

The let serve has gone away. Why???

First of all, let's make sure everyone understands what a "LET SERVE" is. A "Let Serve" is called when you serve a ball, it hits the net, the ball completely clears the non-volley zone line and lands in the correct service box on your opponents side of the court. When this happens, play stops and you serve it again. That is what used to happen.

But no more...

As of January 25th, 2021, there is no such thing as a "LET SERVE". You won't even find the word LET in the rulebook.

So what does this mean and why did they make this change?

Well, let's begin by making clear, **this is not a test.** It is **not a provisional rule.** It is now an official rule, so it's best to get ready for it.

But **why did they do away with the Let Serve rule?**

The USA Pickleball organization made it very clear that **the rule change is to get ready for the future.** Admittedly I didn't understand that at first. Currently the let serve rarely causes a problem. In my many years of playing pickleball, I've only had it occur in my matches a few times where one of the players on our court would call a let (the ball tipped the net) and yet nobody else on the court saw or heard it. It was what I would call a phantom let. It may have happened or it may have simply been a sound from another court that the player thought came from our court. Regardless, the point is replayed and depending on the situation, you have two unhappy players.

What the rules makers are doing are preparing for the future and the inevitable. And here is why.

If you look at history and examine the growth and changes in pickleball, you'll find that only a mere 10 years ago, there was only about 200,000 players in the entire world and the vast majority of the very top players were 50 years old or older. You couldn't buy a paddle online and pay for it with a credit card. There was only a handful of 5.0 players and NO 5.5 or 6.0 players.

Fast forward to today with **almost 4 million players and two pro pickleball tournament circuits with prize packages ranging from \$25,000 to \$150,000.** There are over 100 paddle manufacturers and four days ago, ESPN2 broadcasted one hour in prime time, showcasing the mens and womens gold medal matches from the Las Vegas PPA Championships. That is huge and simply **another sign pointing in the direction of where pickleball is going.**

So what does this have to do with removing the Let Serve rule?

I wasn't sure how I personally felt about it until last night. Up until yesterday I have only had one let serve ACE hit against me. And it was my fault that I just wasn't paying close enough attention.

But last night I finally understood why this rule removal is going to be a good thing in the future.

Late last night I was watching a tennis match from the Australian Open and Patrick McEnroe and John McEnroe were the broadcasters. Yes, I played and coached tennis for many years and still enjoy watching the great players do battle.

Somehow it came up that there is no Let Serve replay in Division 1 college men's tennis. You play the ball after it hits the net on the serve. **That rule has been in place since the late 1990's.**

Then John McEnroe said something that sounded very familiar. And John said it exactly this way: "yeah, they had to put that No Let Serve rule in because so many players were learning to purposely cheat because they couldn't return a serve, so they would quickly call a let to keep from being aced and lose the point. You saw it quite often." Now don't say that WE

AREN'T TENNIS. I know that. But we are a sport that is in an evolutionary period in time.

So how does that apply to pickleball? As the old song goes, **Times, They Are A Changing**. Our top players are now in their 20's. They are faster, they are quicker and they are able to play for much higher stakes than any of us could ten years ago. This may sound sad, but it is inevitable that the money purses are going to continue to get bigger and bigger. The pressure to win for the pros is going to get greater and greater with new, younger, even faster players flooding in to compete. Corporate sponsors are going to continue to grow the purses and the player sponsorship contracts. So **would a phantom let become an issue on a point where \$50,000 is riding on the result?**

I know **every one of us wants to say NO**, nobody would call that phantom let.

But reality is, **the game at the top levels is changing** and so will be the way some people will approach a match. For us common folks, it will never matter whether we win that point or don't, because 99% of us play for the love of the game. Cheating or missing a call on purpose would never enter our minds. At the amateur level, it likely would never be a major issue. But yes, **Times They Are A Changing**.

In reality, the USA Pickleball rules committee is **preparing for the future**. A number of new rule changes are not really necessary yet, but they are in preparation for the future. And ultimately it will be a good thing for pickleball. Do us amateurs care. I know I don't because I'll continue to play for the love of the game, so I don't really care what the rules are. It will always be fun for me and my friends.

So how do we get ready for the new NO LET SERVE? The main thing is to change your focus on that incoming serve. In the past, most of us, as returners, had a tendency to relax and wait for the ball to bounce on our side in the service box before we'd seriously start preparing to hit the return.

If the ball hit the net and came on over, you really didn't think much about it. You simply watched to see where the ball landed and if it landed in the

service box, then you called a let serve and your opponent served again. Easy, right?

Well that has changed now and **what must change is YOUR FOCUS**. Now when your opponent strikes the serve, you must focus on the ball immediately as it leaves his or her paddle. You must focus on the ball early now, because now you need to see the ball hit the net because that may change the trajectory of the ball.

At the point the ball gets to the net, you have to be ready to adjust, side to side or maybe move forward to get to the ball, which has just **made a dramatic change in direction or speed**.

If you are not dialed in and focused at the time the ball crosses the net, the adjustment will be tough and likely many times too late.

But here is the **really good news** concerning this new NO LET SERVE situation.

We did a quick online poll today and addressed it to every level player. **It had only one question:**

How many times since the NO LET SERVE went into affect, have you been ACED?

The results? A whopping **93% said that they have had less than 3 unplayable let serves** since the elimination of that old let serve rule.

And almost 50 percent of those said they'd had it happen ZERO times to them since playing with it started.

We needed to wait a little bit before talking much about it, but the data is beginning to paint a clear picture. **Is there always instant resistance to change?** Yep, you bet.

So shoot me for my opinion if you want, but the way I see things unfolding, is as soon as the initial shock of this change begins to wear off, most players will

be able to easily adjust their focus a bit and the NO LET SERVE will be mostly a non-issue.

So as a returner, **adjust your focus to the point when the ball is approaching the net.** That will help you react to whatever happens.

And for heaven's sake, enjoy your time on the court.
Let's Play!

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