IN.
9. Not sure about the call? The ball is IN. Uncertainty between doubles partners? The ball is IN.
10. All points played are treated the same regardless of their importance.
11. Spectators never make line calls. The spectators' role is to offer positive support.

Can (Should?) I challenge a line call?

Yes, but do so with respect to The Code and your opponents. Remember that calling lines in tennis is challenging; everyone makes mistakes, even officials! Here are a few tips for correctly challenging line calls:

1. Players make calls on their own side of the net. Calls should be made immediately in a clear audible voice accompanied by a hand signal that the ball is "OUT."
2. If a player genuinely doubts an opponent's call, the player may ask: "Are you sure of your call?" If the opponent reaffirms their call, the call shall be accepted without any further discussion or contrary comments.
3. Remember that if a ball is just barely touching the line, it is 100% IN.
4. In the event of repeated questionable line calls, calmly approach the net and say, "we are seeing the line calls differently than you are, and we would like to ask our team captains to assign court monitors to help us with close calls".

But nice guys finish last. We want to win!

Tennis history shows us that nice players actually win...and win a lot! It is hard to find better examples of this than players like Roger Federer, Rafa Nadal, and Ash Barty. These legends of the sport serve as prime examples of exemplary sportsmanship. It is important to keep in mind that most players sign up for league play to have FUN. This must always remain the number one goal.

The opposing captain won't work with me on a match reschedule. They just say NO!

One of the challenges of team sports like USTA league play is to get everyone in the same place at the same time. Because of this, we recommend that you have a big enough roster to cover all matches in the event that players are not available. We offer a 3-week window for multi-week leagues once the season schedule is published. This is the opportunity for you to work with your fellow team captains to reschedule any matches where you won't be able to field an entire team. Requests to reschedule should be made politely, with reason, and provide several alternative dates for the opposing captain to consider. Responses to reschedule requests should be equally polite, and consideration should be given to the alternative dates provided. One day, you will be the one requesting the reschedule, so it's always best to work together and do the best you can to work out the reschedule. This interaction between captains will often set the tone for the match. Start things off on the right foot.

I check my player rating on a third-party site constantly to check how I'm doing.

Third-party websites cannot correctly recreate the NTRP rating algorithm, and therefore the ratings generated from third-party sites are not accurate NTRP ratings. Unless you are a professional tennis player and your livelihood depends upon your results, your rating should not be a consideration when playing a recreational sport like USTA league tennis. Tennis is one of the great opportunities in our lives that serve as a distraction from the daily grind. Tennis has everything we need to forget about work, school, or whatever else is troubling us and simply focus on the fun and healthy tennis that we are fortunate to play with our friends. Player ratings will take care of themselves. Have fun, play free, and enjoy our great sport.

How do I do a better job preparing my team for the match?

As a team captain, you want to create an environment in which you want to play, one that is welcoming, inclusive, and focused on fun. Here are a few tips for setting the tone for a great match:

1. Meet the opposing captain before the match and discuss any critical information along with the exchange of line-ups, making sure to keep the conversation positive.
2. Make sure your players are ready to play at the designated match start time. Wondering if one of your players is going to arrive on time is not a good way to begin your match.
3. Welcome the opposing team to your Home facility and invite them to stick around after the match for a post-match snack/drink. Some captains will use the pre-match announcement as an opportunity to lighten the mood by telling a joke, story, or just a quick thank you to all players for making league tennis so fun.
4. As the Home team captain, make the announcement, "Let's have a great match!" before sending players out to the courts.
5. Players should meet at the net for the racquet spin before the warm-up. Introduce yourself and try to use first names throughout the match.
6. Acknowledge your opponent's good shots in a visible or audible way..."Nice Shot!"
7. End the match with a warm handshake/tap of racquets and congratulations on a fun match.
8. Have fun! Your positive energy is contagious.

Recognize a league player for outstanding sportsmanship.

A great way to keep league play fair and fun is to recognize players for their exceptional sportsmanship. If a player on your team or an opponent displays great sportsmanship, make sure to let them know that you appreciate it. The best way to do that is to complete the short Sportsmanship Recognition form that can be found on your league website.

Like a well placed serve or a finely tuned forehand, good sportsmanship requires proper technique and practice. Make it a part of your tennis routine. Enjoy your match!