

Social League & Rainbow League Rules

Updated: Winter 2026

OVERVIEW:

Balls: We play with seven balls. Four balls will be placed on the midline on the side nearest the entrance to the gym. In the case where teams have a preference, rock - paper - scissors can be used to determine starting sides.

The Start: Players must start touching the back wall at the beginning of the game.

The End: Play continues until one team is eliminated, the refs call a pause in game play, or until the round timer sounds.

Multiple outs: A thrown ball can get multiple people out if it contacts them before hitting the ground, the wall, or another dead object.

Saves: If a ball hits you and a teammate catches it before it becomes dead, it is considered a catch. You are safe, the person who threw the ball is out and the first player in your out queue comes back into the game.

Lava lines: If a player steps on boundary lines that player is out.

Ball count: The team with the majority of balls has ten seconds to throw enough balls to relinquish the majority. (e.g. If a team has 5 balls at the start of the ball count they must throw 2 balls before the ball count runs out.)

The Queue: The first player eliminated is the first to come back into a game if there is a catch.

Headshots: Direct hits to a standing player's head are illegal and the thrower is out.

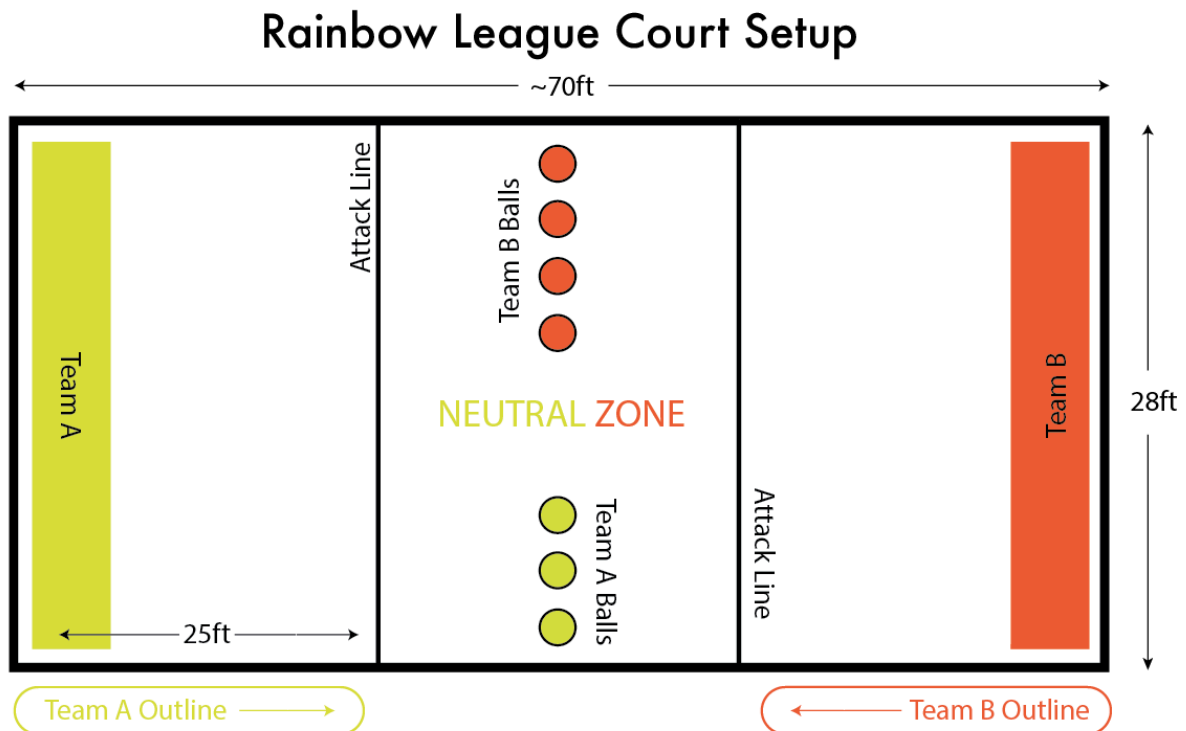
Attack Line: This is the farthest that an offensive player can go towards the opponent's back wall. The attack line is 25' feet from the opposing backline.

Neutral Zone: The area in the middle of the court that players from either team can occupy. All game play is valid in the neutral zone.

The Honor System: Players are responsible for calling themselves out. When in doubt, call yourself out.

Community: Get to know your teammates, your opponents, and have fun!

THE COURT:



Neutral zone: If a player steps completely over the line the neutral zone onto the opponent's side of the court that player is out. The size of the neutral zone may vary depending on the facility, but the attack line distance is consistent.

Attack line: The attack line is 25 feet from the back wall.

Sidelines: Players are not allowed to step over the sideline at any time. If their foot (or any other appendage) touches a sideline, that player is out.

Width: Court width can vary by format and facilities, but is generally 28 feet wide for a three court configuration.

Outline: Teams should line up on the right side of their court when two sidelines are present. If a sidewall is used as a boundary, both teams line up on the opposite side of the court.

SETUP:

All balls are placed on the centerline of the court. Four balls will be placed on the side nearest the gym entrance. Three balls will be placed on the other side.

Team captains can play rock, paper, scissors to decide starting sides.

The ref will start play generally by checking in with both sides and saying “ready, ready, go!”

THE RUSH:

On the initial rush, you may only touch the balls on the right side of the court.

Balls must be checked all the way to the back wall before they can be thrown.

The ball must be checked by a person, i.e. someone holding the ball must also be touching the wall. A ball thrown at the wall is not checked.

After all of your own balls have been checked you may grab the remaining balls on the centerline if the other team did not get theirs.

THE THROW COUNT:

Offense and Defense: When a team possesses a majority of the balls, they are on offense, and have ten seconds to throw enough balls to relinquish the majority. When that occurs, the count resets and whichever team has more balls will be on offense.

Refing the throw count: Use your arms to denote which side is on offense a silent count is fine but when the count gets down to five seconds make sure you’re loud enough for both teams to hear. On a count down, if the ref gets to the word “zero” without a throw from the offensive team, stop play and give all but two balls to the defense. Both teams move to the back wall from the wall and the ref can resume play.

OUTS:

If you get hit, you’re out. Easy right? Well, there are some tricky gray areas.

Getting hit: A player is considered out if they are contacted by a live ball thrown by the opposite team and it becomes dead. A player is out the moment they are hit with a ball. After being hit, a player can only attempt to catch the ball that hit them. Any thrown balls or other catches are

invalid.

Clothing: Uniforms and accessories are considered part of a player's body.

Hit etiquette: If a player is hit, they may pass balls under their control to their teammates, raise their arm to signal that they are out, and leave the court immediately without disrupting play.

When in doubt, you're out: If you are not sure if you were hit or safe, go out.

CATCHING:

Throwing a catch: If a player catches a ball thrown by an opponent, the thrower is out and one player returns to the catcher's side from the queue, in the order of first out, first in.

Catch: A catch is when a player retains control of a live ball thrown by an opponent. A player must have two feet in bounds to make a catch.

Returning: When a player is caught back into the game, that player must enter from the back of the court, near the wall, and tag the wall to become active. A returning player has 5 seconds to rejoin the game. A returning player cannot make any dodgeball moves until they touch the back wall. At the referee's discretion, if a player appears to be engaging in play before the 5 seconds have elapsed and gets out in the process, they are still out. Players should refrain from making plays during that 5 seconds if they wish to utilize it to get their bearings.

Catches from blocks: It is considered a catch if an opponent's ball hits a blocking ball and is caught by the blocker's teammate.

Saves: If a ball hits you and a teammate catches it before it becomes dead, it is considered a catch. You are safe, the person who threw the ball is out and the first player in your out queue comes back into the game.

Catching balls going out of bounds: Player must be in control (see Glossary) of the ball before going out of bounds, with both feet in bounds for a catch to be valid. The catch counts but the player falling out of bounds is out.

Confusion on a catch: If there is a catch and neither team knows who was caught the referee will pause the game and choose one player from the throwing side to come off the court.

Too close to call: If a player is hit out but makes a catch within the same volley, the player is out, but the catch counts. See the definition of volley.

BLOCKING:

Block: A block is when a player uses a ball to keep from being hit.

Failed Block: If a live ball, thrown by the opponent, hits a player's blocking ball and then hits the blocker's body, the player is out.

Dropped blocker: If a player drops their blocking ball because of contact from an incoming throw, the player is out.

Hands are part of the ball: The fingers and hand are considered part of the ball when holding a ball, the wrist and forearm are not. A player holding a blocker and hit in the hand is not out, a player hit in the forearm is.

JOUST:

When play is down to one vs one, the ten second count will immediately start. If both players are still in when the count is at zero, play will stop. Each player will go to their respective sides with two balls in hand and the remaining three on the center line, spaced out. On the referee's call, play resumes and players may ignore the throw lines. Referees may impose a 10 second count on a player if play stalls.

HEADSHOTS & HIGH THROWS:

Headshots: Headshots are illegal throws that hit players directly in the head while that player is at standing level or in an athletic stance. If a player has significantly lowered their head by kneeling, ducking or crouching, or raises their head by jumping, no headshot will be called. On a close call we're going to err on the side of safety and call the thrower out for a headshot.

Apology: At any time if a head shot is thrown, the thrower should immediately apologize and ensure that the apology is received by the head shot recipient.

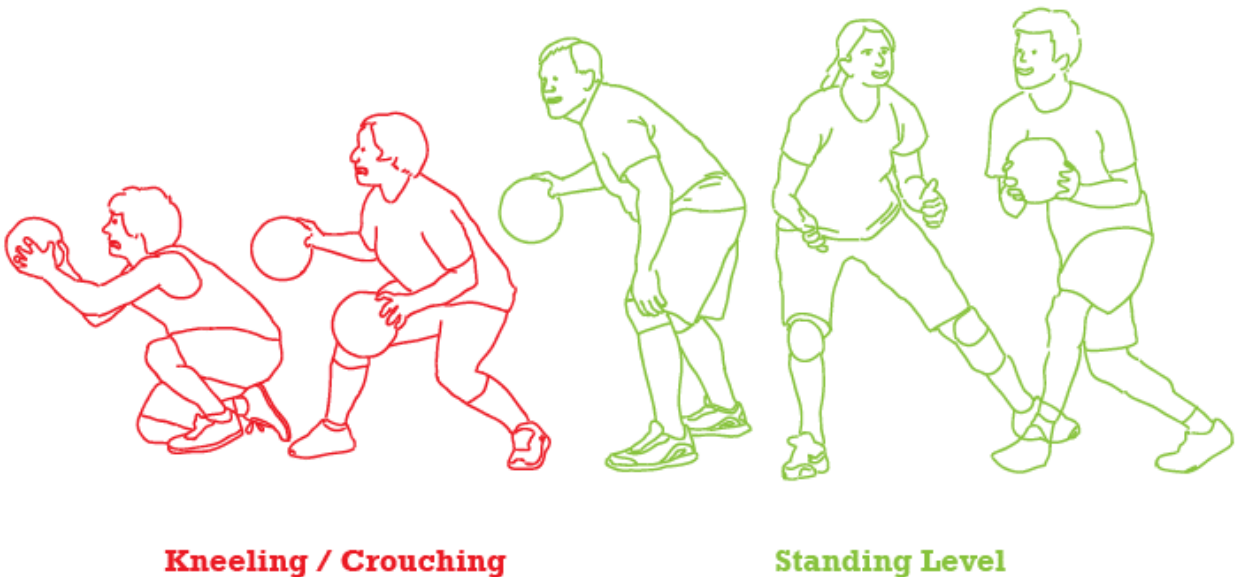
Halo rule: If it is currently one vs many and there is a group of balls thrown at a player, if one of them is a headshot, any other hits in that volley are erased. The headshot nullifies the entire volley. The dodger stays in and the thrower comes out for the headshot.

Catches: If a player puts their hands or arms in the path of a ball that would otherwise result in a headshot, the throw will be considered a headshot even when the ball touches the hands or

arms first. This is intended to further discourage headshots as well as protect players that may put their arms up in defense.

High throw line: A line will be affixed to the back walls at approximately 5 feet high. Any ball thrown on or above that line is forfeit to the defending team. If the ball ricochets back to the offending team, the ball must be rolled back to the defending team.

Standing Level



High throw warning: Players who throw near head level multiple times in one match will be warned by the referees. If that players throws another head level throw, that player will be called out.

Repeated headshots penalty: Headshots happen, but don't make a habit of it or you'll find yourself on the sideline. The following are the consequences for throwing multiple headshots on a single night of play:

- 1st headshot thrown – The thrower is out and will receive a wristband.
- 2nd headshot thrown – The throwing player is out, will receive a mark on their wristband, and will sit the remainder of the match.
- 3rd headshot thrown – The throwing player is out, will receive a second mark on their wristband, and will sit the remainder of the night.

SHAGGING:

If a ball goes off the court, players not on the court should get it back to an active player ASAP. A ball should be returned to the team on the side of the court that it went out on. The goal of shagging is to help the players, and to keep the game moving.

Shaggers may not reach on to the playing court or shag balls that are on the other team's side of the court.

If you're a spectator of the game and a ball comes to you, shag it and get it to a player ASAP.

HONORS SYSTEM AND REFFING

Dodgeball relies on the honor system, in which officiating is determined more between players and less from the referees. However, if there is a controversial play, the referees will make the final call. They have the right to stop a game and discuss the incident before proceeding. In respect for the spirit of the game and for fellow players, there is absolutely no protesting allowed. However we encourage players to discuss and clarify any plays in a respectful manner with referees after the game is finished.

SUBSTITUTIONS:

Missing Players: Captains can find substitutes for a missing teammates. Subs play for free and sub up to 3 times per season. No subs will be allowed for Playoffs. Captains will look to recruit subs that maintain the competitive balance of their team.

Spirit of subs: The goal of a draft league is to have competitive balance and fun. Similarly, the goal of substitutions is to maintain your team's original competition level. Captains should consider the skill and experience of the missing player when recruiting substitute players.

Team hopping: Subs should stick with the team they are subbing for rather than jumping between teams when breaks occur.

CLARIFICATIONS:

A ball must leave a player's hand(s) to be considered a valid throw. Tagging opponents with a ball will not result in an out.

Any intentional physical contact with an opposing player will deem the player that initiated contact "out".

When catching, a player must be in full control of the ball without using any out of bounds area or floor as leverage.

All players on a team's roster get to start a match. There will be no bench players.

A ball must be picked up in order for the throw to be legal. Kicking, smacking, or spiking a ball is not allowed and any hits resulting from the ball will not count. However, if one of these balls is caught by the opponent, the catch is legal.

Players must line up in the order they were eliminated.

Clothing (uniforms and accessories) is considered part of a player's body.

If playing with a timer and the time ends during a match then the team with the highest number of players on the court wins. If there is a tie for the number of players still on the court then it is a draw.

GLOSSARY:

Dead ball: A dead ball is any ball that has:

Not been checked on the rush.

Contacted an eliminated player.

Contacted another dead ball.

Contacted the floor / ceiling / or walls of the gym.

Been kicked or spiked.

All balls on the rush are dead until they are checked.

If a player throws a dead ball without checking it first, the throws will not count.

When a player is out for any reason, all balls under his/her possession are dead.

Dying ball

A ball that has hit a player, but has not yet become dead.

Live ball

A ball that has been activated and thrown by a player.

Match

A collection of games between two teams.

In

Being eligible to participate in the game on court.

Out

Ineligible to play in the game as a result of being hit, caught, or touching/going past the court's boundaries.

Opening Rush

When players approach the center line to retrieve the balls at the signal of the referee.

Control

A player has control of a ball when they have it secured in their hands.

Save

When a thrown ball deflects off of a live player and is caught by a teammate before hitting the ground it is considered a save. Neither the player who was hit or the thrower are out.

Burden to Throw

If a team has 4 or more balls it is their responsibility to make an attack and throw enough balls to relinquish ball majority.

Volley

A volley is a group throw of multiple balls. All balls arriving at a defending player at the same time are part of the same volley. Any balls that arrive unambiguously early or late to the defender are not a part of the same volley.