Special Olympics Ohio

Pickleball Rules Manual (rev. 10/2026)

All Special Olympics Ohio Pickleball games are run according to the USA Pickleball Rules. Any modifications to those rules shall be found in this manual.

All Special Olympics Ohio regional and state level competitions will enforce the participation regulations for athletes and Unified partners, of which is derived from Article 1 of the Special Olympics Sport Rules. This rule shall be that each team and/or individual athlete or Unified partner, must play all eligible and rostered team members in every game unless a player is injured or has been removed due to disciplinary reasons. Coaches must notify the competition management prior to each game if players on the approved tournament roster will not be playing due to injury or disciplinary reasons, and this needs to be approved by the tournament director. Failure to play all eligible team members in each game will result in forfeit and disqualification.

OFFICIAL EVENTS

The SOOH Pickleball season runs from April through June. The State Tournament is held each year at the end of the season. Teams must qualify for the State Tournament by participating in an approved Regional Qualifying Tournament.

Special Olympics Ohio provides a range of events to offer athletes of varying abilities the opportunity to compete. The following is a list of official events available in Special Olympics Ohio.

Traditional Doubles

Unified Doubles

DIVISIONING

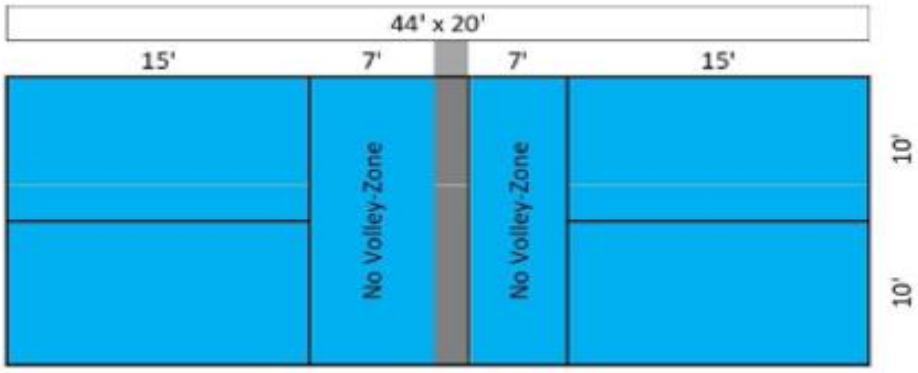
Prior to competition, a qualifying score will be submitted for divisioning. Each athlete/unified partner must complete the Special Olympics Ohio Pickleball Assessment, found in the back of this manual, and their score be submitted with the registration for the regional qualifying tournament they are planning to attend.

For doubles, each participant's assessment scores will be added together to make up the team score for divisioning. When at all possible, divisions are formed based first on gender, then age, and finally the qualifying score. However, in some cases, genders may need to be combined into one division to ensure quality competition. Mixed gender doubles teams will be divisioned as male teams.

COURT SIZE:

Court Dimensions:

USAP approved regulation court measures 20'×44' and including a 7 foot no-volley zone, also known as the kitchen, on either side of the net. The net must rest at 36 inches on both ends and 34 inches in the middle. A diagram of the court is provided on the following page.



No-Volley Zone (Kitchen)

The no-volley zone, known as the kitchen, is the court area within 7 feet on both sides of the net.

Volleying is prohibited within the no-volley zone. This rule prevents players from executing smashes from a position within the zone. Players may not stand in this zone.

A player may step into the no-volley zone if their momentum carries them after hitting the ball below the waist behind the line. If momentum carries the player into the no volley zone from a hit that is at or above the waist, it will be considered a fault.

EQUIPMENT:

Special Olympics Ohio will require the use of standard USAP approved paddles constructed of wood, graphite, or a composite material. Indoor or outdoor balls may be used based on playing location.

ROSTERS:

Traditional Doubles – 2 Special Olympics Athletes – same gender or mixed

Unified Doubles – 1 Special Olympics Athlete & 1 Unified Partner

PREGAME:

A coin toss or random number selection conducted by the referee will determine which team has first choice of service/receive or side of court. The team with second choice will decide the remaining option.

THE SERVE & SERVING SEQUENCE:

Starting The Game

For traditional doubles, the team with first serve at the start of the game will decide who serves first, and they will be considered Server 2 for the first serve rotation.

For unified doubles, the athlete on the team with first serve at the start of the game will always be Server 2 for the first rotation. This allows an athlete to have the first serving opportunity of the match. The standard service rotation below will still be followed for the remainder of unified matches.

Designation of First and Second Servers

After each side out, service begins with the player correctly positioned on the right side according to the team's score. For the duration of that team's service rotation, this player is designated as the first server, and their partner is the second server.

Serving

The serve must be made underhand.

Paddle contact with the ball must be made below the server's waist (navel level).

The ball may bounce once before contact is made during the serve, if desired.

The serve is initiated with two feet behind the baseline; neither foot may contact the baseline or court until after the ball is struck.

The serve must land within the confines of the opposite diagonal court.

Two service attempts are allowed.

Serving Sequence

The server changes side of service after every point that is won and continues to serve until a side out.

Standard service rotation: Server 1 Team A –> Server 2 Team A -> Server 1 Team B -> Server 2 Team B.

Additional Unified Modifications for Serving

Serve changes after 3 consecutive service wins, regardless of who started serving. This can lead to either a change of server for the serving team, or the serve going to the opposition as a side out.

THE GAME:

Return of Serve

The Two-bounce rule is to be followed for the beginning sequence rally of each serve. Once each team has had the opportunity to return the ball once, this rule is no longer in affect for the remainder of that rally, before the next serve.

This two-bounce rule is when the receiving team attempts to return the serve, the ball may not be contacted until after a single bounce on the receiving team's side. The serving team must then allow the ball to bounce once as well before contact can be made on their first receive. The receiving team and serving team may then begin to return the subsequent hits with or without a bounce until a point is earned.

Exception: Wheelchair participants may allow the ball to bounce twice before contact is made.

Rallies

Once the two-bounce rule has been fulfilled, the ball can be returned either in the air, if behind the no-volley zone (kitchen), or after a single bounce on the receiving team's side.

Exception: Wheelchair participants may allow the ball to bounce twice before contact is made.

Line Calls

A ball contacting any line is considered "in". The only exception is during a serve; the ball may not contact the white no-volley zone (kitchen) line. This will be considered a fault serve.

Faults

A fault by the receiving team results in a point for the serving team.

Two faults by the serving team result in the server's loss of serve or side out.

All faults are defined by the USAP.

List of Faults

A serve does not land within the receiving court.

Ball is hit into the net on the serve or a return.

Ball is volleyed before a bounce has occurred on each side (two-bounce rule violation).

Ball is hit out of bounds.

Ball is volleyed from the non-volley zone.

Ball bounces twice before being struck by the receiver (exception – wheelchair athletes).

An athlete/partner, their clothing, or any part of their paddle touches the net or the net post while the ball is in play.

Service rule violation.

A ball in play strikes an athlete/partner or anything they are wearing or carrying.

Ball in play strikes any permanent object before bouncing on the court.

SCORING:

Points can only be scored by the serving team.

Winning the Match

A match will consist of one 11-point game with a 30-minute time limit. The first team to score 11 points by a margin of 2 points, or the team that holds the lead on the last completed point when time expires, will be declared the winner. If time runs out during a point, that point will be completed.

Once a team reaches 11 points but does not lead by 2 points the game will continue until either:

- One team has a 2-point lead.
- One team reaches 15 points.

At 15 points you no longer need to win by 2. A score of 15-14 would end the game.

Tiebreaker:

If tied at the expiration of time the game will continue and the next team to win a point will be declared the winner.

Unified Modification: Once the tiebreaker begins (score of 10-10) only the athletes will serve during the remainder of the match.

COACHING:

One designated Special Olympics Ohio coach may sit or stand on the court (off the playing surface).

Teams receive 1, one-minute timeout per match. Either competitor (athlete or Unified partner) or the coach may call a timeout. Coaching may be received during timeouts.

A request for a timeout must be made by a competitor or coach to the official prior to the next serve being played.

OFFICIALS AND THEIR DUTIES

Each pickleball court should have at least one assigned court official. Court officials must be easily identifiable at an event.

Court Official/Supervisor: This is the head volunteer for each court. This position will make sure the serve sequence is being followed correctly and make the final rulings on score, faults, timing, and overall game discrepancies. Final rule judgments and calls will be made by this position and/or the competition management team. It is preferred this person has experience in either playing or coaching pickleball.

Court Attendants/Assistants: This volunteer position will assist the court official with the running of each individual match on the court. This may consist of ball retrieval, watching the court lines to make in/out calls, assisting with scoring/timing, and watching the sequence of play.

PICKLEBALL ASSESSMENT FOR ATHLETES/UNIFIED PARTNERS

As mentioned in the divisioning section above, a qualifying score will be submitted for divisioning. Each athlete/Unified partner must complete the Special Olympics Ohio Pickleball Assessment and their score be submitted with the registration for the qualifying regional event. For doubles, each participant's scores will be added together for the team score for divisioning.

Equipment Needed

Pickleball court, 2 paddles, 1 indoor/outdoor ball, individual assessment sheets, clipboard and pencil

Roles

Recorder, Feeder, Athlete/Unified partner

Assessment Tasks

Serves

The Athlete/Unified partner stands behind the baseline, beginning on the right-side. The Athlete/Unified partner receives 12 underhand service attempts, 6 on the right-side and 6 on the left side. The serve must be a diagonal underhand serve with the paddle below the waist and no higher than the highest part of the wrist and be hit prior to bouncing. Serves may be a one bounce serve, if desired. Serves where the ball lands in the correct box will receive 1 point. If the player steps on or over the baseline, it is considered a foot fault and shall receive 0 points for that attempt. Serves where the ball lands in the no-volley zone (kitchen) shall receive 0 points for that attempt. A missed attempt is 0 points and will not be replayed unless it was a "let" serve. Served balls landing on a line shall be considered good except for the No-Volley Zone (kitchen) line.

Return of Serve

The Athlete/Unified partner stands in the right service box, the Feeder/Server shall serve 6 balls to the right service box - 3 balls to the forehand side and 3 balls to the backhand side with the Athlete/Unified partner to return each serve. The point is not played out. The same process is repeated on the left service box. The Athlete/Unified partner shall receive 1 point for each return of serve that lands over the net and within the court boundaries. Balls landing on lines are considered good.

Volleys

The Athlete/Unified partner stands 1 meter behind the No-Volley Zone (kitchen) line on the center line. The feeder stands on the opposite side of the net, 1 meter from the No-Volley Zone (kitchen) line on the center line with a basket of 12 balls. Each ball is paddle fed to the Athlete/Unified partner, alternating between forehand and backhand, for a total of twelve attempts (6 forehands and 6 backhands). Each volley hit landing inbounds across the net receives 1 point. Any ball landing on a line is considered good. If the feeder makes an error in feeding, the feed shall be retried 1 time. If an Athlete/Unified partner misses a volley, that attempt shall receive 0 points.

Dinks

The Athlete/Unified partner stands on the base line. The feeder stands on the opposite side of the net, 1 meter from the No-Volley Zone (kitchen) line on the center line with a basket of 12 balls. The feeder paddle feeds each ball. The Athlete/Unified partner shall receive 6 attempts to dink the ball over the net to land in the No Volley Zone (kitchen). Each ball landing inbounds in the No Volley Zone (kitchen) area receives 2 points. Any ball landing on a line is considered good. If the feeder makes an error in feeding, the feed shall be retried 1 time. If an Athlete/Unified partner misses a dink attempt, that attempt shall receive 0 points.

Rally

The Athlete/Unified partner shall receive 6 rally attempts. The Athlete/Unified partner will serve (alternating right then left sides for each rally) to a like ability Athlete/Unified partner/Feeder. The Two-bounce rule is in effect. After the Two-bounce rule is fulfilled, every hit counts as 1 point until an error ending the rally is made. (Ex. Athlete/Unified partner serves, the ball bounces and the receiver returns the ball. Then after the ball bounces the server hits the ball and the rally continues until a mistake is made after the 4th hit. The score for that attempt would be 4 points.) If the Two-bounce rule was not met, that rally attempt shall receive 0 points

Dink Rally

The Athlete/Unified partner shall receive 6 dink rally attempts. The Athlete/Unified partner will serve (alternating between right then left sides for each rally) to a like ability Athlete/Unified partner/Feeder. The Two-bounce rule is in effect. After the Two-bounce rule is fulfilled, each hit must be a dink hit. All dinks must be in consecutive hits to score points for each attempt. If the hit is not a dink, then that attempt ends. For each attempt, 1-2 dinks = 1 point; 3-4 dinks = 2 points; 5 or more dinks = 3 points. (Ex. Two-bounce rule was fulfilled, 2 dinks and then a deep hit occurred. This attempt ended with the deep hit and 1 point shall be scored for this attempt, because 2 dinks were hit in succession). If the Two-bounce rule is not met, that rally attempt shall receive 0 points

Total Score

Once all the tasks have been completed, please total up the score for each attempt, then add up the scores of each task to complete the assessment. Put this score in the total score blank on the assessment. This is the score you will enter for divisioning during registration.

Special Olympics Ohio Pickleball Assessment Scoresheet

	ATTEMPTS							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	MAX	SCORE
Serve - Athlete stands behind baseline beginning on the right side - 12 underhand service attempts 6 **right side** and 6 **left side** (a one bounce serve can be used) - 1 point for each serve that lands in the diagonal service box - 0 points for stepping on or over the baseline (foot fault) - 0 points if ball lands in no-volley zone (kitchen) - 0 points for a missed attempt - Served balls landing on a line shall be considered good *except no-volley zone line*							12	
Return of Serve - Athlete will standing right service box and a feeder will serve 6 balls to the right service box (3 balls to the **forehand** side and 3 balls to the **backhand** side) - Repeat for left service box - 1 point for each return that lands over the net and in the court - 0 points if it lands outside the court lines Note: any ball landing on a line are considered good							12	
Volleys - Athlete stands 1 meter behind the no-volley line on center line - Feeder stands on opposite side of the net 1 meter behind the no-volley line on center line - The feeder will give 12 attempts 6 **forehands** and 6 **backhands** - 1 point for any ball landing in bounds - 0 points if they miss the volley Note: any ball landing on a line is considered good							12	
Dinks - Athlete stands on the baseline; Feeder stands on opposite side of the net 1 meter behind the no-volley line on center line - Athlete will receive 6 attempts to dink the ball in the no-volley zone (Kitchen) - 2 points for any ball that lands in the no-volley zone (Kitchen) - 0 points if missed attempt							12	
Rally - Athlete will receive 6 rally attempts - Athlete will serve to an opponent (alternating right and left side) - The two bounce rule is in effect (When the ball is served, the receiving team must let it bounce before returning, and then serving team must let it bounce before returning, thus two bounces) - After the two bounce rule is fulfilled, every hit counts as 1 point until an error ending the rally is made. - If the two bounce rule is not fulfilled that rally attempt shall receive 0 points							Add up the points from all 6 attempts	
Dink Rally - Athlete will receive 6 dink rally attempts - Athlete will serve to an opponent (alternating right and left side) - The two bounce rule is in effect; after the two bounce rule is fulfilled each hit **must** be a dink hit - Dinks must be in consecutive hit to score points, if the hit is not a dink the attempt ends - Scoring for each attempt is: 1-2 dinks= 1 point; 3-4 dinks= 2 points; 5+ dinks= 3 points - If the two bounce rule is not fulfilled that rally attempt shall receive 0 points							18	
						Total Score		