

## Hampshire Squash - Guidance on Conduct

Squash is a game which people generally play for enjoyment. However, there are occasions when the competitive nature of the game can lead to unacceptable behaviour. Whilst the conduct of players is not a major issue in Hampshire there is a consensus that some guidance is required in order to assist those responsible for marking and refereeing matches.

The international rule covering Conduct on Court (Rule 17) has been in place for over ten years and is applicable to any match played under the Rules of World Singles Squash ([www.worldsquash.org](http://www.worldsquash.org)), whether at the British Open or a club here in Hampshire. It is also applicable to the doubles game.

Rule 17 is wide ranging and covers any behaviour that the referee considers brings "the game into disrepute". This includes behaviour that is disruptive, intimidating or offensive to the opponent, official or a spectator. It is further interpreted to cover any behaviour that allows an opponent to gain an unfair advantage over the opponent. Examples of this include racket and ball abuse, significant physical contact, dangerous play, time wasting, late back on court and, of course, audible and/or visible obscenities.

The Rule is quite clear in requiring that the referee shall impose a penalty which can be one of the following: Conduct warning, Conduct Stroke, Conduct Game and finally Conduct Match. Once a player has been penalised for an offence should the player make the same offence a second time, the referee must proceed to the next level of penalty. The sequence is:

- Warning: e.g. "Conduct warning, Smith: wasting time".
- Stroke awarded to opponent e.g. "Conduct Stroke, Smith: wasting time".
- Conduct Game awarded to opponent e.g. "Conduct Game, Smith: wasting time".
- Conduct Match awarded to opponent e.g. "Conduct Match, Smith: wasting time".

The essence of the Rule is that according to the severity of the offence, the referee can enter the "ladder" at any point: a minor infringement might warrant a warning whereas the player who head-butted his opponent at the British Open a few years ago was immediately disqualified ("Conduct Match"). A further example is that there is a clear difference between throwing the racket to the floor in frustration (Conduct warning), and throwing it so that it narrowly avoids the opponent (Conduct stroke). For minor infringements it is common practice for the more experienced referees to quietly advise the player not to do it again – a warning before the official warning!

The one topic that remains an issue at club level is that of bad language. We all know of the occasion when the player, presented with an open court, tins the ball and in disbelief swears to him/herself. **On a cold court in February with an empty balcony it would be somewhat heavy-handed to issue conduct warnings etc. However, in a more public arena it is expected that the referee take a more official approach** and the following guidance has been accepted for a number of years:

- A minor oath heard only by the referee: Conduct warning.
- A minor oath heard by the audience: Conduct stroke.
- The F- word heard by the audience: Conduct game:
- Any offensive language/behaviour directed at a player or official: Conduct match.

**The general principle is that we all know the swear words but the referee must take into account the occasion and the audience (children, family, dignitaries) when applying the Rule.** To give a penalty of "Conduct Game" for an oath muttered under the breath would not only bewilder the audience (who may not have heard it) but also ruin the occasion.

If a referee/marker from your club issues a conduct stroke, or higher punishment, during a Hampshire Squash league game please inform Paddy May ([themays@ntlworld.com](mailto:themays@ntlworld.com)). The Hampshire Squash Committee want to keep a record of transgressions so that appropriate action e.g. suspension, can be taken in the event of a serious breach of conduct, or against persistent offenders.