**2 THE LAWS OF TABLE TENNIS**

**2.1 THE TABLE**

2.1.1 The upper surface of the table, known as the playing surface, shall be

rectangular, 2.74m long and 1.525m wide, and shall lie in a horizontal plane

76cm above the floor.

2.1.2 The playing surface shall not include the vertical sides of the tabletop.

2.1.3 The playing surface may be of any material and shall yield a uniform bounce

of about 23cm when a standard ball is dropped on to it from a height of 30cm.

2.1.4 The playing surface shall be uniformly dark coloured and matt, but with a

white side line, 2cm wide, along each 2.74m edge and a white end line, 2cm

wide, along each 1.525m edge.

2.1.5 The playing surface shall be divided into 2 equal courts by a vertical net

running parallel with the end lines, and shall be continuous over the whole

area of each court.

2.1.6 For doubles, each court shall be divided into 2 equal half-courts by a white

centre line, 3mm wide, running parallel with the side lines; the centre line shall

be regarded as part of each right half-court.

**2.2 THE NET ASSEMBLY**

2.2.1 The net assembly shall consist of the net, its suspension and the supporting

posts, including the clamps attaching them to the table.

2.2.2 The net shall be suspended by a cord attached at each end to an upright post

15.25cm high, the outside limits of the post being 15.25cm outside the side

line.

2.2.3 The top of the net, along its whole length, shall be 15.25cm above the playing

surface.

2.2.4 The bottom of the net, along its whole length, shall be as close as possible to

the playing surface and the ends of the net shall be attached to the supporting

posts from top to bottom.

**2.3 THE BALL**

2.3.1 The ball shall be spherical, with a diameter of 40mm.

2.3.2 The ball shall weigh 2.7g.

2.3.3 The ball shall be made of celluloid or similar plastics material and shall be

white or orange, and matt.

2: The Laws of Table Tennis

ITTF Handbook 2018 v2 Page 35

**2.4 THE RACKET**

2.4.1 The racket may be of any size, shape or weight but the blade shall be flat and

rigid.

2.4.2 At least 85% of the blade by thickness shall be of natural wood; an adhesive

layer within the blade may be reinforced with fibrous material such as carbon

fibre, glass fibre or compressed paper, but shall not be thicker than 7.5% of

the total thickness or 0.35mm, whichever is the smaller.

2.4.3 A side of the blade used for striking the ball shall be covered with either

ordinary pimpled rubber, with pimples outwards having a total thickness

including adhesive of not more than 2.0mm, or sandwich rubber, with pimples

inwards or outwards, having a total thickness including adhesive of not more

than 4.0mm.

2.4.3.1 *Ordinary pimpled rubber* is a single layer of non-cellular rubber, natural or

synthetic, with pimples evenly distributed over its surface at a density of

not less than 10 per cm² and not more than 30 per cm².

2.4.3.2 *Sandwich rubber* is a single layer of cellular rubber covered with a single

outer layer of ordinary pimpled rubber, the thickness of the pimpled rubber

not being more than 2.0mm.

2.4.4 The covering material shall extend up to but not beyond the limits of the

blade, except that the part nearest the handle and gripped by the fingers may

be left uncovered or covered with any material.

2.4.5 The blade, any layer within the blade and any layer of covering material or

adhesive on a side used for striking the ball shall be continuous and of even

thickness.

2.4.6 The surface of the covering material on a side of the blade, or of a side of the

blade if it is left uncovered, shall be matt, bright red on one side and black on

the other.

2.4.7 The racket covering shall be used without any physical, chemical or other

treatment.

2.4.7.1 Slight deviations from continuity of surface or uniformity of colour due to

accidental damage or wear may be allowed provided that they do not

significantly change the characteristics of the surface.

2.4.8 Before the start of a match and whenever he or she changes his or her racket

during a match a player shall show his or her opponent and the umpire the

racket he or she is about to use and shall allow them to examine it.

2: The Laws of Table Tennis

Page 36 ITTF Handbook 2018 v2

**2.5 DEFINITIONS**

2.5.1 A *rally* is the period during which the ball is in play.

2.5.2 The ball is *in play* from the last moment at which it is stationary on the palm of

the free hand before being intentionally projected in service until the rally is

decided as a let or a point.

2.5.3 A *let* is a rally of which the result is not scored.

2.5.4 A *point* is a rally of which the result is scored.

2.5.5 The *racket hand* is the hand carrying the racket.

2.5.6 The *free hand* is the hand not carrying the racket; the *free arm* is the arm of

the free hand.

2.5.7 A player *strikes* the ball if he or she touches it in play with his or her racket,

held in the hand, or with his or her racket hand below the wrist.

2.5.8 A player *obstructs* the ball if he or she, or anything he or she wears or carries,

touches it in play when it is above or travelling towards the playing surface,

not having touched his or her court since last being struck by his or her

opponent.

2.5.9 The *server* is the player due to strike the ball first in a rally.

2.5.10 The *receiver* is the player due to strike the ball second in a rally.

2.5.11 The *umpire* is the person appointed to control a match.

2.5.12 The *assistant umpire* is the person appointed to assist the umpire with certain

decisions.

2.5.13 Anything that a player *wears or carries* includes anything that he or she was

wearing or carrying, other than the ball, at the start of the rally.

2.5.14 The *end line* shall be regarded as extending indefinitely in both directions.

**2.6 THE SERVICE**

2.6.1 Service shall start with the ball resting freely on the open palm of the server's

stationary free hand.

2.6.2 The server shall then project the ball near vertically upwards, without

imparting spin, so that it rises at least 16cm after leaving the palm of the free

hand and then falls without touching anything before being struck.

2.6.3 As the ball is falling the server shall strike it so that it touches first his or her

court and then touches directly the receiver's court; in doubles, the ball shall

touch successively the right half court of server and receiver.

2.6.4 From the start of service until it is struck, the ball shall be above the level of

the playing surface and behind the server's end line, and it shall not be hidden

from the receiver by the server or his or her doubles partner or by anything

they wear or carry.

2: The Laws of Table Tennis

ITTF Handbook 2018 v2 Page 37

2.6.5 As soon as the ball has been projected, the server’s free arm and hand shall

be removed from the space between the ball and the net.

The space between the ball and the net is defined by the ball, the net and its

indefinite upward extension.

2.6.6 It is the responsibility of the player to serve so that the umpire or the assistant

umpire can be satisfied that he or she complies with the requirements of the

Laws, and either may decide that a service is incorrect.

2.6.6.1 If either the umpire or the assistant umpire is not sure about the legality of

a service he or she may, on the first occasion in a match, interrupt play

and warn the server; but any subsequent service by that player or his or

her doubles partner which is not clearly legal shall be considered incorrect.

2.6.7 Exceptionally, the umpire may relax the requirements for a correct service

where he or she is satisfied that compliance is prevented by physical

disability.

**2.7 THE RETURN**

2.7.1 The ball, having been served or returned, shall be struck so that it touches the

opponent's court, either directly or after touching the net assembly.

**2.8 THE ORDER OF PLAY**

2.8.1 In singles, the server shall first make a service, the receiver shall then make a

return and thereafter server and receiver alternately shall each make a return.

2.8.2 In doubles, except as provided in 2.8.3, the server shall first make a service,

the receiver shall then make a return, the partner of the server shall then

make a return, the partner of the receiver shall then make a return and

thereafter each player in turn in that sequence shall make a return.

2.8.3 In doubles, when at least one player of a pair is in a wheelchair due to a

physical disability, the server shall first make a service, the receiver shall then

make a return but thereafter either player of the disabled pair may make

returns.

**2.9 A LET**

2.9.1 The rally shall be a let:

2.9.1.1 if in service the ball touches the net assembly, provided the service is

otherwise correct or the ball is obstructed by the receiver or his or her

partner;

2: The Laws of Table Tennis

Page 38 ITTF Handbook 2018 v2

2.9.1.2 if the service is delivered when the receiving player or pair is not ready,

provided that neither the receiver nor his or her partner attempts to strike

the ball;

2.9.1.3 if failure to make a service or a return or otherwise to comply with the

Laws is due to a disturbance outside the control of the player;

2.9.1.4 if play is interrupted by the umpire or assistant umpire;

2.9.1.5 if the receiver is in wheelchair owing to a physical disability and in service

the ball, provided that the service is otherwise correct,

2.9.1.5.1 after touching the receiver’s court returns in the direction of the net;

2.9.1.5.2 comes to rest on the receiver's court;

2.9.1.5.3 in singles leaves the receiver’s court after touching it by either of its

sidelines.

2.9.2 Play may be interrupted

2.9.2.1 to correct an error in the order of serving, receiving or ends;

2.9.2.2 to introduce the expedite system;

2.9.2.3 to warn or penalise a player or adviser;

2.9.2.4 because the conditions of play are disturbed in a way which could affect

the outcome of the rally.

**2.10 A POINT**

2.10.1 Unless the rally is a let, a player shall score a point

2.10.1.1 if an opponent fails to make a correct service;

2.10.1.2 if an opponent fails to make a correct return;

2.10.1.3 if, after he or she has made a service or a return, the ball touches anything

other than the net assembly before being struck by an opponent;

2.10.1.4 if the ball passes over his or her court or beyond his or her end line without

touching his or her court, after being struck by an opponent;

2.10.1.5 if the ball, after being struck by an opponent, passes through the net or

between the net and the net post or between the net and playing surface;

2.10.1.6 if an opponent obstructs the ball;

2.10.1.7 if an opponent deliberately strikes the ball twice in succession;

2.10.1.8 if an opponent strikes the ball with a side of the racket blade whose

surface does not comply with the requirements of 2.4.3, 2.4.4 and 2.4.5;

2.10.1.9 if an opponent, or anything an opponent wears or carries, moves the

playing surface;

2.10.1.10 if an opponent, or anything an opponent wears or carries, touches the net

assembly;

2: The Laws of Table Tennis

ITTF Handbook 2018 v2 Page 39

2.10.1.11 if an opponent's free hand touches the playing surface;

2.10.1.12 if a doubles opponent strikes the ball out of the sequence established by

the first server and first receiver;

2.10.1.13 as provided under the expedite system (2.15.4).

2.10.1.14 if both players or pairs are in a wheelchair due to a physical disability and

2.10.1.14.1 his or her opponent does not maintain a minimum contact with the seat

or cushion(s), with the back of the thigh, when the ball is struck;

2.10.1.14.2 his or her opponent touches the table with either hand before striking

the ball;

2.10.1.14.3 his or her opponent’s footrest or foot touches the floor during play.

2.10.1.15 if, where an opposing doubles pair includes at least one player in a

wheelchair, any part of the wheelchair or a foot of a standing player

crosses an imaginary extension of the centre line of the table

**2.11 A GAME**

2.11.1 A game shall be won by the player or pair first scoring 11 points unless both

players or pairs score 10 points, when the game shall be won by the first

player or pair subsequently gaining a lead of 2 points.

**2.12 A MATCH**

2.12.1 A match shall consist of the best of any odd number of games.

**2.13 THE ORDER OF SERVING, RECEIVING AND ENDS**

2.13.1 The right to choose the initial order of serving, receiving and ends shall be

decided by lot and the winner may choose to serve or to receive first or to

start at a particular end.

2.13.2 When one player or pair has chosen to serve or to receive first or to start at a

particular end, the other player or pair shall have the other choice.

2.13.3 After each 2 points have been scored the receiving player or pair shall

become the serving player or pair and so on until the end of the game, unless

both players or pairs score 10 points or the expedite system is in operation,

when the sequences of serving and receiving shall be the same but each

player shall serve for only 1 point in turn.

2.13.4 In each game of a doubles match, the pair having the right to serve first shall

choose which of them will do so and in the first game of a match the receiving

pair shall decide which of them will receive first; in subsequent games of the

match, the first server having been chosen, the first receiver shall be the

player who served to him or her in the preceding game.

2: The Laws of Table Tennis

Page 40 ITTF Handbook 2018 v2

2.13.5 In doubles, at each change of service the previous receiver shall become the

server and the partner of the previous server shall become the receiver.

2.13.6 The player or pair serving first in a game shall receive first in the next game of

the match and in the last possible game of a doubles match the pair due to

receive next shall change their order of receiving when first one pair scores 5

points.

2.13.7 The player or pair starting at one end in a game shall start at the other end in

the next game of the match and in the last possible game of a match the

players or pairs shall change ends when first one player or pair scores 5

points.

**2.14 OUT OF ORDER OF SERVING, RECEIVING OR ENDS**

2.14.1 If a player serves or receives out of turn, play shall be interrupted by the

umpire as soon as the error is discovered and shall resume with those players

serving and receiving who should be server and receiver respectively at the

score that has been reached, according to the sequence established at the

beginning of the match and, in doubles, to the order of serving chosen by the

pair having the right to serve first in the game during which the error is

discovered.

2.14.2 If the players have not changed ends when they should have done so, play

shall be interrupted by the umpire as soon as the error is discovered and shall

resume with the players at the ends at which they should be at the score that

has been reached, according to the sequence established at the beginning of

the match.

2.14.3 In any circumstances, all points scored before the discovery of an error shall

be reckoned.

**2.15 THE EXPEDITE SYSTEM**

2.15.1 Except as provided in 2.15.2, the expedite system shall come into operation

after 10 minutes’ play in a game or at any time when requested by both

players or pairs.

2.15.2 The expedite system shall not be introduced in a game if at least 18 points

have been scored.

2.15.3 If the ball is in play when the time limit is reached and the expedite system is

due to come into operation, play shall be interrupted by the umpire and shall

resume with service by the player who served in the rally that was interrupted;

if the ball is not in play when the expedite system comes into operation, play

shall resume with service by the player who received in the immediately

preceding rally.

2: The Laws of Table Tennis

ITTF Handbook 2018 v2 Page 41

2.15.4 Thereafter, each player shall serve for 1 point in turn until the end of the

game, and if the receiving player or pair makes 13 correct returns in a rally the

receiver shall score a point.

2.15.5 Introduction of the expedite system shall not alter the order of serving and

receiving in the match, as defined in 2.13.6.

2.15.6 Once introduced, the expedite system shall remain in operation until the end

of the match.