



2025

MLPLAY™
RULES GUIDE



MLP
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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. The 2025 season will consist of fourteen (14) total weeks of events:

- Ten (10) regular season events (April - August), all hosted in MLP team markets for the first time.
- The 2025 Mid-Season Tournament (July).
- Two (2) weekends of 2025 MLP Playoffs (August).
- 2025 MLP Cup (November).

Teams compete under rules specific to MLP (MLPlay™ Rules), including rally scoring for 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 DreamBreaker™ is played.

For the 2025 MLP season, sixteen (16) teams will compete in the Premier Level and six (6) in the Challenger Level. Premier teams will consist of six (6) players, three (3) men and three (3) women, and Challenger teams will consist of four (4) players, two (2) men and two (2) women. All teams will participate in five (5) of the ten (10) total regular season events. Every team will be scheduled to play a total of 25 regular season matches over their five (5) events.

The 2025 USA Pickleball Official Rulebook rules shall apply to all MLP events with the exception and/or addition 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 time-outs 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 least 10 minutes** before their scheduled match time. Match times are when the match will begin play, with the exception of broadcast delays. If all players on a team are not on court within at least five (5) minutes of their scheduled start time, they will forfeit their coin toss selections.

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, the next match will begin 10 minutes later. If a team's players have not shown up to court after five (5) minutes after the completion of the previous match on that court, 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 and presents an untested paddle to the referee, delaying the start of the first game, they will lose their time-out for that 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) STARTING LINEUPS

Premier teams will have optionality on which two males and which two females will play during a match. All teams must submit their daily lineups online the day before each match day (for example, teams must submit their lineup on Wednesday for a Thursday match; repeat the process on Thursday for Friday matches, etc.).

A. Away Team

Teams designated as the "Away" team for a match will be responsible for submitting their player lineup for each match as well as each game lineup for women's, men's, mixed 1, mixed 2 and the DreamBreaker by 8 pm local time the night before scheduled matches.

B. Home Team

Teams designated as the "Home" team for a match will be responsible for submitting their player lineup for each match as well as each game lineup for women's, men's, mixed 1, mixed 2 and the DreamBreaker by 10 pm local time the night before scheduled matches. "Home" teams will be able to see the opponent's lineups and respond to the gender, mixed and DreamBreaker lineups.

4) 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:

A. Serve or Receive

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

B. End

Teams will choose one end of the court to begin the match on. Teams will stay on the end they finish game one (1) 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).

5) MATCHES

Each match will consist of four (4) games to 11 (win by 2) with side-out scoring. The four (4) games will be played in this order: Women's doubles (first), men's doubles (second), and two (2) mixed doubles (third and fourth). 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.

6) DOUBLES & MIXED DOUBLES GAMES

Each doubles and mixed doubles game will be played with side-out scoring to 11 points (win by 2). Players will change ends when one team reaches a score of six (6). 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

Side-out scoring to eleven (11) with a winning margin of at least two (2) points. Teams switch ends when one team reaches a score of six (6).

7) DREAMBREAKER™ (SINGLES TIEBREAKER)

A DreamBreaker™ is a game to 21 (win by 2) with rally scoring and a team **must win while serving**. Each team must rotate its four (4) players for four (4) singles rallies in a set order. 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.

Teams will submit lineups prior to the match. Four (4) players 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).

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).

8) 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 and will be re-served if not visible. The release of the ball must be no higher than the top of the shoulder. The ball can travel upward after release, but only equal to one height of the ball itself. Until the ball is struck, the swing of the paddle to serve the ball must be traveling in an upward motion. Paddle swing when the ball is served must not be downward or flat (through the ball), it must be upward. The highest point of the paddle head must be clearly below the highest point of the wrist when the paddle strikes the ball. The referee will disregard point of contact on the body when the serve occurs. Service faults are at the referee’s discretion and will not be challengeable by teams.

A. Service Faults

If a referee identifies a fault in one of the service criteria listed above, they will stop play and call for a re-serve. Each player will receive one service warning per game. All other service faults will result in a side-out or second serve.

9) 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

A player can request a medical time-out from the Lead Referee due to injury, illness, or heat-related condition, but medical personnel **must** validate the request. The Lead Referee is not responsible for validating a medical time-out request. If medical personnel do not validate the request, the player will lose their Medical Time-out in addition to a time-out. If the player does not have a time-out remaining, they will be issued an Orange Card (Technical Foul). Each player will be allowed one Medical Time-out per match.

The Medical Time-out includes evaluation time from medical personnel and on-court treatment, for a maximum of 3 minutes (timer starts when medical personnel arrive). At the end of the 3 minute timer, the player will either resume play or an alternate will take his/her place (no warm up time will be allotted to the player). A maximum Medical Time-out of 5 minutes will be allowed for a bleeding injury. If a player cannot resume play after this time, an alternate will play. If blood is present on court, additional time may be allowed for cleanup and will not be additional treatment time given to the player.

If a player leaves the court before medical personnel arrive, they will be issued a Technical Foul, and a 5 minute timer will begin. If a player needs to leave the court with medical personnel for treatment, the Lead Referee will allow up to 5 minutes for evaluation and off court treatment. If a player has not returned to court after 5 minutes, an alternate will take his/her place.

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.

10) 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 an Orange Card 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 (Orange Card) 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 receiving an Orange Card, if the call is overturned.

One team will lose a “free” challenge (or receive an Orange Card 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 will receive an Orange Card and a point will be awarded to the opponent. Each additional wrong line call will result in additional Orange Cards with a point being awarded to the opponent. The team who challenged the bad line calls and won, 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, the team that challenged will receive an Orange Card and a point will be awarded to the opponent.

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 receive an Orange Card if they have no “free” challenges remaining.

If a team opts to challenge a possible missed fault, the team captain must clearly identify: 1) The fault, 2) the player who committed it, and 3) 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).

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 their partner 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 point addition to the non-offending team 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 an addition of one (1) point for the non-offending team. 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 (owner/GM/coach/captain) 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. MLP will allow up to two (2) team representatives on the sideline (behind the LED boards) or bench plus one (1) celebrity owner (league approved) along with the team players not actively playing in a game. One (1) team representative will be allowed to stand in front of the LED boards during a match. The League reserves the right to reduce the number of team representatives during any event to ensure safety and maintain an organized professional environment. Any behavior from team representatives on the sideline that impact play are subject to distraction fault calls and cannot be challenged. Any team requests for the Head of Competition to verify a call will be issued an Orange Card if the Lead Referee is correct in their ruling.

Any player that damages their paddle during a game will need to find a replacement paddle among those already at court that have 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.

14) INJURIES

If an injury is to occur during an MLP event, a Premier Level team will first be required to use one of their bench players as a replacement. If a team's roster player is brought in mid-match, they must play in all team matches for the remainder of that day, in addition to all team matches on the following day (for example, a player serving as a mid-match injury replacement on Thursday must also play all Friday matches, but the originally injured player is eligible to be in the team's Saturday and Sunday lineups, if applicable). If a team's bench players are not in attendance, teams can select from an available pool of alternates provided by the league; that list will be made available one week prior to each event. Once a

player on a Challenger team comes out due to injury, the injury sub must play in all team matches for the remainder of that day, in addition to all team matches on the following day before the roster player may return to play.

If a player elects to not play in a DreamBreaker™ due to injury (but has played gender and mixed doubles), and chooses to use a sub they will begin the DreamBreaker™ with a 2 point penalty in which the opposing team will begin the game 2-0. The first two players in the DreamBreaker™ lineup will only play two rallies in this scenario. The injury replacement will fill in for the player's DreamBreaker™ spot and there will be no rearranging of player order.

If a team needs to replace a player between MLP events and they are unable to execute a trade to replace the injured player, they will be allowed to make a selection from the available pool of UPA contracted players not currently on an MLP roster, if they are unable to utilize an additional player on their roster (for Premier teams). The acquired player will be released after the event and available for pickup by another team for the next event. Player loans are no longer permitted.

Challenger & Premier Level teams will have one "Injured Reserve" slot where a player can be placed and the team will maintain the rights to keep that player. If a player is placed on "Injured Reserve", they are ineligible to be traded or return to play for the remainder of the season. Teams can pick up a player as an IR replacement, though that player must come from the player pool of UPA contracted players not currently on an MLP roster.

In all scenarios around injuries, a team will be required to provide four players (two men, two women) for a scheduled match. The league will aim to avoid any rescheduling of matches as it pertains to injuries or absences for a team. If a team is unable to provide a roster of players to complete, the league will step in and provide available alternates for the match.

15) MISCELLANEOUS

Players may cross the plane of the net without first hitting the ball, as long as the player does not create a distraction for the opponent. If a player's entire body (including paddle) crosses the plane without hitting the ball, a fault shall be called.