

# IRF Officiating Guidelines

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## 1. Introduction

Roundnet is a sport that is predominantly self-officiated, but some matches have “observers”. This is different from many major sports that have “referees” who make every call of the match. Observers can settle disagreements on calls made by players, as well as making some calls themselves. The details of what calls observers make and how and when to make them are described in these guidelines. Usually, it is desirable to have multiple observers, but for various reasons, this is often not possible.

It is not an observer’s duty to provide full justice to a game. Since they are not referees, there will be some calls that they are not assigned to make. Observers must not make calls that are outside their purview (as outlined in these guidelines) in order to actualize what they believe might be the “fair” or “correct” outcome of a point and/or match.

These guidelines do not cover the basics and the rules of the sport. For more information on those, please visit the [IRF website](#).

Prospective observers must read and learn the IRF rules and these guidelines before observing a competitive match. The tournament director (TD) has the final say on assigning observers to matches. When many eligible observers are available, it is best for the TD to choose observers with experience. When appropriate it is also important to pair new observers with experienced observers in order to build experience.

### **Observer Equipment**

There are no official uniforms for observers, but, when possible, the observers will wear the same color. It is recommended they wear the same shirt if the TD can supply them. One observer can use a stopwatch (or phone) to keep track of time between games as well as the length of timeouts.

### **Before the Match**

The observers will meet (when there is more than one observer) in order to make sure everyone is on the same page. Observers will review pre-serve positioning, possible rule/guideline clarifications, considerations of outside objects like cameras, timing requirements (in regard to streamed matches), and any other points of emphasis that are unique to that tournament/TD. If one or more of the observers has little experience, it may be beneficial to review some of the basics and instill confidence in one another.

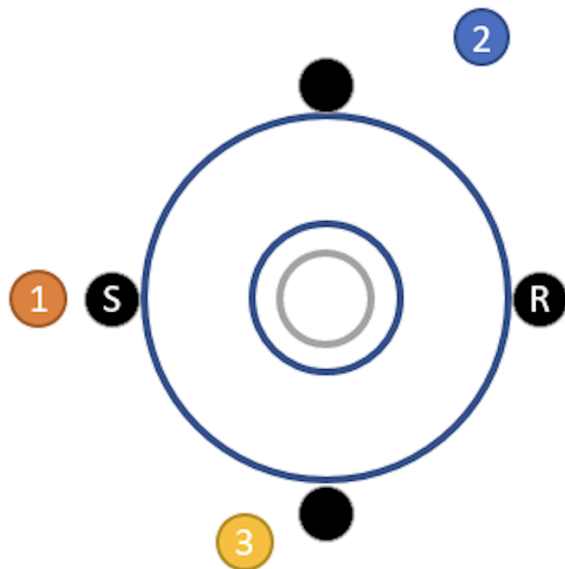
Before the match, the observers may convene with the players. Here, the observers can introduce themselves and possibly go over any points of emphasis unique to that tournament or match. This is a good time for the players to ask the observers questions regarding rules and the observing of the match.

## 2. Positioning and Observer Priorities

On positioning: observers will position themselves as close to the play as possible without interfering with the players. At the start of a play, be about 15 feet (4.5 meters) away from the net. Observers must be ready to rotate around the play to ensure they are not obstructed by players. If there are cameras recording the match, be cognizant of their position and try to avoid blocking them.

These guidelines specify where each observer stands before the point and which calls they are responsible for making if they occur on the serve or receive.

### Three observers. Switch roles as convenient for positioning



*Diagram shows where observers position themselves if there are three observers. The smallest circle represents the net, the middle circle represents the No Hit Zone (NHZ), and the outer circle represents the 7 foot service line.*

1st position – start directly behind the server. If your view is obstructed you can lean to either side to ensure you have a view of the net.

- Side pockets
- Foot Fault (specifically dragging feet)
- Delay of game on serve (more than five seconds to toss the ball)

2nd position – side of the receiver, but a few steps in front of receiver so that you can see both of the receiver's hands (either side of the receiver is fine – whichever is easier and doesn't obstruct a camera)

Before the serve, position your head so your eyes are level with the receiver's shoulders. This way you can keep your head at the same level and watch for where the ball contacts/passes the

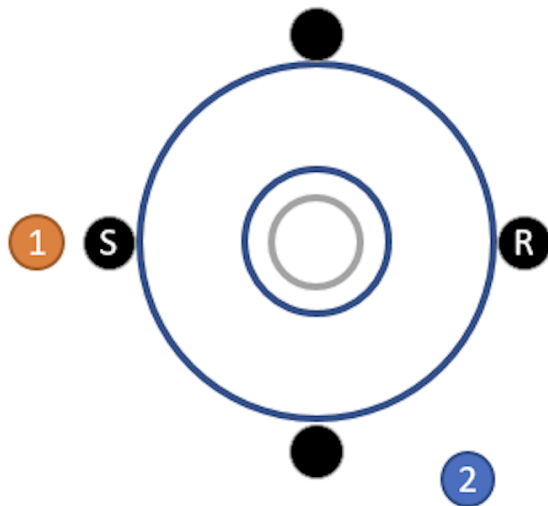
receiver to determine if a serve is high. If the player's shoulders go up while receiving, adjust your eye-line to be at the highest point their shoulders reach during the receive.

- High on serve (ball completely above shoulder)
- Illegal contact on serve receive

3rd position – to the side of the server, with your line of sight roughly parallel with the front rim so that you can see if the serve hits the front rim

- Rim on serve
- Server foot fault

**Two observers. Switch roles as convenient for positioning**



1st position – start directly behind the server. If your view is obstructed you can lean to either side to ensure you have a view of the net.

- Side pockets
- Server foot fault or follow through into circle
- Delay of game on serve (more than five seconds to toss the ball)

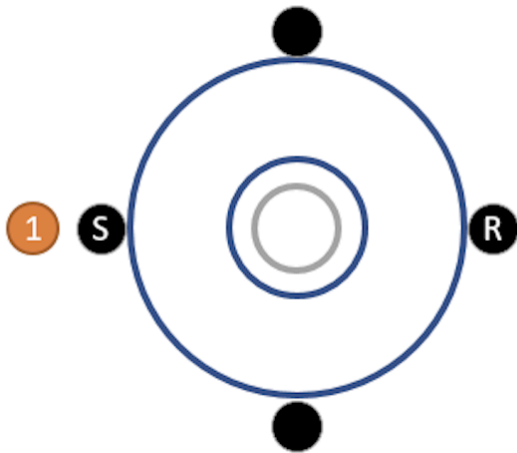
2nd position – side of the receiver, but a few steps in front of receiver so that you can see both of the receiver's hands (either side of the receiver is fine – whichever is easier and doesn't obstruct a camera)

Before the serve, position your head so your eyes are level with the receiver's shoulders. This way you can keep your head at the same level and watch for where the ball contacts or passes the receiver to determine if a serve is high. Note that if the player's shoulders go up, adjust your eye-line to be at the highest point their shoulders reach during the receive.

- High on serve (ball completely above shoulder)
- Illegal contact on serve receive

If players disagree on a rim call on the serve both observers may convene to determine who had the best perspective.

## One Observer



Position yourself directly behind the server (Position 1). If your view is obstructed you can lean to either side to ensure you have a view of the net. If the players agree that high calls are the biggest priority, then the observer switches to Position 2 (as indicated in sections “2 Observers” and “3 Observers”) to have a better perspective on high calls.

- High on serve (ball completely above shoulder)
- Side pockets
- Server foot fault or follow through into circle

When observing alone, the sole observer may adjust priorities if both teams agree a specific perspective is better to make calls in that match. (e.g. server is sometimes falling into the circle after swinging, so teams agree the observer should watch for that, instead of watching for rimmed serves). It is difficult to watch all three of these calls, so it's best to pick two to watch at a time, based on the server's tendencies.

### After the serve

After the serve, watch the half (or part) of the NHZ that you can view. Pay attention to NHZ violations on that part, but if the hitter isn't on your side of the NHZ (no clear perspective of NHZ violations), quickly shift your focus to watch the ball/net contact. If a defender is near/in the NHZ and you have a clear perspective of their feet, focus on a potential infraction for a block returning directly on the net. When the play is happening away from the net, watch the players to look for illegal hand contacts and hinders. If players ever visually obstruct a clear perspective on viewing any of the above, adjust your position to optimize your view while ensuring no interference with the players.

### 3. Making Calls

On any given play an observer either has a call or does not have a call. When an observer has a call it means they saw a particular part of the point and are confident in what occurred - for example this could mean they are confident the hit was clean, or that the hit was rim. This means that in reference to any particular instance there are three options for an observer (in our example of a hit, they would have "rim", "clean"/"legal", or "no call" - meaning they could not tell). It's important for an observer to be confident in their call and if not confident they must refrain from making a call - therefore they'd have no call. Because plays develop quickly and it's difficult to see everything, it is common for observers to have no call. By working as a team, observers can orient themselves with different views to ensure on a given play at least one observer will be in position to have a call.

Any possible calls to be made can be categorized as either active or passive calls. If a violation requires an active call, the observer must stop play to make the call. The following is a list of infractions requiring an active call.

Active Calls (observer must stop play to call it once they have a call)

- Toss violation
- Service line fault
- Server foot fault
- Timing violation on serve
- NHZ violation
- Contacting the roundnet set
- Illegal contact (catch, illegal double contact, four touches, contact out of turn)
- Misconduct

Active calls are to be made promptly and loudly to stop the game and avoid confusion. A player may stop the game to make an active call. If any other player disagrees with the call, the call goes to observers.

Passive Calls (players must stop play then ask you)

- Hits or serves being rim or clean
- Side pocket or high on serve
- Hinder
- Ball contacting the ground
- Everything else

#### **Players making calls**

As per rules 8.2 and 8.3 (shown below), players must stop a play immediately when making a call. They cannot wait until after a point is over to make a call and then ask an observer for a ruling.

8.2. Hitting and Play Infractions - Hitting infractions (rule 5.4.1) or play infractions (rule 5.4.2) must be called immediately after occurrence by saying “violation” and stopping play.

8.3. Calling Hinder - Hinders must be called immediately after occurrence by saying “hinder” or “violation” and stopping play.

### **Making calls on a serve**

For infractions on a serve, the observer watching for particular calls is responsible for making those calls. This applies to both active and passive calls. For an active call (such as a server foot fault) the observer watching for it will be similarly on a passive call, if the players come to the observers, the responsible observer will make that call without huddling with other observers (e.g. with two or three observers, the 2nd position observer would make the call on whether a serve is high). If the observer tasked with the call has no call, they must signal for a replay. They do not need to convene with the other observer(s) because they had the best perspective.

### **Making active calls during a point (after the serve)**

Active calls are made as they occur; observers should act quickly and decisively to ensure players hear them and the play is stopped. That being said, an observer is allowed to make a delayed active call as long as it is before the following point begins. Generally, the observer closest to the action is in the best position to have a call on a play. For example, if you are on the opposite side of the play and the defender has a touch that may have been an illegal contact, leave it to the observer closer and with a better view to make the call. Once an observer stops play and makes an active call, that call is final. Other observers cannot overrule the call, even if they disagree with it.

### **Making passive calls during a point (after the serve)**

On passive calls, the most important aspect is to wait until the players decide to ask observers. Until players decide to ask observers, do not make any signals or indications of what the call may be.

When players go to observers for a decision, the observers use hand signals (see section 4) to communicate what call they have only if they have a call (making no signal if they do not have a call). If all observers with a call are in agreement, that is the call and all observers will repeat the signal and state the call. If multiple observers have a call and disagree, the observers should convene. Once in the huddle, the observers with differing calls must determine who had the best perspective and take the call of whichever observer had the best perspective. Perspective means best sight of the infraction (play in question), and is not always a matter of position. If the observers had the same or very similar perspective or cannot come to agreement, the point will be replayed.

For example, a player hits the ball at the set and the opposing team makes a call that the ball hit the rim. One observer on the opposite side of where the ball entered the set sees that the ball took an oddly low trajectory and is confident the call is rim. Another observer was in-line with the rim where the ball entered the set and saw the ball contact the front pocket and therefore was confident the hit was clean. The latter observer had the best perspective of the possible infraction, and the observers should call the hit clean.

Another example: in the same play as above, the observers are on opposite sides of the set, both roughly in line with the angle the ball enters the set. One observer could not see the NHZ, so they watched the hit, and they were confident the ball contacted the net, not the rim. The other observer was watching to see if the hitter's feet were in the NHZ, but they also saw the ball hit the rim from the periphery of their view and the path the ball took after contact. The former observer had the best perspective because they were focused solely on watching the hit in question and the observers should call the hit clean.

These huddles should be brief and to the point. The observers with calls state their calls and their perspectives, and the group then decides the call. These should not be long debates where observers are trying to convince one another. If you cannot quickly determine who has the best perspective, the correct call is a replay.

### **Immediately Preceding Infraction (IPI) - Multiple infractions on a play**

For passive calls, players are required to stop play to make a call, but sometimes this is difficult to do when multiple infractions occur. Considering this, when observers make an active call, they can include a call on an "Immediately Preceding Infraction" (IPI) when applicable. This call overrides the active call.

Here is an exhaustive list of situations where IPI applies. No other active calls can be overridden by a preceding passive call:

- Player illegally contacts the ball on their first touch after a rimmed hit or service fault
- Hitter contacts NHZ on their follow through due to a defender hindering them
- Defender successfully blocks hit/serve back on net on first touch while contacting the NHZ, but the hit that they blocked hit rim, or the serve they blocked was a fault.
- Player contacts the roundnet set on their first touch while defending a rimmed hit or a service fault

Since observers are supposed to make active calls quickly, they must do so and also include the call on the immediately preceding infraction if applicable. For example, if the receiver makes illegal contact on the serve receive after the serve contacts the rim. The observer would actively call the illegal contact, but also indicate the rim call, and ultimately make/signal the rim call.

"Illegal contact! Rim precedes the illegal contact call. \*gives rim signal\*"

If an observer makes an active call, a second observer who noticed an IPI may convene with the other observer to make the correct preceding call.

### **On making the "right" call**

While observers are seeking to make the correct call, there will always be mistakes and missed calls. This is okay. This guide and an observer's job in general is to ensure observers are in the best position and follow a process to make calls. Therefore, observers must not overrule other observers or indicate they disagree with another observer's call. Showing a lack of confidence in



another observer might undermine them in the eyes of the players or spectators. Instead, meet up with the observers after a game or match to discuss calls you may disagree with to give feedback and recap why they made a call. Even if there were no disagreements, observers should recap with each other after a game just to discuss what worked well and exchange feedback. Similarly, when meeting to discuss a potential call, the observers should never discuss the play from across the net, but rather should meet privately out of earshot of players and spectators.

### **Outside influence**

Observers must be cognizant of outside factors and ensure they do not influence their decisions. This includes spectators, commentators, and even cameras - observers cannot check film to assist with a call. In the rare case that players and observers cannot determine the score or player orientation they may check a camera.

### **Working with new observers**

When working with new observers make sure they are in the correct position before the serve and be sure to review before the game what calls they will be responsible for. As stated above, do not overrule a new observer on active calls even if you disagree with their call. Especially when working with new observers it is important to recap with them after a game to give feedback on what they did well and what should be improved.

## 4. Hand Signals



Foot fault on serve



High serve



Pocket



Illegal serve toss



Rim



Clean (no infraction)



Illegal two consecutive touches



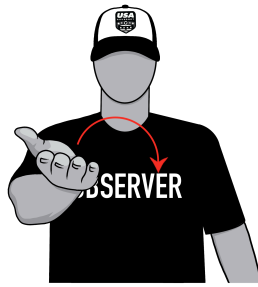
Four hits



Double bounce on net



Hand contacting ball while on net



Illegal Contact



Hinder



Infraction



No hit zone infraction (make a circle with fingers)



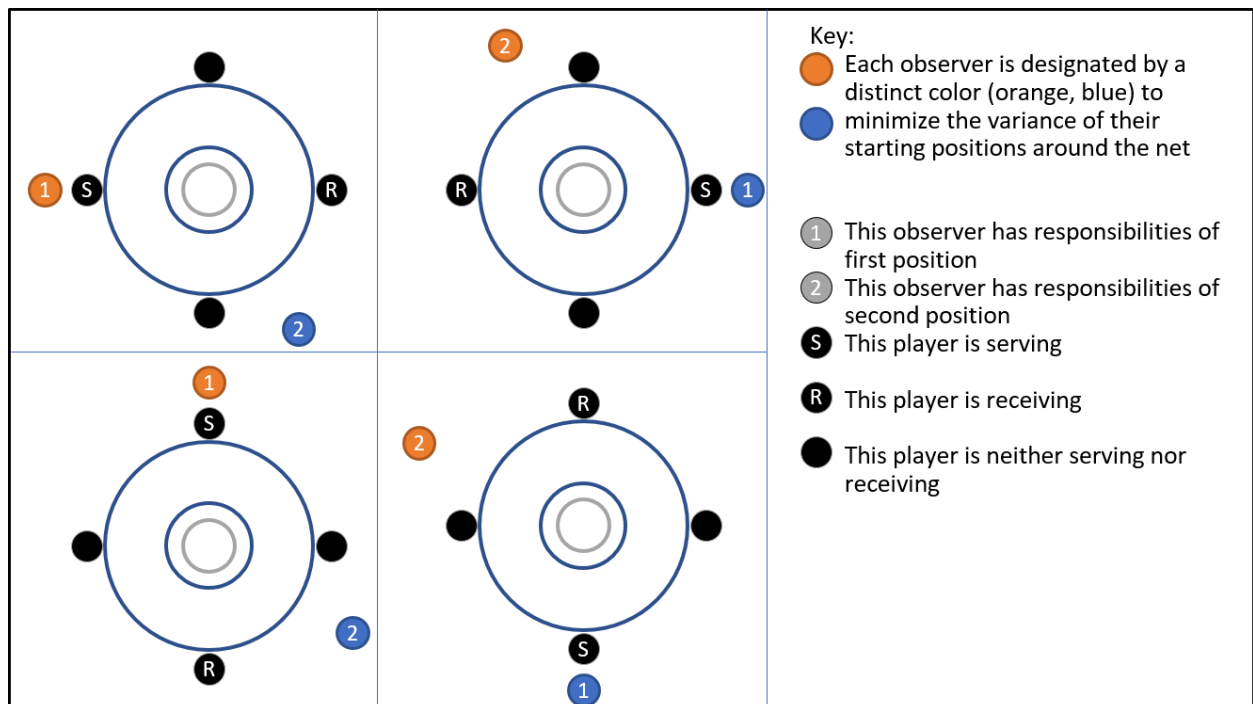
Replay

## 5. Appendix

The starting positions for a group of either two or three observers is detailed below based on the four variations of where the server and receiver are oriented. Observers will exchange roles and take on different priorities depending on where the server and receiver stand. The distance between observers and players shown here may not be to scale. Refer to section 2 for clarification on responsibilities for each position and appropriate distances.

*Note: These diagrams are guidelines and should be followed when possible. Observers should be cognizant of cameras and external objects and realign their positions accordingly. For example, in the diagrams for two observers, the camera would be in either the top right or bottom left of the diagram.*

### Positioning for Two Observers



## Positioning for Three Observers

