



## The American Platform Tennis Association's Chair Umpire Handbook

The APTA Chair Umpire Handbook is intended for certified officials who umpire matches at all APTA Grand Prix events and APTA Nationals, but are applicable for umpiring platform tennis matches at any level. If you are interested in becoming a certified APTA chair umpire, please reach out to Marshall Chapin, head of umpires, at [mchapin@gmail.com](mailto:mchapin@gmail.com).

The following is a list of procedures and tips which, when adhered to, will make the conduct of a match more likely to be smooth and error free.

The official rules of platform tennis can be found at the Rules tab of the APTA's website, <http://www.platformtennis.org/>

### APTA UMPIRING PRINCIPLES

Our umpiring principles are intended to continually increase the quality of umpiring at APTA events and can be used as qualitative measure of performance. The principles are

- **Professional:** umpires should act with a level of professionalism no different than those umpiring an ATP event or an MLB game. Yes, we are volunteers, but there's no reason volunteers can't or shouldn't be as professional as possible.
- **Knowledgeable:** umpires should know the rules. They should know the most common issues which arise in umpired matches, and they should be prepared to handle them effectively.
- **Consistent:** we're trying to create some consistency across all our umpires. How they introduce the players, what they say when they call scores – consistency makes it easier for the players and crowd to follow, and it feels more professional to all involved.
- **Reliable and Prepared:** tournament directors and live stream crews have enough to worry about at big events. Umpires should be reliably on time to matches and prepared with the tools they need to be successful in the chair.
- **Loud:** one of the most common complaints is the crowd can't hear the umpires. That should be easy to fix and it will remain a focus for improvement.

### BEFORE THE TOURNAMENT

Review this handbook, the *APTA Official Rules of Platform Tennis*, and the *Addendum: The Etiquette of Platform Tennis*. Connect with your regional umpire captain to discuss any local club or tournament-specific guidelines.

### DO A DRY RUN

If you're new to this, or if you haven't been in the chair in a while, I \*strongly\* recommend you do a dry run from your home before the tournament. After you've read through this handbook

and the other prep materials, go to [The APTA's YouTube Channel](#), pick out a good archived match and act as umpire from the safety of your home. Print out your prep sheet and scorecards, treat it like the real thing. You may be shocked at how little time there is between points to both mark and announce the score, and to be sure you know who just scored the point, and then to check for receiver-ready and a foot fault (if you get Steve DeRose, he basically runs to the service line and begins tossing it without ever pausing, it's nuts). Practice the best system which works for you on the scorecard for tracking the match. I promise you that you don't want to get lost or confused up in that chair, it's not a happy feeling!

## ARRIVING AT THE MAIN HUT

- Bring printed copies of your Prep Sheet and your Scorecards (bring extras!), a clipboard, pencils/pens, and a stopwatch.
- Check in with the APTA tournament director and the hut commander well ahead of your scheduled match time.
- APTA guidance calls for a new ball to be used every 7 games (always starting with a new ball, never using the warm-up ball and counting it as a game), but confirm ball changes with the tournament director.
- If your match is live-streamed there may be timing considerations (like looking for a signal before announcing the teams, and a signal before starting the 2nd set). Coordinate with the live stream crew before going out.
- The APTA will provide a super official and warm umpire jacket (not to keep, sorry), hand and toe warmers, new balls and clipboards (if you forget yours). Please dress warmly! You may bring a blanket to keep warm, we will all be sitting in the umpire chairs (wear your seat belt up there!). The metal chairs are cold and hard, wrapping a blanket under you and then over your legs really helps, and you may want to bring a stadium pad to sit on.

## PREPARATION FOR YOUR MATCH

Ideally you should begin filling out your scoresheet and chair umpire prep sheet in the hut before going to the court. If you're unclear of the pronunciation of a player's name, ask that player to say it for you then repeat it back. Look up players' hometowns for the prep sheet while you still have WiFi or phone connectivity (they can be found in the draw on the APTA's site when you click through the player's name).

If you have a phone on you, turn off the ringer and any timers/alarms! This happened once in a national final in the middle of a point, no kidding.

Use the bathroom before getting up in the chair! Try not to drink too much liquids beforehand ☺

If the tournament director or umpire captain hasn't measured the net, be sure to do so before the players arrive for the warm up. Be sure the court is free of debris, the snowboards are locked down, and the court is in good shape for play.

Plan to get out to the court before players warm up - ideally you can get the coin toss/racquet spin out of the way before warmups and before you climb up on the chair. Make sure you have scoresheets, two pencils/pens, and at least three new balls (check for round). After the spin, while all four players are still at the net, use your Prep Sheet and let everyone know what your 4 major responsibilities are:

-- Four responsibilities (found on the Prep Sheet, this is what you'll say to the players on the court before the match and the spin):

- 1) I'll be introducing players and announcing the score before every point, and after every game.
- 2) Calling violations: There are a few things I'll call immediately, with or without a player dispute -- foot faults will be called without warning, touching the net, reaching over the net – clear non-line violations, though you should of course call those on yourself if you're aware of the infraction.
- 3) YOU will be making all the line calls, I'll only get involved if there is a dispute. If a player disputes an out call, look up to me and ask for confirmation – I'll either confirm or overturn the call and that decision is final.
- 4) Unsportsmanlike conduct isn't tolerated at APTA events. Penalties can range from a warning to a loss of point, game, or match depending on the severity of the infraction.

-- Score calling, and consistency:

- 1) First, BE LOUD. You'd be shocked how hard it is to hear most umpires. Heaters, crowd noise, etc. I basically YELL the score out toward the crowd, and that way the live stream will pick it up from the chair's microphone too.
- 2) Consistency. It's hard for the crowd to follow different score calls, and we look less professional when we get creative. Please make the calls as follows:  
...between points, "30-15"  
...between games, "Game Chapin Horne, they lead the first set 3 games to 2." Or "Game Chapin Horne, DuRandt Mitchell lead the first set 5 games to 4"  
...in the second set, \*only between side changes\*, add the first set score, "Game Chapin Horne, DuRandt Mitchell lead the second set 4 games to 3, Chapin Horne won the first set 7-5" (no need for this in the third set because of course they split).

-- Calling violations:

Some violations are to be called by the umpire immediately, with or without an opponent disputing. These include foot faults (more on this below), touching the net, reaching over the net to strike the ball, the ball double bouncing, and the ball touching a player. If a ball hits the umpire or chair or anything attached to it the ball is out, even if it was going in, loss of point to the last team to hit the ball. Make it clear that the PLAYERS will be making the line calls. The umpire will make a line call ONLY IF there is a disputed call. (More notes below)

-- Foot Faults:

When players are warming up serves, watch their feet to get used to their service motion. During the match there is no "warning" or "grace call" for foot faults. If you call a foot fault it is a loss of point, including the first time you call it. I know calling foot faults is awkward but it is cheating, intentional or not, so don't hesitate to call them regardless of the situation. These can't be subjective calls, you **must** call them when you see them, it's important for the players that we as umpires are consistent on this. Be sure you have a full understanding of the rule (for example, throughout the service motion touching any surface outside the imaginary extension of the doubles line or touching any part of the imaginary extension of the service mark is a foot fault, etc.).

-- Disputed Calls:

Here are the situations:

- a) If a call is disputed and the Umpire either saw it out or wasn't 100% sure, be confident in agreeing with the call and say, "I agree, I saw the ball out." Or,

- b) If the Umpire didn't have a clear view, be confident in agreeing with the call and say "I agree, the call stands." In both cases were the Umpire is agreeing with the out call, usually a simply nod to the questioning team will suffice.
- c) If a call is disputed and the Umpire clearly saw the ball in, say, "Correction, I saw the ball in." The team who made the out call loses the point (including the serve).

**THE MOST IMPORTANT THING FOR AN UMPIRE IS BEING CONFIDENT OF YOUR DECISIONS.** If you did not get a clear view of the ball where the call is being questioned, you must agree with the original "out" call.

### **TIPS WHILE WATCHING A POINT**

- a) I like to point my feet slightly at the serving team's side of the court. Some top teams play very long points, and it's possible at the end of a point to forget who was serving and fumble your score announcement which screws up the players.
- b) As the server gets ready, check their location for a potential fault (over the server hash or outside the court, including the back foot at address), quickly scan the receiver to ensure he/she is ready, then watch for a foot fault. If you see one, call it immediately and confidently.
- c) Stay focused - you're not a fan, you're an umpire. Follow the ball and don't break focus.
- d) If a point is long, during a high lob I like to quickly peek down at the scoresheet and repeat the game score to myself. It'll help when the point ends.
- e) On every single shot, as the ball bounces I say "IN" to myself if I see the ball clearly in. If I can't tell for sure or if I see it out, I say nothing to myself. The benefit of this is you can immediately overturn a disputed call if the receiving team calls a ball out when you said "IN" to yourself. If you say nothing and they play an out ball, that's all good, the point continues, but if they call it out and you said nothing, you can confidently confirm their call. The players all appreciate an immediate overturn if you have to do it. If you have to overturn a call, the correct language is, "Correction, I saw the ball in."
- f) The moment a point ends, mark down and also very loudly and clearly announce the score to the crowd. Do this quickly and clearly. You honestly can't be too loud!

No points shall be replayed unless a let is called from an obstruction, or the players all agree for some reason to play a let (which should be exceptionally rare).

### **UNSPORTSMANLIKE CONDUCT RULE AND PROTOCOL**

First, here's the rule:

*An umpire, a tournament director, the APTA Tour Director, or designated APTA official has authority to administer penalties for unsportsmanlike conduct during a tournament. The umpire may impose penalties that can include a warning or loss of point. Penalties such as loss of game, set, match, or expulsion from the tournament will be made upon consultation between the umpire and APTA Tour Director, the Tournament Director or designated APTA official. Examples of unsportsmanlike conduct: continuous, aggressive questioning of line calls, throwing the paddle, abusive or foul language, retaliatory calls, threatening verbal or physical behavior, and name calling.*

*In addition, after the conclusion of any APTA sanctioned tournament, the APTA Board may, at its discretion, mete out penalties to players for unsportsmanlike behavior. Penalties can range from a warning letter to a lifetime ban from all APTA sanctioned events.*

There are a couple important things here. First, we didn't want to create a clear order of penalties (warning, then loss of point, loss of game, etc.), because we believe the umpire and

APTA need the freedom to skip if the infraction was egregious. For example, if a player threw his paddle over the net and hit his opponent in the head, we'd want to skip way past a warning.

Second, the umpire has the authority to administer penalties but only up until a loss of point. For any more severe penalties, the umpire needs to stop the match and call for (first choice) the APTA Tour Director (currently Jackie Cameron), or the tournament director or other authorized APTA representative (Tiernan, Amin, etc.) to come to the court, discuss the incident, and determine the penalty.

As a best practice: in the unlikely event that you have to issue an unsportsmanlike conduct warning (or loss of point), right then you should make the APTA Tour Director (or other if not available) aware it's happened so she/he can be courtside to watch for additional infractions. After you've issued the warning, you ask for someone you know courtside to find the Tour Director and bring him/her to the court, or speak it into the mic and the live stream crew will find them. Then between games when the TD gets to the court and is near you, you explain the warning infraction and ask them to standby.

### **"A CONFIDENT, DISPASSIONATE EMPATHY"**

In general, umpires should exhibit "a confident, dispassionate empathy". Be confident in your decisions. Keep the emotion out of it, you have to remain dispassionate in your communication but you can't come off as a jerk, you have to show some empathy for the player. If you've just overturned an out call, they might be a little embarrassed and/or pissed off, and it's not your job to show your dominance or command, it's your job to get them calmed down quickly so they and the other players can move on. The quick and confident decision is half the battle (waffling and god forbid negotiating just erodes confidence). And then an empathetic tone in communication helps them as well. The same goes in the rare instance of dealing with unsportsmanlike conduct – a confident, dispassionate empathy, and help the players all move on with the match.

### **DON'T TOLERATE ARGUING**

Players should not argue with any call made by the umpire. If you find that players are asking you over and over to make line calls, gather everyone together to remind them about the spirit of paddle, and remind them that they really need to call their own lines. Know that you are 100% supported by the APTA and Tournament Directors... you should not tolerate any kind of abuse or back talk at all.

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