

The Roving Eye

Bathroom Breaks



This month, the Roving Eye segment of the USTA PNW newsletter will focus on the rules and how league players should handle bathroom breaks. For an explanation of the rules, we turn to one of our most experienced tennis officials, Tony Hernandez.

Bathroom Breaks – YES and NO. YES, we are all sensitive to someone that needs an emergency bathroom visit during a match. Please take care of this need before your match, and try to ride out the nerves after the warmup, it is bad form to leave the courts for a few minutes before the first serve is struck.

The Rule Book (2022 Friend at Court) states, “When possible, these breaks should be taken during a set break. If this is not possible, then the break should be taken at an odd game changeover. Breaks taken at other times should be limited to true emergencies.”

This is the NO – If an official is present, they will find out the score, and if the player requesting the break was just broken at 4 all, it is possible the official will deny the request, usually determining gamesmanship, not a real emergency need. I usually say, “This is not the time to take a bathroom break, you should be able to wait until the end of the set. Do you REALLY need an emergency break?” After 11 years, no player has said “Yes, I really need to go now.”

So, if no official is present, I suppose you could ask your opponent the same sort of question. Most players are honest and aware of their “non-tennis” actions. I bet the match would continue, and needed breaks taken at more appropriate times.

Finally, “Gastrointestinal problems are medical problems that are governed by medical timeout provisions and not by the toilet break provisions.” That means, it would be a 3 minute break (add on travel time back and forth to the toilet), taken at any time it was truly needed.

Tony Hernandez

More about the rules of stoppage in play:

29. CONTINUOUS PLAY As a principle, play should be continuous, from the time the match starts (when the first service of the match is put in play) until the match finishes.

- a. Between points, a maximum of twenty (20) seconds is allowed. When the players change ends at the end of a game, a maximum of ninety (90) seconds are allowed. However, after the first game of each set and during a tie-break game, play shall be continuous and the players shall change ends without a rest. USTA Comment 29.1: The 20-second time limit does not apply if a player has to chase a stray ball. At the end of each set there shall be a set break of a maximum of one hundred and twenty (120) seconds.
- b. PART 1-ITF RULES OF TENNIS 15 The maximum time starts from the moment that one point finishes until the first service is struck for the next point.

For more information about the rules of Tennis, please review the current edition of Friends at Court.