



# COORDINATOR'S CORNER:

## A LEAGUE COORDINATOR ANSWERS YOUR QUESTIONS

**In this reoccurring feature, you ask a question about how to navigate certain situations in USTA League play, and one of our Regional League Coordinators answers it.**

**For this installment of Coordinator's Corner, Chris Merrill, Regional League Coordinator for Southwest Washington answers a questions for you.**

**Captain:** I am a USTA PNW League team captain, and we had an incident where the opposing team had a husband/spectator who was so obnoxiously clapping and cheering that it just seemed malicious. He was sitting right next to the court that was in use. Are there any USTA rules concerning audience behavior?

**Chris:** First of all, thank you for taking on the duties as a USTA League team captain. I'm sorry to hear about the issues with the spectator during your recent match. While we absolutely love to hear and see supporting friends and family out at USTA League and tournament matches, we also like to remind them that their role is to provide positive support and to ALWAYS show respect and good sportsmanship to all players on the court.

Since much of our league tennis is played without officials, we rely upon our ability to communicate with each other and to hopefully diffuse situations like this. Had there been an official on site, they would have monitored the behavior of the spectator and stepped

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in if needed. Without an official it would be up to you to mention to the opposing team (don't directly get involved with the spectator as this will most likely make things worse) that their supporting spectator is being disruptive and perhaps they could have him tone it down a bit. While most players would respond appropriately to this request, be prepared for push back from some players.

**Captain:** What tips can you offer me if this were to happen again?

**Chris:** Here are three options for dealing with this if it were to happen again:

1. Politely ask the opposing team to have them ask their supporting family/friends to be more respectful and tone it down. Remember that not all spectators are aware of the sportsmanship and etiquette of tennis, so be prepared if your request is not met with the response you had hoped for.
2. Treat the disruptive/distracting spectator behavior as an opportunity to develop your mental toughness and ability to deal with distractions. If you play tennis long enough, you will be faced with a variety of outside distractions. Your ability to block them out and focus on your tennis will make you a better player. Putting yourself in these situations more often makes it easier to deal with distractions when they come up. As an example, I used to seek out distracting situations in practice by often playing at the public courts that were located right next to a busy freeway...you could barely hear yourself hitting the ball. I knew that by practicing in this extreme environment I would be ready for anything at the upcoming tournament.
3. If the spectator's behavior goes beyond what you mentioned and they are being abusive, then you should seek out the facility staff for help if you are playing at a tennis club or tennis center. Again, you shouldn't engage directly with the spectator. At a recent Sectional tournament where I was the site director, we had a spectator that had a bit too much to drink and was being very disruptive to the players and other spectators around him. I notified that Director of Tennis at the club and he was able to step in and get the person to calm down and be respectful of the players.

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Lastly, I will leave you with our Sportsmanship policy and The Code, which are included in Friend at Court.

### **SPORTSMANSHIP POLICY**

Sportsmanship is the foundation of tennis. It is essential to tennis as a welcoming, open, and inclusive sport. Sports integrity follows a boundless set of core values and tributes that enrich the lives of all who participate. These attributes include, but are not limited to:

- Understanding and following the rules
- Being fair
- Acting with character
- Respecting others
- Winning with humility and losing with grace
- Maintaining composure
- Being accountable for one's own actions
- Giving others the benefit of the doubt

### **THE CODE**

Tennis is more fun when players are good sports, and when persons associated with the players and the sport reinforce the ideals of good sports conduct. It entices people to stay involved with the sport their entire lives. Being a good sport is its own reward—both on and off the tennis court. Sportsmanship builds trust, generates mutual respect, and promotes friendship among all people. As we grow and develop the game, we do so with the highest commitment to sports integrity.

Thank you again for your question. ■