

Racquetball



Racquetball racquet and ball

Racquetball is a [racquet sport](#) played with a hollow [rubber ball](#) in an indoor or outdoor court. [Joseph Sobek](#)^[1] is credited with inventing the modern sport of racquetball in 1950 (the outdoor, one-wall game goes back to at least 1910 in N.Y.C.),^[2] adding a stringed racquet to [paddleball](#) in order to increase velocity and control. Unlike most [racquet sports](#), such as [tennis](#) and [badminton](#), there is no net to hit the ball over, and, unlike [squash](#), no tin (out of bounds area at the bottom of front wall) to hit the ball above. Also, the court's walls, floor, and ceiling are legal playing surfaces, with the exception of court-specific designated hindlers being out-of-bounds.^[3] It is very similar to 40×20 handball, which is played in many countries.

Joe Sobek is credited with inventing the sport of racquetball in the [New Britain Connecticut YMCA](#), though not with naming it. A professional [tennis](#) and [handball](#) player, Sobek sought a fast-paced sport that was easy to learn and play. He designed the first strung paddle, devised a set of rules, based on those of [squash](#), handball, and paddleball, and named his game *paddle rackets*.

In February 1952 Sobek founded the National Paddle Rackets Association (NPRA), codified the rules, and had them printed as a booklet. The new sport was rapidly adopted and became popular through Sobek's continual promotion of it; he was aided by the existence of some 40,000 handball courts in the country's [YMCAs](#) and [JCCs](#), wherein racquetball could be played.

In 1969, aided by [Robert W. Kendler](#), the president-founder of the U.S. Handball Association (USHA), the [International Racquetball Association](#) (IRA) was founded using the name coined by Bob McInerney,^[4] a professional tennis player. That same year, the IRA assumed the national championship from the National Paddle Rackets Association (NPRA). In 1973, after a dispute with the IRA board of directors, Kendler formed two other racquetball organizations, yet the IRA remains the sport's dominant organization, recognized by the [United States Olympic Committee](#) as the American national racquetball governing body.

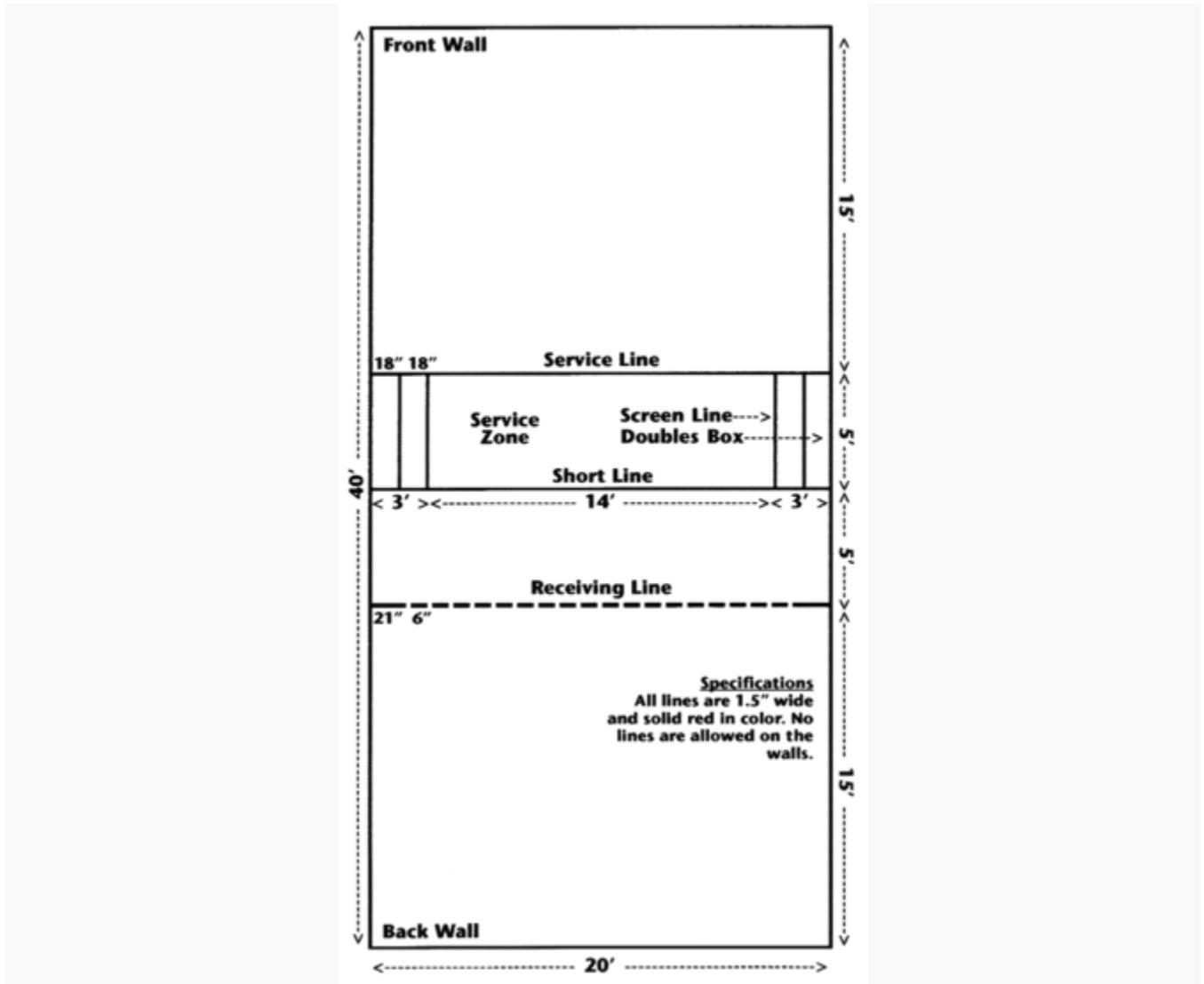
In 1974, the IRA organized the first professional tournament, and is a founding member of the International Racquetball Federation (IRF). Eventually, the IRA became the American Amateur Racquetball Association (AARA); in late 1995, it renamed itself as the United States Racquetball Association (USRA). In 2003, the USRA again renamed itself to USA Racquetball (USAR), to mirror other [Olympic sports](#) associations.

Kendler used his publication *ACE* to promote both handball and racquetball. Starting in the 1970s, and aided by the [fitness](#) boom of that decade, the sport's popularity increased to an estimated 3.1 million players by 1974. Consequent to increased demand, racquetball clubs and courts were founded and built, and sporting goods manufacturers began

producing racquetball-specific equipment. This growth continued until the early 1980s, and declining in the decade's latter part when racquet clubs converted to physical fitness clubs, in service to a wider clientele, adding aerobics exercise classes and physical fitness and bodybuilding machines. Since then, the number of racquetball players has remained steady, an estimated 5.6 million players.

Equipment

This court and equipment are required for playing racquetball:



The court dimensions

- A racquetball court; fully enclosed indoor or outdoor with a front wall. The standard racquetball court is [rectangular](#): 40 feet long, 20 feet wide, and 20 feet high with red lines defining the service and serve reception areas.

The "service box" is formed by the *short line* (a solid red line running the court's width parallel to the front and back walls at a distance of 20 feet) and the *service line* (which runs parallel to the short line and is 15 feet from the front wall). Within the service box there are two sets of lines perpendicular to the short and service lines.

One set of lines is 18 inches from, and parallel to, the side walls. Along with the short line, service line, and side wall these lines define the doubles box, where the non-serving doubles partner stands during the serve; 36 inches from the side wall is another set of lines which, along with the short line and the service line, define an area that the server must not enter if he wishes to hit a drive serve between himself and the nearest side wall. The *receiving line* is a parallel dashed line 5 feet behind the short line.^[9][\[dead link\]](#)

Other equipment needed:

- A racquetball; a dynamic (bouncy) rubber ball of 2.25 in. (57 mm) diameter
- A racquetball racquet; no longer than 22 inches
- Racquetball eyeguards (mandatory during competitions; playing without eyeguards is not recommended, as being hit in the eye by the ball can cause permanent vision damage).

Racquetball differs from other [racquet sports](#) as most competitive players wear a glove on their racquet hand for the purpose of getting a better grip on the racquet (similar to golfers using a glove when driving), but gloves are optional equipment. Also, players usually wear a comfortable short sleeved shirt and shorts, as well as racquetball court shoes designed for enabling quick lateral as well as forward and backward movement.

Ball Colors

Racquetballs are manufactured in a variety of colors such as blue, green, purple, black, red, and pink and some are for specific purposes (e.g., outdoor play vs. indoor play), but the differences are unlikely to make much difference for recreational play. For players that are just beginning to play racquetball is it recommended to use the "blue" colored racquetball that is manufactured by Penn, Ektelon, or Wilson. The blue racquetball is the most commonly used racquetball because it is the most neutral racquetball for average speed and accuracy of contact. Green racquetballs are often used a significant amount as well because they are very similar to the blue style ball. In the USA the main choice of racquetball color is blue and green for tournament play. In some cases in the International Pro Racquetball Tour (IRT) they will use the Purple Penn HD ball for their official racquetball ball due to the ball's high effectiveness. The black racquetball is often used in tournaments for senior players because the ball is designed to be much slower moving and it allows for much longer rallies. The red racquetball is the fastest of the racquetballs out there in production and they are known as the Red Ektelon Fireballs. This ball is much heavier and allows for a much quicker pace and requires much more experience from the player. The pink racquetball tends to be the favorite of most recreational players and even some pro level players. This pink racquetball allows for the "highest" level of visibility due to the bright pink coloration of the ball. Also, the speed and durability of the ball is very close to that of the blue and green racquetballs. Finally, the pink ball was created to support breast cancer research and the manufacturers of the ball Wilson, donate \$1.00 to the breast cancer awareness association every time a package of the pink racquetballs are sold.^[10]

Racquetballs do break occasionally, and will lose their bounce over time even without breaking. To keep racquetballs around for a long time it is best to keep them in a room temperature setting and keep them out of the extreme cold and heat because this will cause the racquetballs to become less effective and lose their bounce sooner than usual.

Rules

Play begins with the serve. The serving player must bounce the ball on the floor once and hit it directly to the front wall, making the ball hit the floor beyond the short line; otherwise the serve counts as a fault.^[11] The ball may touch one side wall, but not two, prior to hitting the floor; hitting both side walls after the front wall (but before the floor) is a "three wall serve," and a fault. Also, serving the ball into the front wall so that it rebounds to the back wall without hitting the floor first is a long serve, and a fault.

Other fault serves include a ceiling serve in which the ball touches the ceiling after the front wall and serving before the receiving player is ready. Also, the server must wait until the ball passes the short line before stepping out of the service box, otherwise it is a fault serve.

If the server hits the ball directly to any surface other than the front wall the server immediately loses serve regardless of whether it was first or second serve.

After the ball bounces behind the short line, or passes the receiving line, the ball is in play and the opposing player(s) may play it.

Usually, the server is allowed two opportunities (called first serve and second serve) to put the ball into play (two serve rule), although elite level competitions often allow the server only one opportunity (one serve rule).

After a successful serve, players alternate hitting the ball against the front wall. The player returning the hit may allow the ball to bounce once on the floor or hit the ball on the fly. However, once the player returning the shot has hit the ball, it must strike the front wall before striking the floor. Unlike during the serve, a ball in play may touch as many walls, including the ceiling, as necessary so long as it reaches the front wall without striking the floor.

Hinders

Due to the nature of the game, players often occupy the space their opponent(s) want(s) to occupy. This may result in a player blocking his opponent's ability to play the ball. Such occurrences are termed either hinders or penalty hinders. A hinder is a replay of the current rally, while a penalty hinder results in the player who caused the avoidable obstruction to lose the rally. A type of hinder is a screen in which the player is unable to see the ball prior to it passing the opponent.

The difference between a hinder and a penalty hinder (or formerly an avoidable hinder) is that in the latter case a player has missed out on a clear opportunity to make a rally-winning shot due to the obstruction by the player's opponent, while in the former case the opportunity missed would not clearly have led to a winning shot. This difference is almost always a judgment call by the referee (if available).

There is also a "court" hinder in which some part of the playing field caused the ball to bounce untrue. Often this is the door frame or (recessed) handle or a flaw in the floor or walls. In this case, the rally is a re-serve.

Scoring

Points can only be scored by the serving player or serving team in a doubles game, and points are the result of winning a rally that began with a successful serve.

During play, a player loses the rally if any one of the following occurs:^[12]

1. The ball bounces on the floor more than once before being struck.
2. The ball skips, or does not reach the front wall on the fly.
3. The ball flies into the spectator's gallery or wall opening or strikes an out-of-bounds surface above the court's normal playing area [cf. Rule 2.1(a)].^[13]
4. A slow ball strikes another player without the estimated speed and/or direction to strike the front wall.
5. A ball struck by a player hits that player or that player's partner.
6. A penalized hindrance [cf. Rule 3.15].^[14]
7. Switching racquet hands during a rally.
8. Touching the ball with either the body or uniform.
9. Prior to September 1, 2013, carrying or slinging the ball with the racquet was considered an illegal hit. The USAR 2013 Official Rulebook now states the following: 4. Unintentional "carries" during the rally are allowed and are no longer called. See Rule 3.13(b).

Under USA Racquetball rules, matches are best of three games with the first two games to 15 points and a third game to 11 points, if necessary. USA Racquetball rules do not require players to win by two, so a match score line could read 15–14, 14–15, 11–10. Racquetball Canada matches are also the best of three format, but require a winning margin of at least two points.

International competitions run by the International Racquetball Federation are like the USA Racquetball scoring system: two games to 15 with a tie-breaker to 11, if necessary, and win by one. However, the men's and women's pro tours play matches that are the best-of-five games to 11 points, requiring a two-point margin for victory.

Game variations

Racquetball games can be played with two, three or four players, with doubles or singles matches being most common. Two player games are called singles or "one-up" (one vs. one for the entire game), while four player games are doubles with two pairs playing against each other (two vs. two for the entire game). Tournament competitions have divisions for singles or doubles or both.

Three-player games are most commonly called "Cut-throat" and sometimes "Ironman" (two-on-one for the entire game) where each player takes turns serving to the other two, who play as a team against the serving player. Another three-player game is "California", "In-and-Out", or "King of the Court" where play is 1 vs. 1 with the third player remaining in the back court out of play while the other two play a rally; the rally winner then serves to the player who was sitting out, and the rally loser stays out of play. Another three-player variation is "Sevens" in which one player plays against two players as a team, with the game being played to seven points; if the two player team gets to seven first, the game is over, but if the solo player gets to seven first then the game continues to 14; if the solo player again reaches 14 first, then the game continues to 21, where the game ends regardless of whether the solo player or the two player team reach 21 first.

Shots of the game

Service

Serve style varies drastically from player to player. Generally, they are divided into two types: offensive and defensive. Most players use an offensive serve for the first serve, and a defensive serve if they need to hit a second serve. Of the offensive serves, the most common is the drive. The intention with this serve is for the ball to travel low and fast towards either back corner, and to bounce twice before striking either side wall or the back wall. If the opponent is adjusting to the drive serve, the server will throw in any variety of jam serves.

A *jam serve* is an offensive serve which attempts to catch the opponent off balance by making use of difficult angles and unfrequented play space. The most common jam serve is the Z-serve, which strikes the front wall close to a side wall. The ball bounces quickly off the side wall, then strikes the floor and then the opposite side wall about 30–35 feet back. Depending upon the spin the server gives the Z-serve, the resulting carom may prove unpredictable and difficult to return. Side spin may cause the ball to bounce parallel to the back wall.

A *pinch serve* is similar to a drive serve; however, the ball strikes a side wall very low and close to the serving box. With the appropriate spin, the ball has little bounce, and is difficult to return. It is possible that a successful serve would strike the sidewall before the short line, and land on the floor after the short line.

If the player faults on the first serve, they will usually hit a defensive serve. Defensive serves do not usually garner aces, but they are designed to generate a weak return by the opponent, thereby setting up the server to win the point. Most defensive serves are any variety of lob serves. A plain lob serve is a ball hit with a long, high arch into either back corner. The goal is to hit the ball so that it lands as close as possible to the back wall, giving the opponent very little room to hit a solid return. A junk lob takes a shallower arch, and lands close to the side wall somewhere between the dotted line and the back wall. This lob is intended to deceive the opponent into thinking he has an easy kill. However, since the ball is in the deep zone, it will more likely set up the server for an offensive shot.

Offensive shots

Straight-in shots are usually meant to hit the front wall as low as possible. If the ball contacts the front wall so low as to bounce twice before it reaches the service line it is called a "kill" shot. Straight-in shots are normally attempted with the idea of hitting toward the area of the court the opponent cannot cover. Straight-in shots hit where the opponent can't return them are called down-the-line and cross court passing shots. Often kill shots are returned very close to the back wall as the ball is moving towards the front wall.

Pinches and splats are shots that strike the side wall before the front wall. This often makes the ball bounce twice quickly to end the rally. Pinches normally strike the side wall towards the front part of the court, often within a few inches from the front wall.

The "splat" shot is an elongated pinch that strikes the side wall towards the back part of the court. It often makes a distinctive splatting sound. A very disorienting shot named the "rayjay splat" after Ray Johnson, a Wyoming state champion, who consistently used this shot by smashing the ball into the sidewall at such an angle that it would "Z" into the opposite front wall, arriving with such minimum momentum that it would "die" at the front wall and not rebound as expected. The best defense is to listen for the splat and anticipate the ball action. The advantage to a splat shot, beyond an unpredictable

angle, is that it creates a longer distance to travel forward for the opponent who is held between a tension of going forward and staying back because of velocity of passing shots.

Pinches are classified as frontside or reverse. A [right-handed](#) player shooting a forehand shot to the right front corner is shooting a frontside pinch. A right-handed player shooting to the left front corner is a reverse pinch. A right-handed player shoots a backhand frontside pinch to the left corner and a reverse double pinch to the right corner. Everything for a left-handed player would be the opposite.

The dink is another very effective offensive shot designed to end the point. It is a shot very low to the front wall hit very softly so as to bounce twice before the opponent can get to it. Dinks are most effective when the opponent is positioned deep in the court.

Another important shot type is the "Z" shot. This shot is effective at confusing and tiring out your opponent. To hit a "Z" shot one hits the side wall hard and up high causing the ball to hit the front then the other side wall then back to the original side wall. If done correctly, the path of the ball will be Z shaped. This shot can have confusing bounces which can frustrate opponents. If done correctly, a "Z" shot will apply spin to the ball as well on the final bounce, causing it to rebound perpendicular to the second wall and fall parallel to the back wall, the closer the better. This makes the "Z" shot very difficult to return.

An interesting and surprise attack shot is the "CB Pinch", named after Charlie Beram, a Colorado state champion who is credited with this unique style. The CB Pinch occurs where the player responds to a ceiling shot quickly, in front of the service line and right after the floor bounce. The shot is basically a redirected floor bounce (knee to waist high), where the ball is directed very softly but quickly to either corner from a position in front of the service line. The fact that the shot is taken right after a ceiling shot-floor bounce usually leaves the opponent in the rear of the court defenseless against the CB Pinch, when the player has suddenly rushed forward to take the shot.

Defensive shots

Defensive shots are defined as shots which are not returned low to the front wall.

The ceiling ball shot is the primary defensive shot. This is a shot that strikes the ceiling at or near the front wall. The ball will bounce once in the forecourt and should then travel in a high arc to arrive as close to, and as vertical to, the back wall as possible. Often this is aimed at the corner which would require a backhand return by the opponent. This makes it difficult for the opponent to return the ball as he cannot make a full arc of the racquet. However, if the ball comes down too long or too short of the back wall, this can allow the opponent a kill shot.

Another defensive shot is the high Z. Used when the defensive player is near the front wall, the high Z is hit ten feet high or higher into the front wall near a corner. The ball then bounces from the side wall all the way to the opposite side wall, usually traveling over the top of the opponent, hitting the opposite side wall with spin. The spin will cause the ball to leave the opposite wall almost perpendicular to it. This may confuse inexperienced opponents but importantly, if very close to and parallel to the rear wall, makes for a difficult return shot.

The "around the world" or "3 wall" defensive shot is hit like a pinch shot but high on the wall toward the ceiling. It travels around the court in a high trajectory and is an alternative to hitting a ceiling ball.

Two other defensive shots are used but are less effective. If the defensive player is in the backcourt but unable to position himself for a non-defensive shot, he may need to hit the ball off of the back wall. The ball often returns without much force and is easily returned. The round-the-world shot is hit high into the side wall first so the ball then hits the front wall and then the other side wall, effectively circling the court. It can be easily cut off and is rarely used anymore.

Strategy

The primary strategy of racquetball is to command the center of the court just at or behind the dashed receiving line. This allows the player to move as quickly as possible to all areas of the court and limit open court areas which are difficult to defend. After a shot, return quickly to center court. The antithesis of this is to be against a wall which severely limits the player's movement and allows the opponent an open court.

Keep an eye on the opponent by glancing sideways to anticipate their return shot and move appropriately in the court. Learn the typical return shots of the opponent and move appropriately in the court for a return shot. Attempt to not be predictable with your return shots.

Other more obvious strategies are to keep the returned ball as low on the front wall as possible, keeping the ball moving fast (limiting reaction time) and to keep your opponent moving away from center court by the use of lobs, cross court shots, and dinks.