



SOME OBSERVATIONS FROM THE REFEREEING SEAT:

Having refereed many matches again this season at Junior, Masters and Senior levels including the Irish Nationals in each, I would like to share some observations that those who would like to improve either their understanding of the rules or their refereeing or marking skills might find interesting.

A general observation about the refereeing at masters tournaments is that they continue to be the easiest group with which to be involved as they have built up the good habit of refereeing the next match on court, often with both the winner and loser taking on the responsibility. The senior players continue to lead the way in playing the ball when it can be played, rather than looking for an unnecessary let. For their part, many of the juniors have the best grasp of the rules and regularly apply the 'No Let' correctly.

We continue to have a shortage of qualified referees and this has the greatest impact at Junior Tournaments where it can be unfair to expect the younger age groups to referee older players. As many of the spectators are parents of the players that can have its own drawbacks.

Seven take-aways from my refereeing experience this season:

1. Language / Vocabulary around Calls:

'Out' is the appropriate call when a ball goes out of court during a rally and not 'out of court'.

Anything wrong with the serve (like a foot fault, hitting the ball out of court or hitting an out of court line or hitting the tin) requires the call of 'Fault'. (Rules 5.7 and 5.8 and Appendix 1.)

Awarding a Stroke or Let:

Rather than saying "*stroke*" it is best to say, "*Stroke to O'Brien*" and "Yes Let" is the appropriate call and not "Play a Let please".

Game (or Match) Ball:

This must be called each time it is the case and not just once. For example, where the server is serving at 2/10 the marker call is "*2/10 Match Ball*", then "*3/10 Match ball*" and so on until the end of the game.

2. Calling the score:

There seems to be a belief that the marker should not call the score until the receiver is ready. This is not the case and the rules state clearly that "*the marker must call the score without delay at the end of each rally*". (Rule 3.6.4.). Waiting until the receiver appears to be ready delays the match and play is meant to be continuous.

3. Warming up the ball:

Players should warm up the ball fairly and both should have equal opportunity to strike the ball. It is a feature in the junior game for a small but significant number of players to take too

many shots before passing the ball to their opponent. Three or four times to oneself is really the maximum and then the ball should be hit back to the opponent. Obviously, the more experienced and senior players can strike the ball 5 or 6 times back to themselves quite quickly in a very short space of time and that is acceptable. The Rules say that the referee must penalise unacceptable conduct and that includes an unfair warm up. (Rules 4.2 and 15.6)

Proper court etiquette requires that after an interval between games the players can bring the ball back to playing conditions and it is unsporting for a server to walk on court and attempt to serve the ball without first having given the opponent an opportunity to hit the ball. Some players do this. Of course, there is also an obligation on the players to be back on court on time to allow this to occur and to that end players should make their way to court when “15 Seconds” is called and be ready to play on the call of “Time”.

4. Bringing towels or other objects on to the court:

This season I have seen racket covers, handbags, wallets and towels being brought on court. Rule 15:2 is definite about this saying that “Players may not place any object within the court”. The referee needs to request the players to remove the object and it best to do that sooner rather than later.

The reasons for this rule include the possibility of distraction, danger to the players if any object moved and interfered with the movement of a player and the chance that in moving they then interfere with an otherwise ‘good’ ball. – for example, the drop lands on the racket cover or the edge of a towel.

In professional squash there is a towel box supplied at the top of the court, appropriately coloured so as not to interfere with the view and designed so that the ball will not come into contact with the box when coming from the front wall. It would be reasonable to extend that to the amateur game provided that same conditions apply. Where the towel is not too large and does not protrude excessively into the court it may be allowable to waive the rule but it is likely to be at the discretion of the referee and unacceptable where the other player objects.

5. A player’s racket coming into contact with the opponent on the swing:

This observation refers to where after the contact the ball is struck.

It is clear from the reactions of some players that there is an assumption that should this happen it is an automatic stroke to the player. This is not so and whether it is a stroke or let will depend on the degree of interference with the path of the ball. If the contact affects the swing but the flight of the ball is deemed by the referee not to have been greatly *affected* then a Let will be allowed. Where the contact caused the flight to be greatly affected then this is viewed as the swing being *prevented* and that is a stroke.

Where the contact is on the follow through a Let is the most that would be allowed and it could easily be a no let where the referee judges that the stroke was generally unaffected – minimal interference.

6. Player Dissent:

World Squash Officiating has spearheaded the move to eliminate player dissent so that all involved can have a more positive and sporting experience. W.S.O. Directive 3 of August 2024 reminds us that Rule 15 requires that *'unacceptable behaviour such as dissent (15.6.5), obscenity (15.6.1), and abuse (15.6.2) be penalised'* and defines Dissent as *'repeated questioning, aggressive tone, arguing, shouting, or disrespectful comments'*.

While it is acceptable for players to seek an explanation for a particular decision, that explanation once given should be sufficient. Repeatedly arguing the point is contrary to the rules and should be penalised. That Penalty for dissent would be a conduct warning in the first instance followed by a conduct stroke for repeated offences. This season in the professional game we have seen 'conduct games' being awarded for repeated dissent.

The bad habit of a player immediately telling the referee what the result of an appeal should be is another example of dissent in that it is an attempt to influence the referee. It is better to allow the referee to make the decision before asking for the explanation or making any comment.

The Directive also emphasises that referee should maintain a courteous, professional and empathetic demeanour when in dialogue with the players.

7. Racket or ball abuse:

Racket abuse (knocking racket against court walls or throwing the racket or hitting oneself with the racket) and ball abuse (hitting the ball in annoyance at the end of a rally) is also in breach of R15 and should be penalised, again with a conduct warning in the first instance and thereafter with a conduct stroke.

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