

Timing is Everything!

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As a coach, I am often encouraging players to time their hits well, such as making contact with the ball in front of them for a good quality forehand. However, did you know that it is also important to have good timing in order to play fairly and properly by the rules?



As a Tennis Canada Official, I occasionally see players arguing on court, and it is often my job to try to calm things down and get them back to playing tennis. Players often get into arguments simply because they are not familiar with the rules and the code of conduct for tennis. Playing by the rules will reduce many arguments on court.

Example 1

You are in the middle of a rally and, out of the corner of your eye, you see a ball roll into your court from next door. This happens just as your opponent sends you an easy short ball that is begging to be blasted into the open court. What should you do?

Scenario 1

You decide to smack the ball and hit a winner, which you manage to do well. However, your opponent says there was a stray ball on court and a let should be played.

Ruling: Because they did not yell out “let” before you hit the ball, then you win the point. However, if they did say “let” before you hit the ball, then you should replay the point. Timing is everything!

Scenario 2

You decide to smack the ball hard and it sails out long. You complain that you saw a stray ball roll onto the court and it distracted you. You then ask to replay the point. However, your opponent knows the rules and says that if the ball distracted you, then you should have called a “let” beforehand and made no attempt to hit the ball.

Ruling: There is a principle that says you don’t get 2 chances to win a point and you would be violating that rule if you got to replay that point. If you hit the ball and it was a winner, you would not be asking to replay the point, would you? So you lose this point because you hit the ball long.

Scenario 3

You stop, call out “let” quickly and do not attempt to hit the ball. First serve, replay the point. Everyone is happy and safe! This is the ideal situation and one that I suggest all players abide by. In this situation, no one will feel they have been cheated. Timing is everything!

Example 2

On a first serve, the server hits a fast serve that lands close to the service line. The server (or server’s partner) thinks his serve was long, so he stops to get another ball out of his pocket for the second serve. However, the receiver thinks the serve is good and returns the ball for a crosscourt winner.

The server (or server’s partner) argues that his serve was out and a second serve should be played. The receiver says he thought the ball was good and returned a winner. What should be done here?

Ruling: When calling lines, the rule states that any ball that cannot be seen as clearly out, shall be called good. So if the receiver thought the ball was good, it shall be considered a good ball, even if it was actually out. The receiver could be giving the serve the benefit of a doubt, so the receiver can err on being generous to the server on balls that are close to being out, or even if they are out.

The server must play the ball that the receiver returns, even if the server thinks his serve was out. Consequently, the receiver shall win this point. The server should never call his own ball out, unless it is on his second serve. Only then, with

great sportsmanship, he would offer up a double fault if he should call his own ball out on his second serve.

Example 3

You hit a strong serve and the ball lands near the sideline. After the receiver returns the ball and her return lands wide, she says that the serve was out. The server may feel cheated because the timing of the call was so late. Because the receiver waited until she saw the result of her return, the out call looks very suspicious to the server.

Ruling: It is important for the receiver to make the out call as soon as the ball bounces. At least the receiver should make the call before her return is struck. By waiting until after her return lands wide or in the net, it looks a lot like cheating.

A late call can still be made and probably should be honoured the first time this happens. However, I would, at this point, ask the receiver to **make all her calls, loud and prompt!** Late calls made after this warning can be denied and result in the returner losing the point.

Example 4

In a doubles match, you hit a first serve into the net. While preparing to hit your second serve, a ball from an adjacent court rolls onto your court. Your partner quickly returns the ball to its home court. Should you ask, or presume, that you should get a first serve again?

Ruling: The rules explicitly state that the time it takes to return a ball to an adjacent court is not sufficient to warrant a first serve. Giving a first serve requires a prolonged delay, perhaps a minute or longer. When you retrieve your first serve ball after it hits the net and rolls back to your service line, you wouldn't ask for a first serve there, would you? Then it stands to reason that you should not ask for a first serve when you return a ball from next door. In any case, the receiving team decides whether or not to grant a first serve so don't get uptight if they play according to the rules and simply state: "second serve".

Etiquette & Safety

Finally, I'd like to talk about court etiquette. We appreciate that players wait until the buzzer rings before entering the bubble. However, you shouldn't just head onto your court blindly. There is a curtain just beyond the revolving door and it has a window on it. You should look through the little window to see if court #2 is in the middle of a rally. If they are, please wait until they finish the point. Once it is done, then it is a great time to quickly cross their court to get to yours. This way you won't disturb their point and also you won't get hit by any balls, racquets or players! They'll be happy and you will be safe. Timing is everything!

I hope these tips help you have fun, contention-free, competitive tennis matches. Now, I've got to run because I don't want to be late for my match as it has been said... *timing is everything!*

