

DEALING WITH BAD LINE CALLS



"Life is 10% of what happens to you, and 90% of how you react to it" -Charles Swindoll

The following document contains advice for players and parents regarding how to handle poor line calls in tennis competition. Although it won't completely solve the problem, it will hopefully provide you with a few ideas about how those involved can deal with a future situation appropriately

Unfortunately, there is not a perfect solution to stop cheating in sports. However, making your way through the ups and down of competitive sport is a fantastic character shaping experience that will help them to be stronger individuals in the future.

As a junior player, coping with an opponent who is cheating is one of the most difficult things that you have to deal with in tennis. It is also incredibly frustrating for a parent or coach watching your child or pupil being cheated, and finding the right things to say to them after the match is almost impossible.

Witnessing your child being hurt in some way by another child, through their behavior or cheating, is one the most challenging things for a tennis parent. Every parental instinct tells you to intervene in some way and try to protect your child, yet you know that as a sporting contest you have to stay out of it and suffer on the balcony!

Children also tend to have a very acute sense of right and wrong, so thinking of something to say after the match when they feel that they have been cheated is a tough task. A parent's instinct is to take away the pain, but that's pretty much impossible.



By far the most common challenge is playing an opponent who makes bad line calls. The information below offers suggestions separated into the following four categories:

- ✓ General Advice to Players
- ✓ What to do During a Match
- ✓ What to Say After the Match
- ✓ What to Say at a Later Date

General Advice to Players

- Under the rules you are allowed to question calls by asking an opponent if they are sure. If they confirm that they are sure, the call stands. If they are not certain, the point should be replayed.
- On clay courts you can ask to examine the mark made by the ball, and this mark can be used to decide the line call. The problem is that the players have to first reach an agreement on which is the mark that the ball made.
- If you feel that a player is consistently making bad calls, you can call the referee. The referee won't be able to do anything about what has happened, as they cannot overrule calls in the past, but hopefully they will stay to watch and monitor calls.
- The crucial point to remember in terms of beating cheaters is that matches are rarely decided by the line calls; it is decided by how the two players react to those calls. So the key to beating a cheat is not to get too wound up by them but to stay cool and calculating and stay focused on your tennis.

Quotes from Experienced, High-Level Junior Players When Asked About Cheating:

"If it's just one call, I just forget it, but if consistently do it, then I feel I have to do more than just ask if they're sure because they'll just keep saying yes. If I'm positive they're cheating I go and get the referee – not because I expect the referee to do anything, but more to show my opponent that I'm not going to just allow them unfairly take points off of me."

"You've got to put it to the back of your mind – winning the match is the most important thing to me, and I know that if I constantly think about it and allow myself to get annoyed, I will lose the match."

What to Do During the Match

- Unfortunately, very little! Tennis at all levels is full of this type problem (even on the Pro Tour where the players have line judges). So, to a certain extent, dealing with this situation is a skill that your child has to develop if they are to progress.
- A golden rule in all stressful situations is to concentrate on the things that you can affect. In this situation you can have a positive effect on helping your child stay calm and playing well despite the calls.

- Stay calm and consistent with your normal behavior; applaud good play and effort and be sure that you are not projecting your stress through your body language.
- Remind yourself that it is only a tennis match and that you would rather it be your child who was the one who had to deal with this rather than the one who was making the poor line calls.

What to Say after the Match

- Give your child space; it is best not talk about what happened straight away. Check that they are ok, see if they need something to drink/eat, or praise them for their effort and the way in which they handled themselves during the match, but perhaps leave it at that.
- When they are ready to talk about it, let them tell you what they think and feel. Remember, you can't change what happened. The most important thing is to sympathize with how they are feeling and agree that it was really tough.
- Praise them and tell them that you are proud of them for how they dealt with the tough situation. Ensure that as the parent, you are reinforcing the good moral values that they displayed during the match. It is important that they understand that to you, how they acted and the attitudes that they displayed, are more important than the result of the match.
- Make sure to back your words up with actions. Change the focus and talk about something else and go do something positive together away from the tournament site. Avoid having a quiet and disappointed trip home, as kids will pick-up on it.

What to Say at a Later Date

- At the right time, discuss with your player that typically, players who cheat do so because they feel pressure to succeed (from somewhere), but lack the ability to achieve it. They are similar to playground bullies in that they may get some short term benefits, but in the long term, they will not succeed.
- It is also worth explaining that this is a prevalent situation that unfortunately is an aspect of all sports. The nature of the cheating varies between sports and ages, but it is always there. Therefore, it is important to work on the best way to handle it. As they get better at coping, it will happen to them less frequently.