**Five 2021 Pickleball Rule Changes that Will Affect Everyone**

Summary supplied by Pickleball Nexus

The 2021 Rule Change document is out, and there is a lot (81 pages to be exact)! So we’ve read through it and found the most important changes so you don’t have to.

Here’s a quick list of the rule changes we will be taking look at:

1. Service lets have been eliminated.
2. You can start your service motion while the score is being called.
3. You can bounce the ball to hit a “Drop Serve.”
4. The server doesn’t have to call the score, but someone on the serving team does.
5. Lines calls have been simplified.

Disclaimer! The 2021 Rules Change Document is a long and dry document. There is a possibility that we went insane while reading it. Due to the circumstances, we recommend that you check the rule changes yourself to be 100% certain of the rules.  Also, there is plenty we have left out of this article. If you are a tournament player, you may want to read up on the all the changes as there are some procedural changes that will definitely impact tournament play.

**1. Service Lets**

What’s New?
Let’s (pun intended) start with the big one, service lets. Here’s the official wording of the rule change:
Removed: The definition (3.A.18) and section 4 (Service Lets) have been removed. Starting in 2021, there will be no rule(s) governing service lets. Service Lets have been removed. It is noted that out of habit, both referees and players may sometimes habitually call a service let. If any player stops play because of a service let being called, that player/team will have committed a fault per rule 7.I.

What does this mean for us?
Now, when the server hits the net and lands “in,” the returner will have to play the ball. There is no longer a “redo” when this happens. The ball will still be considered “out” if it lands in the kitchen, outside the service box and lines, or if it hits a portable net crossbar or post after clipping the net. If you accidentally call a let on a service, you will have committed a fault.

Why the change?
The USA Pickleball Rules Committee is addressing a possible cheating scenario with this rule change. In a refereed match, according to the 2020 rule book, a person can hit their return of serve “out” and then call a “let,” implying that the served hit the net on its way over. Under the 2020 rules, that point will be replayed no matter what. The committee saw this as a possible way to cheat, and by banning all let serve replays they have addressed it.

How will this impact the game?
Now we must be ready to return those let serves. This is tough because players often stand well behind the baseline to return fast/hard serves. Perhaps its time to work on short-hopping the return of serve in order to stand closer to the baseline and not get caught too far back if the ball hits the net cord and ends up short in the service box.

**2. Serving While Calling the Score**

What’s New?
In 2021, the serve must wait to serve the ball until after the entire score is called. Here is how the new rule is written:
20. Rule 4.A.1
New: The entire score must be called before the ball is served.
—AND—
40. Rule 4.M.11
New: A fault occurs when the server hits the ball to make the serve while the score is being called.

What does this mean for us?
Now you can begin your service motion before the score is completely called. The ball must not be contacted until after the entire score has been called. Before, you were unable to begin your service motion until the score was completely called. Also, a fault will not be called if the ball is served before the score is called. Instead the ball is considered “dead” until the score is called, and the referee will remind the server that they must wait until the score is called to serve.

Why the change?
This rule change eliminates the possibility of the referee calling a fault for a “practice serve.” Before, there could be ambiguity on whether a swinging arm was a cause for conflict between two people claiming “you started your service motion” and “I was taking a practice swing.” Now fault can only be called if the ball is served before the entire score has been called.

How will this impact the game?
Now returners will need to be ready sooner. The server may start their service motion a little sooner than before, and this might catch people off guard. Make sure, if you are the returner, to be ready for the serve, and hold your paddle up above your head as a signal that you are not ready if you feel you are being “quick-served” a lot. If you think the score was called incorrectly, you now have until the third shot to challenge the score.

**3. Drop Serves**

What’s New?
The 2021 rule book will have a provision for all players to be able to hit their serve off a bounce. This is a provisional rule, so it is being evaluated for unintended outcomes and may not be in effect next year. Test it out and see if you like this new way to serve. Here’s the wording of the new rule:
24.Rule 4.A.8
New: \*\*\*Provisional Rule\*\*\*
*Drop Serve.*In addition to the standard serve sequence described in Rules 4.A.1 to 4.A.7, players may opt to use an alternate “drop serve” method.

What does this mean for us?
Now you may drop the ball from your hand or paddle and hit your serve after it bounces. You are not able to toss the ball up and hit it off the bounce or throw the ball down and hit it after the bounce. If you choose to use the “drop serve,” you will not have the restrictions of a regular serve i.e. contact below the navel, swinging upwards at contact, etc. This means that you will be able to hit back spinning serves if you choose to use the “drop serve.”

Why the change?
Hitting the serve off the bounce can be easier to learn as it bears similarities to hitting a groundstroke. This can be a helpful serving method if you’ve ever developed the serving yips. The USA Pickleball Rules Committee also says this may be an easier method of serving for anyone with a physical impairment.

How will this impact the game?
You may see some people trying this serving method in your games next year. This will look pretty different than the regular service motion, and might catch you off guard. You might see different serve techniques that weren’t possible before, so be ready!

**4. Calling the Score**

What’s New?
Now it’s not just the server’s job to call the score. Here’s the new rule:
32. Rule 4.D.2
New: In non-officiated play, the server normally calls the score, but the server’s partner may call the score if the server is unable to call the score with sufficient volume. In the latter case, the person calling the score shall not change during the game.

What does this mean for us?
Now, calling the score is the responsibility of the serving team, not necessarily the server. If your team decides that only one of you will call the score, that one person must call the score for the whole game. If a team decides after the game has started to deviate from the norm of the server calling the score, they must stay with that change and not change again.

Why the change?
There can be some circumstances in which one person is not able to call the score. Their partner can now call the score for the whole game.

How will this impact the game?
We must be ready now for the score to be called by one player, and the ball to be served from another. Pay attention to who has the ball in their hand if you are not sure who is serving. This is another case of something that will take some getting used to.

**5.** **Line Calls**

What’s New?
The definition of how to make line calls has been simplified. The procedure for an uncertain line call has changed a bit. Here’s the new rule:
50. Rule 6.D.7
New: Players should not call the ball “out” unless they can clearly see a space between the line and the ball as it hits the ground.

What does this mean for us?
You must see space between the ball and the line in order to call it “out.”  The only way to call a ball “out” is to see space between the ball and the line. If there is any doubt about the line call, it is in. If you cannot call the ball “out” or “in,” it is “in.” There is no replay for a ball that cannot be called, however the referee or opposing team can be consulted. If you consult the referee or the opposing team, that line call will be used whether you agree or not. You may consult the referee after consulting the opposing team.

Why the change?
Before, there was a diagram that showed the ball partly over the line, and a rule that discussed parallax and depth of field. Now those descriptions are gone to decrease confusion and disagreement of interpretation of the rule.

How will this impact the game?
Not much has changed here, but it should help us understand what happens when people are unsure of whether the ball is in or out. Also, this should clarify what a player must see in order to call a ball out.