**What Is Rally Scoring in Pickleball & How Does It Work?**

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Currently, the sport of pickleball uses what is known as “side out scoring.” In other words, you can only score a point on the pickleball court when you are serving.

To date, there has been some discussion in the pickleball world of changing the scoring structure to what is known as “rally scoring.” In rally scoring, a point is scored on every single rally—regardless of who serves the pickleball.

There are a few arguments for and against using rally scoring in pickleball. The arguments in favor of rally scoring generally include: (1) faster, more exciting games; (2) more predictable game times, which is important for marketing the sport for national broadcast and reaching a wider audience; (3) simpler or easier for a beginner or newbie to the sport to understand; (4) more accurate ratings of players because every point counts; and (5) better format for gambling, which some believe is important to continue to grow the sport.

The arguments against rally scoring generally include: (1) rally scoring alters the delicate balance between the serving team and the receiving team, so it may change the essence of the game and/or result in unfair outcomes; (2) many sports only permit you to score on “offense” (i.e., serving), so it could be confusing if a team can score a point when on “defense” (i.e., receiving); (3) it could be confusing to change the scoring system at this point in the sport’s evolution; (4) it favors the underdog by encouraging comebacks (assuming that side out scoring is used for the final point (as described below)); and (5) it takes away from and/or changes the strategy of pickleball (for instance, there may be less reason to stack on the pickleball court and, as a result, no reason to “unwind” the stack).

More research into scoring formats for the sport of pickleball is in the works. However, the effects of rally scoring may really be tested during certain Major League Pickleball events.

**So, how does rally scoring work in pickleball?**

There are a few ways to implement rally scoring. This pickleball blog will describe the format for rally scoring used at certain Major League Pickleball events.

* Determine which team will serve, receive, pick the end of the court, or defer using any fair method (e.g., pick a 1 or 2, coin flip, rock-paper-scissors, etc.).
* Each partner on a team determines which side of the pickleball court (the left side or the right side) to start on. Then, each partner remains on those respective sides throughout the entire game. (However, a team may switch sides of the pickleball court on a time out or end change.)
* The team that serves first will start the game. The player on the right-hand side of the court will serve first (serving crosscourt).
* If the serving team wins the rally, then they will win a point and continue to serve. However, the partner on the left-hand side of the court will serve (but, remember, the players will stay on their respective sides of the court). The serve alternates between the players on the left- and right-hand side of the court (without the players changing positions) until they lose a rally.
* If the serving team loses the rally, then the receiving team will win a point and the receiving team will win the serve. To note, there is no second server (so the score will only be two numbers—the serving team score and the receiving team score—and there will be no third number for the server number).
* Which player will serve on a team is determined by the score of the serving team. If the score is even, then the player on the right-hand side of the court will serve. If the score is odd, then the player on the left-hand side of the court will serve. So, for example, if the score is 0-0, and the receiving team wins the rally, then the receiving team will win a point and the right to serve. The score will now be 1-0, so the player on the left-side of the receiving team will serve next.
* The teams will change ends of the pickleball court when a team reaches 11 points.
* The first team to 21 points wins (win by 2 points). However, points after the 20th point may only be scored on the serve. Further, if one team is at 20 points, the other team's points will "freeze" at 18 points, and such other team may only score points when serving.
* Again, players will remain on their respective sides (the left side and the right side) for the entire game, unless there is a time out or an end change (in which case the players on a team could change sides). A point is scored on every rally, regardless of who has served (except the final point, which the final point may only be won when serving). Whichever team wins the rally, wins a point. If the serving team wins the point, then the players alternate serves until they lose a rally/point. Then, the serve goes to the receiving team, and the player that serves will be based on the serving team’s score. The final point (or points after the 20th point (or 18th point for the opposing team)) may only be scored on the serve. First team to 21 points wins (win by 2 points)!

Have you tried rally scoring? What are your thoughts? Let us know your thoughts on rally scoring by emailing [stacie@thepickler.com](mailto:stacie@thepickler.com).