

P.E. SPORTS AND ACTIVITIES

RACQUETBALL



“There are a lot of good racquetball players out there, but playing the game and knowing the game are two different things. Because I had no direction, I had to feel the game.”

Kane Waselenchuk, Canadian professional racquetball player

INTRODUCTION

Racquetball is a relatively new game which continues to grow in popularity. It can be played competitively or simply for fun and relaxation.

HISTORY OF THE GAME

Racquetball is an offshoot of the game of tennis. It’s tempting to make comparisons between the two sports but we have to be careful not to be misleading! According to many pros, excelling in one of the racquet sports does not necessarily guarantee top performance in another.

Compared to other sports, racquetball is a young sport, having originated in the United States in the 1950s. Although it is strenuous and physically challenging, it does not entail chasing balls all over a court. But like tennis, it does require both superior physical dexterity as well as the ability to strategize quickly and effectively.



HOW RACQUETBALL IS PLAYED

BASIC RULES

Racquetball can be played alone, against one opponent as a singles game, or with four players as a doubles game.

In racquetball, the first team or player to score 21 points (or to score 11 points if the opposing players remain scoreless) wins. A match is won by the first side to win two games.

The server or serving side tries to win each volley by serving or returning the ball so that the opposition is not able to keep the ball in play. Points can be scored only by the side that is serving when it makes an unreturnable serve or wins a volley. When the serving side loses the volley, it automatically loses the serve (called “a handout”).

THE COURT

Competitive racquetball is played on a four-walled room with a ceiling. The typical court is 20 feet wide, 40 feet long and 20 feet high, with six playing surfaces: the front wall, back wall, two side walls, the ceiling and the floor.

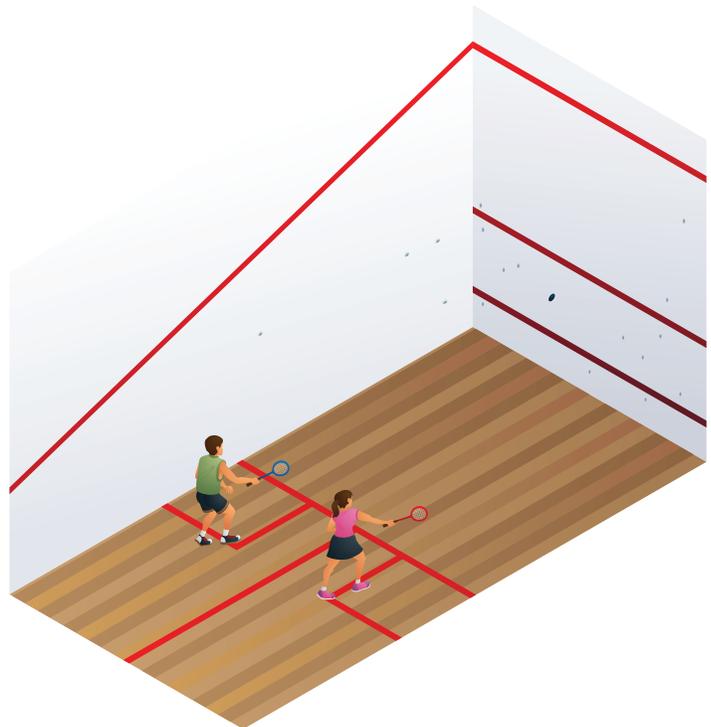
Lines divide the court into sections:

The short line runs parallel to the front wall and divides the court into front and back courts.

The service line runs five feet in front of the short line and parallel to it.

The service zone is the area between the short line and the service line.

The service boxes are formed by lines that run 18 inches away from and parallel to the two side walls. During a doubles game, the server’s partner stands in one of the boxes during the serve.



PLAYING TECHNIQUES

STROKES

Racquetball is played with three basic strokes: backhand, forehand and overhand. In the backhand stroke, the key point to remember is that the face of the racquet must hit the ball perpendicular to the floor just past the right leg. Your body is bent slightly facing the left wall (right wall for left-handed players). The right arm is raised so that the racquet head is above your left ear. The weight is on your left leg until the racquet is swung; then the weight shifts to your right leg as your arm swings across the front of your body.

As you swing the racquet, keep your eyes on the ball. After you hit the ball, let your arm follow through the arc of the swing until it straightens out again.

The forehand stroke is easier to perform than the backhand stroke. However, the body motions used in this stroke are almost identical with those used in the backhand stroke. The racquet is held perpendicular to the floor. The racquet contacts the ball just past the left leg.

The key to the forehand stroke is to bring the racquet arm back behind your head as fast as possible before starting the downswing. Also, keep your wrist cocked back so that it snaps as the racquet meets the ball.

The overhand stroke is the least-used stroke in racquetball. It is often used for ceiling shots. It's also widely used by beginning players who are not yet sure of the other moves.

In this stroke, move your racquet arm back and hold it at a 90-degree angle. The overhead motion is similar to tossing a ball in the air. Extend your racquet arm forward as if you were trying to smash the ball.



THE SERVE

As with tennis, the serve is where the game of racquetball begins. The player who serves is the only one who can earn points. As in tennis, the exchange of the ball between players after the serve is called the “volley.”

The proper way to serve is to bounce the ball and hit it with the racquet against the front wall of the court. As mentioned above, a handout (losing the serve) can occur if there is a foot fault or a bad serve. Three kinds of errors can result in losing the serve:

A foot fault occurs when the server’s foot extends over the foot boundaries. Two successive foot faults result in a handout.

A bad serve occurs when the ball hits the ceiling, floor or any of the other walls of the court before it hits the front wall.

A handout occurs when two successive faults are committed. This can occur when the ball hits the short line on a serve (this is called “a short”), or when the ball hits the rear wall on a serve before it bounces (this is called “a long”).

TYPES OF SERVES

The three most important serves in racquetball are the Power Serve, the Lob and the Zee.

The power serve (or “Power Drive”) is the most common serve used by skilled players. When done correctly, this serve is difficult for the player’s opponent to return. A serve which is impossible to return is called an “Ace.” On a low bounce, the ball is hit with full strength to a point on the front wall so that the ball rebounds only a few inches high off either side wall.

The lob is a much softer serve than the Power Serve. The ball is hit to the top of the front wall so that it rebounds to either side wall and hits the floor near the rear wall. The closer the ball to the rear wall, the more difficult it is for the receiver to return it.



The zee is a specialized serve. In this serve, the ball follows a twisted path that resembles the letter “Z.” Ideally, the ball will strike the front wall 8 to 16 feet above the floor. It rebounds onto the side wall and travels across the court, bounces on the floor, and hits the opposite side wall. The ball cannot hit the first side wall before it hits the front wall.

The Zee is a complicated and tricky serve. Considerable practice is required before a player can use it effectively.

SERVE RETURNS

Two rules of thumb when returning balls are:

1. If a ball is below the knee, the player should run toward it and return it.
2. If the ball is above the knee, the player should wait for the ball to rebound off a wall and then return it.

Five other basic rules also should be kept in mind during a game:

1. When the ball is being served, stand at least five feet behind the short line.
2. A ball cannot be returned until it has passed the short line.
3. The ball must be returned before it hits the floor twice. The ball can also be returned on the fly or before it touches the floor.
4. A ball should hit the front wall first. However, it can hit the ceiling or side wall before it reaches the front wall. It must not touch the floor before it touches the front wall.
5. If you swing at the serve and miss, you can recover and make a legal return.



EQUIPMENT AND CLOTHING

Any type of loose, non-binding garments can be worn to play racquetball. Many players wear shorts or lightweight sweatpants and a T-shirt.

The best shoes to wear are those with gummed soles. These shoes provide the best traction on racquetball court surfaces and will not leave marks on the floor. Serious eye injuries can occur in racquetball because of the enormous force of the ball. Protective eye gear for all racquetball players (beginner or experienced) must be worn according to racquetball official rules.

Racquets for racquetball can be purchased for as little as \$20 or as much as many hundreds of dollars. It is recommended one start with less expensive gear and move up to pricier options as skills improve. Rules state that the racquet must be secured to the player's wrist by a cord or strap. This keeps the racquet from accidentally flying out of the hand and possibly injuring the other player.



RACQUETBALL NOTES

Popularity of the sport grew in the 1960s and 1970s as more athletes noticed its high intensity, giving them a great workout and building up a sweat while playing. Sports clubs and country clubs throughout the U.S. picked up on the enthusiasm of the sport and started building racquetball courts. But in the 1980s the sport's popularity began to fall but many enthusiasts continued to devote themselves to the sport and kept the spirit of the game alive. Even with the decline of its popularity there are still well over 20 million people worldwide that compete in this sport.

There is a world championship that is held annually and racquetball is an approved Pan American Games sport. Racquetball was part of the U.S. Olympic Festival with the hopes of one day being a part of the real Olympics. It is known as the youngest sport ever to be noticed by the United States Olympic Committee. Today, the 20-million racquetball players are spread out over 96 countries. Rules for this sport can vary from country to country.

The United States has two national racquetball organizations: the American Amateur Racquetball Association (AARA) and the United States Professional Racquetball Association (USPRA). The AARA publishes the official racquetball tournament rules and sanctions racquetball events. The USPRA exists primarily to promote the sport of racquetball and the racquetball teaching profession.

Some high schools offer racquetball and the organization, USA Racquetball (USAR), sponsors National High School championships which feature more than 40 high schools from across the country competing for gold medals in singles and doubles divisions. The USAR is also active in sponsoring programs that involve young players that are interested in competing at various events. The NCAA does not offer racquetball as a college sport.

Many cities and towns offer amateur leagues or teams. Some are sponsored by such organizations as YMCA's or local park districts.

Websites to checkout regarding racquetball are:

www.usra.org

www.teamusa.org