



2024 MLPLAY™ RULES GUIDE



Major League Pickleball

MLPlay™ Rules Guide

Major League Pickleball (MLP or the League) is an innovative coed team league, featuring 22 teams across two levels - Premier and Challenger. Professional players are drafted to teams at both levels, competing across a regular season schedule, Mid-Season Tournament, and annual Playoffs.

Teams compete under rules specific to MLP (MLPlay™ Rules), including rally scoring for Games and tiebreakers known as DreamBreakers™. Every Match between teams consists of four (4) Games: Women's Doubles, Men's Doubles, and two (2) Mixed Doubles Games. If teams are tied after these four (4) Games, an innovative tiebreaker known as a DreamBreaker™ is played.

For the 2024 MLP season, twelve (12) teams will compete in the Premier Level and ten (10) in the Challenger Level. All teams will consist of four (4) players, two (2) men and two (2) women. All Matches at MLP events are officiated by the most experienced referees in the sport.

The most recent USA Pickleball Official Rulebook rules shall apply to all MLP events with the exception of the specific rules and procedures set forth in this Rules Guide. The League will have final authority on any situation that is not specifically covered by this Guide and will have the final decision on disputes or appeals.

MLP started in 2021 with one event and six (6) teams and has grown to twenty-two (22) teams playing in multiple events throughout the US. The League was the first organization to introduce rally scoring and a team format into pickleball. Team pickleball is the most exciting and thrilling experience for spectators.

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1. TEAM CAPTAINS & GENERAL MANAGERS

All teams must designate a team captain to communicate with MLP referees during matches and a general manager (GM) to communicate to the League during events and between events. General Manager duties include, but are not limited to: communicating with the League regarding scheduling, rule clarifications, communicating the selection of alternates and injuries, etc. Team captain duties include, but are not limited to: communicating with MLP referees during a match, participating and making selections during the coin toss, communicating the mixed doubles and DreamBreaker™ lineups to the referee, communicating timeouts and challenges to the referee, etc. If a team captain is unable to fulfill his/her duties, the team must designate a substitute captain.

2. WARM UP

Teams are expected to warm up on a practice court and report to their designated match court at their scheduled time. If an event is using “Followed By” for scheduling, it will be the team’s responsibility to keep track of when the preceding match finishes. Once a match finishes, teams will begin play after ten (10) minutes. If a team has not shown up to court after eight (8) minutes, they will forfeit their coin toss selections. If a team has already made their coin toss selections, but still creates a delay in the start time of the first game, the offending team will lose their timeout in that game.

If a player arrives at their match with an untested paddle and delays the start of the first game, they will lose their timeout in the first game and two (2) “free” challenges in the match. That team will begin the match with one (1) “free” challenge and no “free” challenges for the DreamBreaker™.

3. COIN TOSS

At the start of each match, a coin toss (or similar random selection) will be conducted. The winner will elect to choose one of the following options: 1) Serve or receive, 2) End, 3) Act or react, 4) Men’s or women’s doubles played first. After the coin toss winner makes their first selection, the opponent will then make their first selection from the remaining options. The choice will then go back to the coin toss winner to make their second selection from the remaining choices and the last selection will be made by the opponent.

A. Serve or Receive

The team selecting to serve or receive will maintain that selection for each game throughout the match.

B. End

A team will start on one end of the court and finish on the opposite end. Teams will stay on the end they finish on and begin the next game on that end. Example: If Team A selects the right end of the court to start game one (1), they will begin game one (1) on the right end but begin game two (2) on the left end of the court. Team A will then begin on the right end for game three (3) and the DreamBreaker™ (if one is played during the match).

C. Act or React to Mixed Doubles

The team choosing to act will submit their lineup first for the first mixed doubles game. The team choosing to react will respond to their opponent’s mixed doubles lineup in the first mixed doubles game. This selection will be reversed if teams go to a DreamBreaker™. The team that chose to act for mixed will then react in the DreamBreaker™, and the team that chose to react in mixed will act in the DreamBreaker™.

D. Men’s or Women’s Doubles Played First

Teams will be allowed to choose if they want to play men’s doubles or women’s doubles for game one (1).

4. MATCHES

Each match will consist of up to four (4) games to 25 (win by 2) with rally scoring. The four (4) games to be played will include: Women's doubles, men's doubles, and two (2) mixed doubles. The mixed doubles games will be played after the women's and men's doubles games. A DreamBreaker™ will be played to determine the winner of the match if teams are tied at 2-2 after the women's doubles, men's doubles and mixed doubles games.

During the regular season, teams will play all four (4) games even if the score is 3-0 after the first mixed doubles game. Playoff matches will be played until a team wins three (3) games.

5. GAMES

Each doubles and mixed doubles game will be played with rally scoring to 25 points (win by 2). Players will change ends when one team reaches a score of 13. End changes are mandatory for both teams on the sideline. Players will not be required to move their bags, but players and any GMs, owners or coaches on the sidelines must move ends with their team.

A. Scoring

Rally scoring to 25 with a winning margin of at least two (2) points. The score is announced with just two numbers. There is no first or second server.

6. SERVES

Players will be allowed to use the Volley Serve at events. The Drop Serve is currently not permitted. Any serve that touches the net and lands in the appropriate service area will be considered a Let and re-served. The ball release must be visible to the referee.

A. Service Faults

If a referee identifies an illegal serve, they will stop play to identify the fault and call a replay. Each player will be allowed one (1) replay per game due to a service violation before a fault and side-out are assessed. MLP service violations include: Highest point of the paddle head above the wrist when the paddle strikes the ball, no upward arc in arm swing at the time the ball is struck with the paddle, server imparting spin on the ball during release, foot fault at the baseline and serving while the score is being called.

7. CHANGE OF SIDE

In doubles play, there will be a right side (even) player and a left side (odd) player. The right side player will serve when their score is even and receive when the opponent's score is even. The left side player will serve when their score is odd and receive when the opponent's score is odd. Players do not switch sides after winning points.

A team may choose to switch their players' sides during a time-out they call, but they must inform the lead referee before play resumes. Either team may choose to switch their players' sides during an end change but must inform the lead referee. The referee is not required to inform the opposing team of the change but must do so if asked. To resume play after an end change, the lead referee will first ask the team with the lower score if they are in their desired positions. The referee will ask "Are you in the correct positions?" Once that team's positions are confirmed, they are set and cannot change. The referee will then ask the team with the higher score to confirm their correct positions.

If a player/position error is not detected before the serve occurs, the referee or any player on court can stop play to correctly identify the error and a replay shall occur. If the error is not detected and the rally concludes naturally, the rally will stand and the error will be corrected before the next serve.

8. TIME-OUTS

Teams will each receive one (1) time-out per game. Time-outs will be up to one (1) minute, or longer depending on broadcasting/live streaming. Players on court must request the time-out. Team captains can make a request but the players on court must confirm they want to use it before the referee will proceed with the time-out.

A. Medical Time-Out

One (1) medical time-out per player per game will be allotted. Medical staff will determine if the medical condition is valid and the referee will start a fifteen (15) minute timer. After fifteen (15) minutes, if the player cannot continue, a substitute player will be allowed to play for the remainder of the match. No additional warm up time will be allowed for the substitute player.

B. Broadcast Time-Out

Additional time-outs may be implemented during a game for broadcasting or live streaming.

C. Other Time-Outs

Additional time-outs may be implemented during a game to address equipment issues, referee or fan injury, or for any other reason deemed necessary by the League.

9. VIDEO CHALLENGES

Each team is allotted three (3) “free” video challenges per match and one (1) “free” challenge during a DreamBreaker™. The DreamBreaker™ “free” challenge is not added to challenges left over from the prior games, it is one (1) “free” challenge total for that game. A successful challenge will result in a team keeping their challenge, and an unsuccessful challenge will result in a loss of that challenge or the loss of a point if they have no “free” challenges remaining. The League shall determine whether and to what extent video challenges will be used at each event.

The team captain is the only one who can request a video challenge. Players on court may consult with their teammates in deciding whether or not to use a challenge, provided that consultation does not result in any significant delay in the flow of the game. Players may not use a time-out to determine if they should utilize a challenge.

A. “Free” Challenges

Teams receive three (3) “free” challenges to use during their match. There will not be a point penalty assessed if a team has a “free” challenge and they lose the challenge.

B. Line Call Challenges

Teams are not allowed to challenge their own line calls or defer to the referees to ask if they saw a ball IN or OUT. In the event a match is being played on a court with no video challenge capability, players on court will be allowed to appeal line calls to the lead or second referee. Any line call challenge made by a player on the court must be confirmed by the team captain in a quick and timely manner. Once the line call challenge is confirmed by the team captain, the referee will immediately ask the opposing team captain to confirm their line call. The team captain or a player on court has the opportunity to change the line call to not risk losing a “free” challenge, or a point, if the call is overturned.

One team will lose a “free” challenge (or a point if they have no “free” challenges remaining) during a line call challenge. For example, if a team makes an OUT call that is ultimately overturned and declared IN during a line call challenge, the team who made the bad line call loses a “free” challenge. If this happens again, they lose their second “free” challenge. If a team does not have any “free” challenges remaining and a line call is overturned, the team who made the wrong line call loses a point. Each additional wrong line

call will result in the subtraction of a point. The team who challenged the bad line calls will not lose any challenges.

Teams may still challenge a call even if they do not have any “free” challenges left. If the result of the challenge is the call is upheld/confirmed, and they have no more “free” challenges left, then the team that challenged will have a point subtracted.

C. Fault Call Challenges

If a team challenges the referee’s fault call and wins the challenge, they will retain their challenge. If video review confirms the fault call, the team who challenged the call will lose one of their “free” challenges or lose a point if they have no “free” challenges remaining.

If a team opts to challenge a possible missed fault, the team captain must clearly identify the fault, the player who committed it and the point in time during the rally that it happened. If a team is unable to clearly identify these items in a timely manner, the challenge will be disregarded and either a verbal warning, blue or orange card will be issued for a delay of game (dependent on warnings/cards already issued during the game).

10. DREAMBREAKER™ (SINGLES TIEBREAKER)

A DreamBreaker™ is a game to 21 (win by 2) with rally scoring, where each team must rotate its four (4) players for four (4) singles rallies in a set order. The team that elected to react in mixed doubles will act first for the DreamBreaker™. That team will have one (1) minute to designate the first player in the order of rotation of its four (4) singles players to the referee. That team’s first player will be revealed to the opponent and then they will have one (1) minute to designate their opposing first player to the referee. This process will repeat back and forth until all four (4) players on each team are declared. The DreamBreaker™ will use the same rally scoring used in each game as described in this guide. All team members will play in four (4) rally rotations until the DreamBreaker™ is concluded (player 1 plays four (4) rallies, then player 2 plays four (4) rallies, then player 3 plays four (4) rallies, then player 4 plays four (4) rallies, and then the rotation repeats in the same order).

In the DreamBreaker™, players serve from the left or right side of the court based on their score. A player will serve on the right side when their team score is even, and serve on the left side when the team score is odd. During the DreamBreaker™, each team will be allotted one (1) “free” challenge and one (1) time-out. Teams will change ends when one team reaches a score of eleven (11).

11. LINE CALLING

Players on court must make an OUT call either verbally or with a finger towards the sideline or baseline. All OUT calls must be made prior to the ball being hit by the opponent or before the ball becomes dead. All players or team representatives on the sideline should not call OUT balls during a live rally.

If players on court did not make a play on a rally ending ball or see where it landed, the players or team representatives on the sideline will be allowed to make an OUT call after the ball is dead. In this scenario, if the sideline saw the ball OUT they can call it quickly, and the players on court will need to confirm the OUT call with an immediate verbal call or finger. If neither the players on court or the sideline make an OUT call, the ball will be declared IN.

IN calls need no verbal call, but can be indicated with a flat hand out towards the court. If one player on court calls a ball IN and one player calls it OUT, the ball will be declared IN.

12. BLUE & ORANGE CARDS

MLP has implemented a penalty card system for both players and team representatives during matches. Referees may give a verbal warning, a Blue Card, or an Orange Card for inappropriate behavior. The referee is empowered to issue any of the warnings or cards at their discretion depending on the severity of the offense.

Verbal warnings and cards reset after each game. If a team is issued a Blue or Orange Card between games, the offending team will begin the next game with the card (and associated point penalty, if Orange Card).

A. Blue Card (Technical Warning)

Blue Cards are issued at the time of the offense and recorded on the referee's scoresheet. A Blue Card does not result in a loss of rally or have a point penalty associated with it. However, if a team has already been issued one (1) Blue Card and behaves in a manner that warrants another Blue Card, an Orange Card and loss of point will be issued.

Actions that warrant a Blue Card: objectionable language directed at another person or team; excessively loud profanity; arguing aggressively with a member of the officiating team, other players or spectators in a way that disrupts the flow of play; ball abuse or striking the ball between rallies; taking time between rallies in a way that unnecessarily disrupts the flow of play; and any other minor offense that in the referee's discretion warrant a Blue Card.

B. Orange Card (Technical Foul)

Orange Cards are issued at the time of the offense and recorded as a loss of one (1) point for the offending team on the referee's scoresheet. One (1) point will be removed from the offending team's score unless their score is zero (0), in which case, a point will be added to the score of the opponent. An Orange Card does not result in a loss of rally. A referee can issue an Orange Card without having prior issued a Blue Card. There is no limit to the number of Orange Cards a team is issued during a game.

Actions that warrant an Orange Card: aggressively or recklessly throwing a paddle in frustration or anger with negligent disregard of the consequences; smashing or throwing a paddle that damages the court or tournament equipment; a player using extremely objectionable language or profanity; making a threat or challenge of any nature toward or against any person; and any other major offense that in the referee's discretion warrant an Orange Card.

13. PLAYER CONDUCT & COACHING

Coaching by teammates and team representatives (owners/GMs/coaches) on the sideline is allowed when the ball is not in play (dead ball), as long as it does not interfere with continuous play or unfairly disrupt the opposing team. Team representatives are encouraged to sit along the edge of the court behind the LED wall. MLP will allow up to one (1) team representative on the sideline or bench along with the two (2) players not actively playing in a game. All player gear, including but not limited to bags, paddles, water bottles, etc. must be behind the player bench or LED video wall.

Any player that damages their paddle during a game will need to find a replacement paddle among those already at the court that has been tested and approved. If a player cannot replace their paddle with another tested and approved paddle, they will forfeit the game. Egregious actions beyond what the referee can address with a Blue or Orange card will be dealt with by the League.

All players or team representatives on the sideline should not step onto the court, except during time-outs or end changes. The court is defined as the area inside the outer dimensions of the baselines and sidelines. Players or team representatives should not step beyond the imaginary extension of the sideline or the imaginary extension of the Non-Volley Zone line to respect the referee's area. The team captain is the only team representative that may approach the referee during a match.