



ST. ALBERT
PICKLEBALL CLUB

Member Handbook

Revision 2.2

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Introduction

Welcome to the St. Albert Pickleball Club (SAPC) and this Member Handbook!

Whether you are a new or long-time member of the SAPC, this Handbook is important for you to read. It contains information that you will be expected to know when playing pickleball not just in St. Albert, but at one of the many clubs across Alberta, Canada, and the world.

The Handbook is divided into chapters as follows:

- **Chapter 1: Safety**
- **Chapter 2: Pickleball Rules**
- **Chapter 3: Courtesy and Etiquette**
- **Chapter 4: Ratings**

The purpose of this document is to teach you how to play pickleball safely, smartly, and respectfully while you are a member of the SAPC. Pickleball is a fun sport, but only when everyone on the court understands and follows the basic “rules of the road”, which keep everyone safe and help keep the game running smoothly. Please let this Member Handbook guide your behaviour when playing not just at our club, but at other clubs as well.

Ready to find out more? Let’s begin.

Chapter 1: Safety

The **number one priority** when playing pickleball is to prevent injury to yourself and to others. There are several fundamental “do’s and don’ts” to keep in mind when playing so that everyone is able to play safely:

DO:

- ✓ **Give up a point rather than put yourself or others at risk of injury.**

If you’re running toward a net post or a wall to try to reach a ball, it’s better to pull up short and sacrifice the point rather than risk a potential injury. The same rule applies to your equipment as well—it’s not worth a potential broken paddle to try to swing at a ball that’s too close to a wall or fence. There are many points to be played in your future; don’t risk an injury for just one of them.

- ✓ **Get players’ attention by yelling “BALL!” if you see a ball rolling onto their court.**

You must alert players on your own court or other courts if you see a ball that might become a tripping hazard. Remember, players can suddenly change direction and move quickly, so even balls that are still a short distance away from a player pose an immediate hazard.

When getting the attention of players on another court, don’t just say “Ball” once and consider your job done. **Do whatever you have to do—yell repeatedly, scream at the top of your lungs, wave your arms, whatever it takes—to urgently get the attention of anyone who might trip over a ball.** Do not stop until you are sure the players on the other court have heard you!

On the other hand, if there is absolutely no chance anyone can trip over a ball, don’t interrupt a point in progress. For instance, if a ball is rolling quickly and harmlessly through the back end of a court while the players are at the net in the middle of a point, use your judgment and consider letting play continue. That being said, **always err on the side of warning players** about any balls that might become a hazard. The golden rule is: **The closer someone is to potentially tripping over a ball, the more urgently you need to get their attention.**

- ✓ **When you’ve finished playing the last point of a game, look for where the ball went.**

After finishing a game, the ball often rolls away unnoticed, and players forget about it as they make their way to the net to greet their opponents. Go find the ball and retrieve it before coming to the net so that the ball doesn’t roll back unseen onto your own court or someone else’s. The same goes for balls that roll off the court after a particularly exciting point; don’t simply look at each other and start talking about what just happened—make sure the ball is secured.

✓ **Pay attention to what's going on around you at all times.**

Many players get “tunnel vision”, meaning they are too focused on playing and neglect to notice what's happening around them. If your attention is too focused on the game, you're at risk of tripping over unseen balls that roll onto your court, not hearing players on other courts yelling to warn you about a ball rolling at your feet, or not noticing someone who is chasing a shot from the adjacent court and is about to run into you. **Always keep “half an eye and half an ear open”** so that you are aware of what's going on all around you. That includes times when you are not actively playing a point, and even times when you are seated off court waiting to play (errant balls can hit you in the face).

✓ **Communicate with your partner on balls that both of you can reach.**

Calling “mine” or “yours” will help prevent dangerous collisions between the two of you. In general, the player who can hit the ball on the forehand has the right of way whenever a ball is within reach of both players. However, an audible call is the best way to determine who should hit the ball and prevent a collision.

✓ **Wear protective eyewear.**

Pickleball is a fast sport played at close range with your opponents, and the club has had incidents where players have been hit in the eye and injured because they were not wearing protective eyewear. To avoid possible retinal surgery, please wear protective eyewear (eyeglasses, at the very least) when playing.

DON'T:

× **Don't keep playing if someone calls “Ball!” in the direction of your court.**

You must **immediately stop playing** when a ball rolls onto your court or someone calls “Ball!” **Always be alert so that you can hear any warnings directed at you!**

× **Don't run onto another court to retrieve a ball while play is in progress on that court.**

Running onto another court while play is in progress is a sure way to risk an injury to yourself and the other players on that court. Wait until the point on that court is finished. If the ball poses a possible tripping hazard to the players on that court, warn them immediately.

× **Don't swing your paddle recklessly without knowing if it might hit someone (either directly or on your follow-through).**

You are responsible for controlling your paddle at all times. If there is any chance you might hit someone with your paddle, you must refrain from swinging, even if it means losing the point. Be especially careful when swinging at a ball that is also in reach of your partner, particularly on overhead smashes where you both might be looking up at the ball.

× **Don't blindly charge after a ball that's headed off the court.**

Courts are often close together, and you can accidentally run into someone on another court if you are chasing a ball without looking where you're going. If you have to run off your court to hit a ball, first glance in the path you are travelling and pull up short if you might run into someone.

× **Don't backtrack for a lob while facing forwards.**

This is one of the most common ways for a player to become seriously injured. Several club members have sustained serious head injuries (resulting in ambulance trips to the hospital) by looking up at the ball, shuffling backwards with their feet, and then tripping backwards. If a lob is hit over your head, the proper thing to do is completely or partially turn your body, so that you can run for the ball forwards or by sidestepping.

× **Don't return the ball to someone after a point by hitting it hard at them, or by hitting it at them while they are not looking.**

Whether you are retrieving a ball for your partner, your opponent, or someone on another court, do not simply smack the ball recklessly in his or her general direction. Use the proper way to return the ball to someone, which is as follows:

1. Make sure the person is aware you are going to hit the ball to him or her (i.e. make eye contact).
2. Make sure you won't hit anyone else if you mis-hit the ball.
3. Hit the ball in a soft arc toward the person, in such a way that the ball bounces once or twice at most before settling gently into the person's hands at around chest height.

If you don't think you can accurately reach the targeted person "on the bounce" in this manner, then hit the ball at a moderate pace along the ground to the targeted person instead (fast enough that the ball will get to the person without undue delay, but slow enough that the person can easily catch the ball once it arrives).

Also, when returning a ball to a distant court, **never** hit a ball through or over a court that is in the midst of playing a point.

Chapter 2: Pickleball Rules

In a recreational pickleball game, all the players on the court share the responsibility for refereeing their match. Whether you are a raw beginner or a professional player, **it is your responsibility to be familiar with the rules, particularly the rules regarding line calls.** Pickleball's official rules are set by the International Federation of Pickleball (IFP); a .PDF copy of the rulebook is free to download on the IFP's website (www.ifpickleball.org).

You should always have a copy of the rulebook close at hand for reference whenever you play pickleball—either keep a printed version in your equipment bag, or have the electronic version accessible from your smartphone or tablet.

Although all the rules have a role in governing play, the rules governing line calls are among the most important for you to know and follow. These are covered in Section 6 of the official rulebook, and they are based on one single overriding fundamental principle:

“No matter how much you want to win, always give your opponents every possible benefit of the doubt in the name of good sportsmanship.”

Read that again, and make sure you take it to heart. If every pickleball player follows that principle scrupulously to the letter, the game will be much more pleasant and fun for everyone!

The following is an overview of some common line call rules and other important rules that you should be aware of, as well as notes where appropriate. These are not “guidelines” or “suggestions”; they are official pickleball rules that you must follow at all times on the court. These rules apply to officiated and non-officiated matches alike; however, for matches that are officiated, such as in tournaments, some of these rules may be slightly different. You should always check the latest version of the IFP rulebook before competing in a tournament.

Line Calls

- A ball that lands on a line is always in, with just one exception: a ball that lands on the kitchen line during a serve is out.
- Each team is **only** responsible for line calls on balls that land in their own half of the court. Note that this does not include kitchen violation calls, which can be made by anyone on the court at any time.
- You can only call an opponent's ball out if you are **100% certain** that you saw the ball land **clearly out**. Once again, for emphasis:

YOU CAN ONLY CALL AN OPPONENT'S BALL OUT IF YOU ARE 100% CERTAIN THAT YOU SAW THE BALL LAND CLEARLY OUT.

Note that “100% certain” does not mean “almost certain”, or “99% certain”, or “pretty certain.” Similarly, “clearly out” does not mean “probably out” or “I’m pretty sure I saw it land out” or “it was almost definitely out, I’m just about sure of it.” The words “I think the ball was out” should never, ever be heard on a court! If you have **the slightest doubt or hesitancy** about whether a ball was out (even after you call the ball out), you **must** call the ball “IN” for your opponent. As the well-known saying goes: **“An opponent’s ball that is 99% out is 100% IN.”**

Note 1: Adhering to this rule at all times will take some effort on your part. It’s human nature to convince yourself that you’re pretty sure an opponent’s ball landed out, when you didn’t actually see it 100% for sure. It’s particularly easy to do this at a key point in an important match in a tournament, or against someone you feel is “robbing you” on line calls. If you’re tempted to give yourself the benefit of the doubt on a line call rather than your opponent (“just this one time” is the usual rationalization), ask yourself this: “If I need to fudge a line call in order to win a match, do I really deserve to win? Am I really going to be proud of winning the match?”

Note 2: You should assume every ball you hit is in, unless and until your opponents call it out. In other words, don’t stop playing a point just because you believe one of your shots landed out. If you are absolutely certain that your shot was out, you can explain what you saw to your opponents after the point is over and offer the point to them if it ended in your favour. However, bear in mind that any shot that lands in their half of the court is their call to make, not yours—even if you feel certain they are making the wrong call.

- “Out” calls must be made without undue delay, as soon as possible after the ball lands. You should make the call **loudly, firmly, and decisively**, in a manner that befits the 100% certainty with which you saw the ball land out. If you find yourself making a hesitant “out” call, that implies you were not 100% certain the ball landed out; as such, you should immediately reverse your call and give the point to your opponents.

Note: If you need more than a second or two to decide whether you saw the ball land clearly out, then by definition you are unsure enough that you should give the point to your opponents. Also, when you hit a ball that landed close to a line in your court, you are not allowed to wait to see how your shot turns out, then end up calling your opponent’s previous shot “out” only if your shot was unsuccessful. Your calls should always be made promptly after a ball lands on your side of the court.

- If you call a ball “out” and realize after play stops that you made a mistake and weren’t 100% certain you saw the ball land clearly out, you must immediately give the point to your opponent.

- If you and your partner have a difference of opinion on a call (whether for a line call or kitchen violation), the point should immediately go to your opponent.

*Note: A point lost in this manner should be awarded **immediately and without further discussion** as soon as you realize you and your partner disagree on the call. There should be absolutely no argument or recrimination between you and your partner, even if you “clearly saw it” and know for 100% sure your partner was mistaken. **Never try to sway or bully your partner into changing his or her original call, and never let your partner sway or bully you into changing your original call.***

- You must wait until **after** the ball lands before calling it out, even if it was extremely obvious that the ball was going to land out.
- Don’t catch or touch a ball before it lands out of bounds, no matter how obvious it is that the ball was going to land out; if you do, the point goes to your opponent.
- If you hear your opponent call “out!” or “no!” to his or her partner **before** a ball lands, that is considered “partner communication”, not a line call. You should continue playing the point in that situation. Any line-call word such as “out” or “no” is only a line call if it is said **after** the ball lands.

Note: It may be advisable to arrange a non-line call word or phrase such as “Leave it!” with your partner to communicate that he or she should let the ball go, so as to avoid potential misunderstandings with your opponents. Whether or not to make such an arrangement is up to you and your partner to decide.

- If you didn’t clearly see whether a ball was in or out, ask your partner if he or she saw it and can make a call. If so, your partner’s call stands. If your partner didn’t see the ball clearly either, then the point goes to your opponent. You may ask your opponents if they had a good enough view to tell whether it was out; but you must accept their answer, since they are not responsible for line calls on your side of the net.
- The instant an “out” call has been made, the ball is considered dead and the point is over.

Note: You should always hit the ball when you are unsure whether it might have landed out. If your partner doesn’t call the ball out, then you’ll have lost the point if you let the ball go without hitting it. Also, you are allowed to hit a ball while making an “out” line call (in recognition of the fact that you may be forced to begin and complete your swing while waiting to see if a close ball is going to be out or not).

- Players must **never** consult spectators regarding a line call, and spectators must **never** offer their opinions on a line call to the players. Spectators can be partisan,

unqualified, or not in the best position to make an accurate call. Players are **solely** responsible for **all** calls on the court.

- **Never** replay a point unless the rules specifically call for a “let” (such as when a ball rolls onto the court). If players on a court aren’t sure about what a call should be, they should cooperatively consult the rulebook to determine the proper call rather than replaying the point.

Kitchen Violations

- All players on the court are jointly responsible for calling kitchen violations.
Note: This includes, most importantly, yourself. If you can, check to see if you are in the kitchen after volleying a ball close to the line. When your partner is volleying a ball, try to keep an eye on whether he or she is in the kitchen if you can. Only call a kitchen violation if you are 100% certain of it (i.e. clearly saw it).
- If your paddle, or any part of your body, or anything you are wearing, touches (or falls into) the kitchen during your volley or as part of your follow-through, it is a kitchen violation.
- If your momentum takes you into the kitchen after you hit a volley, it is a kitchen violation—even if you struck the ball legally outside the kitchen, and even if the ball was already dead by the time you fell into the kitchen.

Serving and Receiving

- Before serving, the server must make sure the receiver is ready.
- The server **must** call the score before beginning the serving motion. **Failure to call the score is a fault and results in loss of that serve.**

*Note: When calling the score, the server should do so in a voice loud enough for the **furthest opponent** to hear easily. Also, as a courtesy, the server should wait a moment or two after calling the score, so as to allow the receiving team to dispute it if they want to do so.*

- If your opponent is about to serve and you are not ready to receive it, you should immediately make a “halt” sign with your paddle or your non-paddle hand held high above your head. This signal indicates that you are not ready. You should also do this if you see the server is about to serve and your partner is not ready. You cannot hit a return of serve and then afterward claim you were not ready.
- For a serve to be legal, all of the following must occur:
 - The serve motion of your arm must be in an upward arc.
 - At the moment your paddle makes contact with the ball, the ball must be below the height of your navel.

- When your paddle makes contact with the ball, every part of your paddle above the handle (i.e. the entire head of the paddle) must be below the height of your wrist at that moment.
- When your paddle makes contact with the ball, at least one foot must be on the ground, and your feet cannot be touching any part of the court outside the serving area (the serving area is behind the baseline and between the imaginary extensions of the sideline and the centre line).

Other Rules of Interest

- Balls that hit a venue's "permanent fixtures" (such as the ceiling, lights, or basketball hoops or nets) are called "out".
- Balls that hit the net posts are "out", even if they land in the correct court after doing so. This rule applies both to permanent net posts and to net posts on temporary nets.
- Balls that are hit into the opponent's court by going around the net are legal. On such shots, the ball does not have to be above the height of the net; the ball may go past the net at any height above the ground, as long as it does not touch the ground before entering the opposing court.
- If your opponent's serve hits you or your partner, it is a point for your opponents (unless a fault was committed during the serve delivery, such as a foot fault). Stay alert while your opponent is serving, particularly if you are standing near the net.
- The kitchen exists between the net and the kitchen line, but does not extend past the sidelines; thus, it is legal to step outside the kitchen (i.e. outside either sideline) and then volley a ball that has crossed onto your side of the net, even if it has barely done so (as long as your feet are not touching the kitchen when you make contact with the ball).
- If a ball hit by your opponents bounces on your side of the net and then starts back-spinning backwards over the net toward your opponents' side of the court, your opponents will win the rally unless you hit the ball before it bounces on their side. You are allowed to reach over the net to hit the ball.
- If you touch the net with your paddle or part of your body at any time during a rally, you lose the rally.
- You are allowed to hit a ball more than once or "carry" it with your paddle, as long as your swing at the ball is a continuous motion in a single direction.
- If, after a rally, you discover that the ball is cracked or broken, the point stands as played unless all players on the court agree that the damage to the ball influenced the outcome of the rally—in which case the point is replayed. If all players do not agree that the damaged ball influenced the rally, the point stands.

Chapter 3: Courtesy and Etiquette

Part of being an athlete is being a good sport, being respectful and courteous to your opponent, and practicing good etiquette while competing—no matter which sport you're playing.

Pickleball is no different in this regard. Please adhere to the following points of etiquette and courtesy whenever you play pickleball.

Personal Behaviour

- Club members are expected to be welcoming and helpful to newcomers and beginners, rather than treat them as players to be avoided. Similarly, newcomers and beginners should be respectful of the fact that more advanced players will need opportunities to play against their peers in order to be challenged and to further hone their skills.
- Show respect for your opponents **and yourself** by being a good sport after every match, whether you win or lose, whether the match was close or a blowout.
- Don't gloat or taunt opponents. Also, even if you don't mean to be disrespectful to an opponent, be aware that words you think are harmless joking banter may not be interpreted as such by your opponents.
- If you want to offer advice to another player, **always** ask the player first if he or she would mind hearing your advice. There are many reasons why someone might not want to hear your advice; for instance, some people prefer to learn at their own pace. Players who are constantly telling others how to play, regardless of how good they may be, are frowned upon and generally disliked.
- Get in the habit of offering to help the people who set up equipment for each pickleball session and who put everything away afterward. Not only do many hands make light work, but the faster you can get the equipment set up and put away as a group, the longer you'll get to play.
- **Never criticize or chastise anyone else on the court for making a bad shot, whether it be your partner or your opponents.** Whether the bad shot is made in the middle of a fun recreational game with friends or on match point to lose a national tournament, getting frustrated at someone for a bad shot should never, ever happen on a court.
- If you have a problem with someone's personal behavior while playing at a club venue, please speak with the captain at the venue immediately. If you feel the captain did not adequately address your concerns, please contact the club's Board of Directors.

Playing Matches

- If you are a much stronger player than an opponent, don't seize the opportunity to play full throttle against that person (i.e. don't smash the ball as hard as you can at every opportunity). Keep your opponents involved in the game, and play at a level that will allow them to at least feel like they are participating. Remember, you were a beginner once too.
- By the same token, don't avoid hitting to a player who's better than you. People usually do this because they care so much about winning that they hit the ball almost exclusively to the weaker player. Doing this not only makes the game no fun for the stronger player, but also means that you miss out on an opportunity to improve your own skills by competing against good players. Hitting the ball mostly at the weaker of your two opponents is a perfectly acceptable strategy in competitive tournament play, but it is **completely unacceptable** in recreational play. Accept the challenge and mix it up—hit the ball approximately equally to both opponents when playing recreationally.
- If you need to stop play for any reason before or during a point (such as to dispute the server's call of the score, to indicate that you or your partner are not ready, to stop play due to a ball rolling on court, etc.), raise your hand high above your head and quickly get the attention of the other players.
- If a ball runs onto your court and play is stopped just as you miss a shot, and you know the ball didn't affect your shot at all, you should let your opponents know and award the point to them.

Crossing Courts

- Don't cross behind a court if a point is in progress or about to start on that court. Wait in a spot off one corner of the court, far enough away so that you will not be in anyone's way. While waiting for the point to finish, keep still so as not to distract the players, and pay attention to the progress of the point. As soon as there is a halt in play, **quickly** proceed across the court without delay.
- If you and other players are crossing courts, try to do so as a group rather than one by one.
- If you are on a court and people are crossing behind your court, do not start play until they have crossed and are out of the way.

Line Calls

- Make sure you read and fully understand the "Line Calls" section in the previous chapter of this document. Failure to understand the line call rules is one of the biggest reasons for disputes on a pickleball court.
- If you hit a ball and neither of your opponents have a good view of whether the ball landed in or out, the rules state that the point goes to you. However, it is good

courtesy to let your opponents know what you saw, and encourage them to give themselves the point if you clearly saw that your ball was out. Note that because the ball landed on their side of the court, your opponents are still the ones who must make the final call, even if you were the only person who saw whether the ball landed in or out.

- When making an “out” call, make it loudly, decisively, and with your non-paddle hand raised straight up in the air. That way, your opponents can see **and** hear your call. Similarly, to let your opponents know one of their shots was in, call “good” or “in” loudly and decisively, and fully extend your arm straight downwards with your palm bent parallel to the ground. Remember: if you cannot call a ball “out” with 100% certainty, you must give the point to your opponent.
- Don’t call a ball “out” at the precise instant that it hits the ground. Doing so implies you had already made up your mind about the call without bothering to check whether the ball landed in or not.

Balls

- If a ball is heading toward someone else’s court, and you have an opportunity to intercept it, **make every possible effort to do so** (as long as you can do so safely). It’s good courtesy to intercept the ball so that play doesn’t have to be halted on the other court.
- If a ball from another court is in your vicinity, and you are not currently playing a point, retrieve the ball and return it to the other court; don’t leave it for the other court’s players to get, unless they are closer to the ball than you are.
- Follow all the safety guidelines stated earlier with regards to retrieving balls back to other players after points are ended. **Never blindly smack a ball back in the general direction of where you think it should go.**
- It’s good courtesy to retrieve the ball for the server between points (whether it’s your partner or your opponent) so that the server doesn’t have to expend extra energy or lose focus. For instance, if a ball is on the ground, go pick it up yourself and return it cleanly to the server, rather than forcing the server to bend down and pick it up.

Serving

- As stated earlier, always call the score prior to serving (this isn’t just a courtesy—it’s in the rulebook), and call the score loudly enough for the opponent furthest from you to hear easily.
- When calling the score while serving on match point, don’t include the words “match point”, “game serve”, or any similar comment—just call the score like any other score. This is to avoid putting undue pressure on your opponent (it’s an official IFP rule, too).

- If you think your opponent is using an illegal serve, and you feel he or she is gaining a competitive advantage by doing so and you want to say something, discuss it privately with the person **after the match** rather than during the match. They may not be aware their serve is illegal, may firmly believe their serve is legal, or you may even be wrong—therefore, it’s advisable to broach the topic carefully and with sensitivity.

Equipment

The club has arranged many outdoor and indoor venues for your use. None of these venues are owned by the club, and although some of the equipment at these venues is owned by the club, many other pieces of equipment are not. Please be mindful of equipment and make sure not to damage anything at any venues. In particular, do not lean on nets or sit on them; this will damage them.

Code of Conduct

In addition to the general on-court courtesy and etiquette expectations outlined above, the St. Albert Pickleball Club has a specific Code of Conduct, whose purpose is to allow members, guests, and visitors to enjoy the benefits of being at the club while ensuring that other members can enjoy the same benefits without impairment.

All members, guests, and visitors must adhere to the Code of Conduct. To review the Code of Conduct, please visit the club’s website.

Chapter 4: Ratings

In the sport of pickleball, **ratings** are used to sort players into groups of similar ability. The ratings system ensures that players who are similarly skilled at pickleball are matched with each other in a variety of contexts, such as tournaments or club play.

All members of the St. Albert Pickleball Club are expected to fully understand the ratings system, the different types of ratings, their own rating, and the club's policy regarding ratings. To view the club's current ratings policy and learn more about ratings, visit pickleballstalbert.ca/Skill-Levels-and-Ratings.

Questions

If you have any questions regarding the ratings system or SAPC's ratings policies, or if you want to confirm your own rating, please check the FAQ section on the SAPC website or email SAPC's Membership and Volunteer Director.