

Guide to Richmond USTA League Tennis for Captains (And Players)

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1. INTRODUCTION

Initially this guide was designed to be for new captains, but as we wrote it we realized that it might be helpful for league players too. Things change from year to year, and the more complicated issues can snag even the more experienced player now and then. Not everything can be covered on our website. So, here's a sort of guidebook for you to use. This guidebook is available on the local league web site on the Captains Information page. Think of it as "Cliff Notes on League Tennis for Players & Captains". We have attempted to cover subjects in some sort of order, but you can skip around as the season progresses to find specific information.

Our website address is: www.richmondtennisleagues.com The website is loaded with information, rules, forms, and helpful links. When we reference "our website" in this handbook, that's what we are referring to. We use the term "we" throughout the handbook to refer to the ALC's, or Area League Coordinators for Richmond USTA Leagues.

This handbook is not intended to discourage you from contacting the league coordinators. Please feel free to email us at richmondusta@gmail.com. Either way, we're happy to help with whatever we can.

Thank you so much for playing USTA league tennis in Richmond. Enjoy your season!

PLEASE NOTE: This is a guide to help you understand USTA league tennis in Richmond. It is not a set of governing rules. In case of any inconsistency between the guide and the governing rules, the guide will NOT be the controlling factor. Any failure to comply with the USTA League Tennis National, Mid Atlantic, Virginia and/or Richmond Regulations will not be excused on the grounds that you relied on this guide.

2. FORMING A TEAM & REGISTERING FOR A LEAGUE

Congratulations. You are a captain. USTA League tennis would be nothing without you. You have decided to be a captain because either you know that you have what it takes to be a great leader of men/women, or no one else would do it. You need players, courts, and inner strength! The topics below cover several things to consider when forming a team.

Team Rosters: The Virginia District limits rosters to a maximum of 22 players. USTA National regulations require a minimum of eight players on an Adult League team but typically, the minimum is not enough. (Five players is the minimum for levels 2.0, 2.5, 5.0 and six players for Senior, Super Senior, Mixed Doubles, and Combo Doubles) USTA regulations allow you to default two of five individual matches (one of three individual matches for levels 2.0, 2.5, 5.0, Senior, Mixed Doubles, Combo Doubles, & Super Senior), but face it, that is not much fun. Your opponent may be delighted to have such an advantage, but more often the other team is disappointed because they had a full line-up of players who wanted to play.

So, what number of players is just right? There is no one correct answer, but consider these things: What is your team philosophy? If you are a group of players eager to enjoy tennis, meet new players and move through the League Season without the pressure of trying to be the best in your division, a large team on which everyone gets to play a couple times might be just fine. If you are a group of gung-ho players hoping to really do well and advance to post-season play, your plan may be to field the best team possible for every match, and a smaller team might work better. If you have fewer than 12 players, you had better pray for no injuries, no vacation plans, and no kid emergencies. Also, be prepared for little surprises that mess up your best-laid plans. Like Julie starts dating Louisa's ex husband mid-season, and there is no way that these two women are going to be on the same court. Or your new player Mike turns out to be such a total court jerk that no one will be his partner. On the other hand, if you load up your roster with 22 players, you are asking to be burned in effigy before the end of the season. It will be very difficult to give everyone two chances to play. Everyone will want at least two chances to play because that is how they become eligible to advance to the District Tournament, and that's also how they'll generate a computer rating for the following year.

Please remember that until the deadline to register teams, we won't know how many teams will sign up for the various levels of play. We make every attempt to make our schedule based on fairness to all teams at every level, but it is impossible to give each team in our league the same number of matches. Dividing levels into "Flights" may be necessary in some of the levels with large number of teams. We've

developed a chart that indicates the number of matches your team can expect to have according to the number of teams at a level. Check it out...you might find it helpful when trying to determine how many players you'd like to have on your team. The chart is a guideline, and we do allow team captains to vote on season formats in many cases. It's printed in Appendix B, and also available on our website under "Captains Information".

Playing on More than One Team: USTA leagues in Richmond (except for Combo Doubles, Combo Mixed and Singles Leagues) must follow the USTA Mid Atlantic rule 12 regarding playing on more than one team. USTA Mid Atlantic does allow for participation on more than one team in the same league during the same season, but it is very important that you understand how this rule works and how this rule impacts your team. (This rule can be very confusing, therefore a detailed explanation can be found on our website under "Rules" and "Captain's Information".)

You can play on two teams in the same league as long as the teams are in different levels. For example, Joe with a 3.5 rating may join both a 3.5 and 4.0 Adult league team if he wants. Joe cannot play on two 3.5 teams in the same league, but he can play on two 3.5 teams in different leagues. Joe can play on a Weekend League 3.5 men's team and a 3.5 Weeknight League men's team since they are in different leagues. However, only two players who are registered on the same team may be members together on any other team in the same Division during the same season. Let's say Joe, the 3.5 player mentioned in the above examples, wants to play on a 3.5 team with his friends Bill and Bob. Joe, Bill and Bob also want to "play up" on a 4.0 team. Only two of those players may be on the same 3.5 and 4.0 teams.

Captains should keep in mind that should your team advance to the District championships there will be times when you have been counting on Joe for a critical match, and it turns out that he is the member of another championship team and his other captain got him first. Be sure you discuss with your multi-team players just what your expectations are, and what their definition of commitment is. This could save you misunderstandings down the line. If Joe does advance to District Championships on more than one team at the same level, he must choose which team he will play for and complete a "Player Declaration Form" for Districts. This form can be found on our website under "League Rules & Forms".

Playing at a Higher NTRP Level (or Playing Up): Once upon a time, the Mid Atlantic Section had a 20% rule, meaning that no more than 20% of the players on a roster could be rated lower than the team's NTRP level. The 20% rule no longer exists and there is no limit to how many on a roster can play up. USTA official policy encourages a player to play up if he or she believes that their current rating is incorrect. That is, if you generate a computer rating of 3.5 but plan to take lots of lessons, practice 4 times a week, and you won all of your 3.5 matches the year before, you should think about playing up.

Note for Self-rated players: The National Dynamic NTRP three strikes program evaluates every player's rating after every match, and if your scores indicate three times that you are too good to be playing on your team, you will be moved up to a higher level. Example: Sally has never played tennis and was self-rated at 2.5. However, Sally is a good athlete and she played multiple sports in the past. Sally's gut feeling is that the 2.5 level is probably not appropriate and she should play up at 3.0 or 3.5. If Sally's gut feeling is that she shouldn't play 2.5, the Dynamic NTRP three strikes program will probably think so too and she may be Disqualified. So play up if you feel your self-rating is too low. It's better than getting DQ'd during the league season and causing your team to lose matches.

USTA Richmond encourages most players to play their current NTRP level, but there are some situations when playing up is appropriate. If a 4.0 team needs a few 3.5 players in order to have a team, that certainly seems reasonable for those players to play up. But an entire team of 3.5's deciding to play up for good practice is probably not a good idea. That 3.5 team is better off playing at the 3.5 level. Keep in mind that other teams complain when entire teams are playing up and the resulting scores are very lopsided.

Courts: Some teams are based at private clubs while other teams may choose a public facility as their home courts. Either way, make sure you ask permission to host a team out of that facility and make sure courts are reserved for your home matches. We will give you your home match dates, but you'll need to work with your facility to set the actual times, and you'll be responsible for letting your opponents know the match times.

Each Adult Division league match consists of 5 individual matches (2 singles and 3 doubles positions). 2.5 and 5.0 teams are exceptions to that rule and only play 3 individual matches (1 singles and 2 doubles positions). The Adult Mixed Doubles Division, Singles Division, Combo Doubles and Combo Mixed

Division, Senior and Super Senior Division play 3 individual matches (3 doubles positions). It is suggested that you reserve courts in 2-hour blocks for your matches.

Non-playing Team Captain: If you are a non-playing captain, please let the league coordinator know when you register your team. You'll need to provide your USTA number so that you can be listed in *TennisLink*. The league coordinator will get you listed in *TennisLink* and you will not be charged any league fees as a non-playing captain.

Team Registration: Team Registration deadlines are posted on our website at least a month before the registration deadline. Check the page for the league you'd like to register for. Starting in 2009, captains may register using an online form on our website. We will keep a list of registered teams on our website, and we will update the list every 2-3 days. If you registered a team 2 weeks ago and you still don't see your name on the list, submit another registration.

!!WARNING! WARNING! WARNING! WARNING! WARNING!!

DO NOT register a team unless you are sure you have enough players.

We consider your registration to be a firm commitment to bring a team to the league, and we do our scheduling based on these firm commitments. If you are hopeful that you will have a team, or you think you will probably have a team, don't register until you are sure. You don't have to register the first day that registration opens. The deadline to register a team will be closer to the season start date and will be published on our website each season for each particular league. And if you did register a team and find out that the players you were counting on are all moving away, injured, pregnant, or deciding to go elsewhere, LET US KNOW RIGHT AWAY. If we have not started scheduling, we can drop your team easily and will thank you for letting us know. Teams that drop out after the registration deadline are subject to serious grievance action, because we may have to redo an entire schedule, forcing all the teams left in your flight to deal with undo stress and confusion. Trust me...you definitely won't make friends that way.

Team Name: Your team name may be the captain last name followed by the club name (Willow Oaks Jones), or anything else you choose. Just keep it clean!

Team Captain Email address: The captain's email address is very important. It's our main form of communication and it allows us to be in touch with you throughout the season. We frequently send out emails to all captains keeping them in the loop about deadlines, rules, and other general information. We also use email addresses to reach individual captains when questions arise about matches, or grievances, etc. You may also receive emails as reminders to confirm a scorecard that your opponent has entered. It is your responsibility to keep that email address up to date with USTA Membership, local league coordinators, and with other captains in your level.

If you want to be captain, but don't use email, you will need to select a team representative and use their email address so your team will receive all the information that other teams are getting. That team representative will also need to communicate with other captains and the league coordinators.

TennisLink Team Numbers: After you register a team with the local coordinators you will receive a *TennisLink* team number. You normally receive your team number within 2-3 weeks, but sometimes it takes longer. Levels with multiple flights usually receive their team codes later than the levels with one flight. Please do not send us repeated emails asking when you'll get a team code. We issue them to captains as soon as we can.....really!

Registering Players in TennisLink: Once you have received your team number, you will be able to register your players on your roster in *TennisLink*. Some captains like to do this themselves and get reimbursed by their players later. Most captains have their players register themselves. (This sounds like a great idea....they'll become familiar with the website, be able to access all sorts of interesting team info, and maybe even want to be the team captain next season!) If you choose this option, you will need to provide your players with your specific team number in order for them to register. Team numbers are specific for each season, league, level, and captain. Either way, there is a player registration fee for each name added to your team. This fee covers your league fees for that season and includes the following for 2010: a non-refundable Mid Atlantic fee, an Virginia Tennis District fee, a Richmond local league fee, and a non-refundable *TennisLink* fee. See local league rules for exact fees for 2010.

Note: Sometimes players register on the wrong team roster in *TennisLink*. If that happens, please send an email to the ALC and give the players name, USTA #, incorrect team name, number & level, and the correct team name, number & level. We will get the player moved to the correct roster as quickly as

possible, but this change must go through the District Office. The player cannot play a match for your team until they show up on your roster in *TennisLink*. We have situations every year when a captain calls on a Friday night in a panic because one of their players registered on the wrong team and he needs them to play the match this weekend. Since the District office is closed on weekends, you and your player are out of luck. So please emphasize to your players that they should not wait until the last minute to register, and to be very careful to register on the correct team.

Player Deletions: Sometimes, due to unfortunate circumstances (injury, job transfer or alien abduction), a player may request to be deleted from a team roster. If he/she has not played a match, that player's Captain may complete a Player Deletion form and forward it by email to the appropriate local league coordinator. Player Deletion Forms are available on our website under "League Rules and Forms". We will issue a local league fee refund to players who are injured or who move away from the area and they have not yet played a match. Local league fee refund requests must be submitted before the last league match of the local league season. Virginia Tennis will issue a refund of their fee if the player is deleted before the season starts.

3. PLAYER ELIGIBILITY

Every player on your team must meet two eligibility criteria: USTA membership and NTRP rating. How can you check all this? *TennisLink* will help you check these things.

USTA Membership: At the start of the season, all your players must have USTA memberships that extend at least through the end of the league season, including Sectional Championships! If you have players whose memberships have expired, or will expire before the end of the season, *TennisLink* will tell you so when you or they try to join a team. Until your player's membership expiration date is valid, you will not be able to add him to your roster, and he will not be able to play for your team. Players may join or renew their membership online and then immediately proceed with team registration (this is the number 1, best idea!). They may also call 1-800-990-USTA and renew their membership by credit card. Do not wait until the last minute to add someone to your team, and do not play him in a match unless his name appears on your team roster.

There is also the option to renew memberships by U.S. postal mail. This is NOT a good idea. This takes a long time and can cause you problems down the road. Every season there is a captain who tries to add a player to his roster between the time the player mails it, and NY receives and processes it. They argue that once the player has paid his money, he is eligible. Not so. Their membership information must be updated in the USTA database in order for the player to be added to a roster in *TennisLink*!

NTRP Ratings: In the Mid Atlantic Section, final year-end computer ratings are published once a year, typically at the end of November. If you disagree with your computer rating, you will have an opportunity to appeal...unless of course you played in a District, Sectional or National Championship match. Then you are considered a Championship Benchmark Player and your rating may not be appealed the first year after publishing. Details of the process are available on the Mid Atlantic website. If you appeal, DO NOT register for a team until your final rating has been confirmed.

There is some good reading information about ratings on the USTA National website and the Mid Atlantic website. We have links to both on our website.

So, what is a valid rating for League Play? Basically, computer ratings are valid for a three-year period (two years for players 60 and over) or until another computer rating is generated. If you don't have a valid computer rating, don't be alarmed. You can still play league tennis. Read on...

4. SELF-RATINGS

NTRP, National Tennis Rating Program, is a classification program that identifies and describes levels of tennis ability. The NTRP is used to assure equitable competition in USTA League Tennis. New players, and players with expired ratings will enter the program by rating themselves using the NTRP General and Specific Characteristics of Various Playing Levels. For a description of the general characteristics of levels of play and an experienced player rating matrix, check our website under NTRP Ratings.

If you're not sure what level you should be playing, you might want to ask a tennis teaching pro to hit with you to help you determine your NTRP level. Or, if you play with someone who's already in the league and you're beating the stew out of them, you probably want to rate yourself higher than the level they

play. Of course, if they are the ones giving you the lesson, you should probably rate yourself at a lower level.

Players should self-rate when they register for a team. When a player enters his or her name on a roster, the computer checks for a valid rating, and if it doesn't find one the player will be taken directly to the self-rating program. **Players should complete their own self-rating questionnaire.** The questionnaire will ask many specific questions that the captain probably won't be able to answer. After the player has self-rated, the player can place himself on a team roster. If you self-rate and don't get the ratings you think you should, you should auto appeal right there on the spot. Self-ratings can be automatically appealed UP to a higher level. Self rating can only be requested to be appealed DOWN to a lower level during the self-rate process, or when attempting to register for a team with a lower NTRP rating than their assigned self-rate.

Note about self-rating: Once the player starts the process they must finish. You can't use the "back" button to back all the way out of the questionnaire, or to change answers. So once you get started, go all the way through to the end.

5. THE CAPTAINS' MEETING OR...NOT?

Generally, there will be a Captains' meeting in late February or early March prior to the start of the Adult Division leagues. Sometimes we find it necessary to have an additional captain's meeting during the year, but almost always the most important meeting of the year will be the one that's held in Feb. or March. This is when we announce new league policies and discuss rule changes, rule clarifications, and sticky situations. So you won't want to miss it!

6. MATCH SCHEDULING

In the Virginia District, ALC's do the match scheduling. The ALC's must submit the match schedule to the District office 2 weeks prior to the start of the season. That's why we set the team registration deadline approximately one month before the season starts. If your level is very large, we will divide it into flights. The number of matches you have depends on the number of available weeks in the season, and the number of teams in your flight or level. As mentioned before, there's a chart that will give you an idea of the number of matches your team can expect to have according to the number of teams at your level. The chart is a guideline, and we do allow team captains to vote on season formats in many cases. The chart is printed in Appendix B, and also available online.

The ALC's use a scheduling grid, which assigns a number to each team and gives every team an even number of home and away matches. The grid is pretty simple but scheduling gets very complicated when clubs have multiple teams and when clubs teams request "Blackout Dates".

Blackout Dates: We do our best to honor "blackout dates", or dates that a team's home courts are not available. However, most teams in Richmond play at clubs with multiple teams so it is not always possible to honor all blackout date requests. Each time one team is moved from a home to an away slot, it effects the overall balance of home vs. away matches for all of the other teams. For example, 3.5 team ACAC-Jones has advised that they are scheduled for a home match on May 5 vs MAC-Smith, and their home courts will not be available. Your average captain would assume that the league coordinator can simply switch MAC-Smith to the home team for that match. What the captain doesn't know is that MAC also has two 4.0 matches, a 4.5 match and two 3.0 matches scheduled the same day. Robious only allows 5 matches per day to be scheduled at their club so a simple switch of home and away teams is not possible in this case.

Clubs with Multiple Teams: As mentioned above, most tennis clubs and facilities have multiple teams participating in USTA leagues. Since these clubs must leave courts open for non-league play, they typically limit the number of league matches they can handle per day. This means that their club teams will probably have more Away matches than Home matches. Smaller clubs with fewer teams and fewer issued with court availability will often have more Home matches than Away matches.

Match Times: In order to make sure that courts aren't overbooked, clubs and facilities must set the match times. Once home match times are set, the home Team Captains are responsible for getting their home match times to all of the other team captains in their flight or level. Use common sense and courtesy when notifying other captains of your home match times. Most captains send one email to all other captains in their level (immediately before the season start) listing all home match times. This is the

preferred method of informing other captains of match times. If you prefer to deal with each match time individually, you should let the other captains know well in advance. Do not send a captain an email on Wed. giving him your Sunday match time. Players have to hire babysitters, re-arrange work schedules, etc., etc. so 4 days advance notice is not enough.

Match Schedules: The match schedule will be published in *TennisLink* approximately one week before the first match. *TennisLink* will list the match dates, but the match times in *TennisLink* are simply default match times set by the system. We will also post the master schedule for each level on our website. The schedules we post on our site are the schedule grids mentioned above. If you see a difference between the match schedule in *TennisLink* and the match schedule grid posted on our website, please let us know. The schedule grid is what we submit to the District office for them to load into *TennisLink*. So most of the time if there is a discrepancy, the grid will be correct.

Match Rescheduling: All teams are expected to follow the master schedule, and it is every Team Captain's responsibility to make sure he/she can field a full team for each match. If something out of the ordinary comes up, you may follow league rules and ask the opposing captain to re-schedule a match. However, keep in mind that the other captain is not obligated to honor your request, and the other team captain probably won't honor your request if he/she doesn't get plenty of notice.

Exception: You may request the rescheduling of a match if there is a conflict with player(s) involved in USTA League Championship play. Since we have league deadlines that must be met and most teams will not have players involved in Championships, it's not possible to schedule around all of them. See your local league rules regarding league Championship accommodations.

WHAT ABOUT INCLEMENT WEATHER? The only other reason a match may be rescheduled would be due to inclement weather. That means lightning or rain. Please check your Richmond League Regulations rules and instructions on how to re-schedule matches due to inclement weather.

The following list of pointers can be used in the event that bad weather prevents you from playing your matches according to the schedule.

- When a match is rained out, the captains of the teams should immediately begin discussing rescheduling, using Richmond local league regulations as guiding procedures. Mid Atlantic rules allow only 7 days to get the match played. Need we say more?
- Matches can be made up individually or as a whole team. Many teams find it nearly impossible to reschedule matches as a whole team. So if you really want to get your matches played as quickly as possible, this is often your best bet. You can exchange line-ups through the league coordinators.
- If you, the captain, are handling the rescheduling and you want to keep your line-up a secret from your opponent, negotiate the rescheduling of matches with the opposing captain in terms of positions, not names of players. (Ex: "My #2 and #3 doubles and #1 singles are available tomorrow. Is there an afternoon next week when your #1 doubles and #2 singles can play?")

What happens if a match gets started and it begins to rain in the middle of the match? The match will have to be completed according to the local league inclement weather rules. The captains and players should do the following:

- Write down all scores for all matches at exactly the point where play stopped. Example: #1 doubles stopped with my team ahead 5-2 in the first set. My player Cathy R. was serving at 0-30 when play stopped.
- Make sure your players get contact information for their opponents. They need to contact each other to schedule a time to finish the match using the inclement weather make-up match rules.

7. MATCH PLAY & SCORING FORMAT

The format for all matches will be the best two out of three tie-break sets, with a set tie-break being played at 6-all. In the event you split sets, a 10-point match tiebreak must be played in lieu of a third set. You will have a two-minute break between the end of the second set, and the beginning of the 10-point match tiebreak. (See Appendix A for tiebreak instructions) During the two-minute break...you can relax, talk big time strategy with your partner, or even take a quick trip to the bathroom, but...NO coaching is allowed. That means no words of wisdom from your tennis pro or teammates!

A team wins the match when it wins at least three of the five individual matches played in the Adult Division Leagues or two of three individual matches for levels 2.0, 2.5, 5.0, and Senior, Super Senior, Mixed Doubles, Combo Doubles, and Singles League.

TennisLink is pretty smart, so you don't have to worry about trying to keep track of the standings. From the match results you enter, *TennisLink* will maintain the accurate team standings according to team points won, individual matches won, fewest sets lost, and fewest games lost. So go online and check it out. <http://tennislink.usta.com/leagues/>

8. GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR THE LEAGUE SEASON

League Dates: All important dates for each league season are posted on our website under each specific league page. Pay attention to any deadlines for adding to rosters, playoff dates, as well as dates for post-season championships.

Number of Matches: The number of matches you have is determined by how many teams are at your level. Smaller flights may have a double or even triple round robin. Larger flights will play each opponent only once.

When You are the Home Team: Make sure that you have given the away team captain the match time well in advance. Also let the other captain know if your club/facility has a dress code, and if they have water and towels available for visiting players. The home team also provides the tennis balls. Some captains buy balls for the entire season and ask the team members to reimburse him/her. Other captains have all players bring an unopened can of balls to every home match. For doubles team, both players should bring a can and decide who opens. This method also makes sure you have extra cans of balls in case someone forgets.

You never know what will happen with Richmond weather in the early spring. If there is some question about the weather, go to the courts early and make sure they are playable. If it looks like the weather is going to be iffy on match day, you may want to have a prearranged time to contact the visiting captain to confirm the court situation. If there is more than a 50% chance of rain, many captains work together and reserve indoor courts on match day. That way the match gets played rain or shine and they don't have to deal with finding courts for a make-up match. If indoor courts are used, please split the guest fees!

When You are the Away Team: Get in touch with the home captain and confirm the match time if you haven't heard from her. Get directions to the courts if you don't have them. Most clubs have joined the electronic age and have websites with maps and directions to their clubs. The Richmond Tennis Association (RTA) website (www.richmondtennis.org) has a Court Locator. If you have any questions contact your opponent. They should be able to provide you with all the details.

Both Captains: Contact your players and ask them to get to the courts up to 30 minutes early. This gives you extra travelling time for traffic snarls, wrong turns, forgotten racquets, nervous bladders, etc. If you know that your player Joe is something of a flake, tell him the starting time is 45 minutes earlier than it really is. Or talk to his wife. Better yet, offer him a ride.

Remember, matches are to begin at the scheduled time. Most facilities set aside 2-hour time slots for USTA league matches, but some use 90-minute slots. Remind your players to "move it along" and socialize after the match is over.

Once you take the court, you will have ten minutes to warm-up and then you should begin play. Of course, once you have taken the court, if your opponent(s) aren't there within fifteen minutes...it's a default. You win, but you don't get to play. So please be on time. Your captain will appreciate it, your teammates will appreciate it, and even the teams that are scheduled to play after you, will appreciate it!

Chart for Match Times, Line-up Exchanges, & Default Times

Line-ups should be swapped prior to the scheduled match time. We recommend that captains exchange their line-up with the opposing captain 15 minutes before the scheduled match time. That will give your players time to get to their assigned courts without causing any delay. Note...you are exchanging line-ups, not giving your line-up to the opposing team for them to study!

Examples of matches beginning on the hour and on the half-hour:

Match Begins	Swap Line-Ups*	10-Minute Warm-Up Begins	Begin Play	Default Time
9:00 am	8:45 am	9:00 am	9:10 am	9:15 am
1:30 pm	1:15 pm	1:30 pm	1:40 pm	1:45 pm

9. LINE-UPS & SCORECARDS

There are several things to keep in mind when you do your line-up...

- You are not required to field your teams in order of strength. That means that a 3.5 player and her 3.0 partner do not have to play at a lower spot than a partnership of two 3.5 players. The stronger of your two singles players does not have to play in the #1 spot.
- Playing a stronger team at a lower spot IS NOT CHEATING. It is strategy. It doesn't always work, but it is perfectly acceptable. Many captains web-scout their opponents before they play and may believe that playing out of order is the perfect defense. Sometimes it is. Sometimes it isn't.
- Your line-up should be complete, written down and exchanged 15 minutes before your scheduled match time. New captains, you are EXCHANGING scorecards. You are not handing your line-up to the other captain so he can study it and figure his line-up accordingly.
- Please be sure you are familiar with the rules regarding substitutions. There are two special situations in which you may legally substitute a player.
 1. If a player is injured or becomes ill in the warm up but hasn't started the match, you may substitute for the injured player. This is a USTA National Rule. (Rule 3.01H)
 2. If the captains exchange line-ups for a re-scheduled match, they can substitute players as long as the match hasn't started. Example: A Saturday match is rained out and the #1 singles players have decided to play their match on Tuesday. On Tuesday morning, one of the player's work schedules gets changed so she can't play on Tuesday. It's perfectly OK for her team captain to sub someone else in to play at the agreed upon date and time.

10. SCORECARDS

A scorecard starts as a paper document. You print a blank scorecard for each match right from *TennisLink*. (See our website under "Captains Information" for instructions on how to print match scorecards). You will see that each blank scorecard includes a list of eligible players for both teams. If your opponent includes a name in their line-up that does not appear on that list, ask some questions before you start the match.

Scorecards should be completed and exchanged before the match starts. At the end of a match, it's a good idea to review scores with the opposing captains so any discrepancies can be resolved before everyone leaves the match. Captains must enter the match results directly onto *TennisLink* within 72 hours of the completion of the match. Either captain may do the initial score entry. Once entered, the other captain must confirm within 48 hours. It's a very captain-friendly program, as you will see the first time you try it. (See our website under "Captains Information" for instructions on how to enter scores in *TennisLink*). The computer record becomes the official scorecard and the paper copy may be tossed in a drawer.

11. PLAYOFFS

Sometimes when levels have been divided into flights, there is the need for local league playoffs. At the end of their scheduled matches, the top teams in each flight will need to participate in local league playoffs.

- Advantages: It gives a few of the teams (maybe yours) an extra match or two. This is good. It gives a team that loses its first few matches a reason to fight on, since finishing the season in the top of your bracket may give you a chance to win it all in the playoffs.
- Disadvantages: You may be the team that ends the season in first place and then gets ambushed by one of the playoff teams.

Note: Local league playoffs are part of the local league season. In your local league playoffs you may use players who have played only once, or even not played at all, as long as they are valid members of your team, and were added to your roster before they play a match.

12. STATE/DISTRICT, SECTIONAL, REGIONAL, AND NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS

Districts: When the tennis ball fuzz has settled and all local league competition is over, the winners from the Local League playoffs advance to District competition. Sometimes it's referred to as State, but more commonly it's known as Districts. You will play against the winners at your level from the other teams across the Virginia District. Remember that to be eligible to play at the District tournament, players must have played at least 2 matches during the local league season, which includes playoffs. (See our website on the Captains Information Page for a chart with specific requirements.) There is a tournament entry fee for each team.

Sectionals: If you win at the District level you advance to Sectional Competition. That's where each of the four Districts (VA, MD, WV, Washington DC) send championship teams at each level to see who's the best in the Mid Atlantic Section! USTA Virginia Tennis will pay your team's entry fee.

Nationals: If you win Sectionals, some leagues advance to Regional while others advance to National Championships. At Nationals there are champions from each of the 17 USTA sections that will play for the BIG one! Starting in 2009, each player will be charged a \$50 tournament entry fee to Nationals. However, USTA Virginia will give your team \$500.00 to assist with travel expenses. Starting in 2009, Mid Atlantic will also chip in a travel stipend. The Mid Atlantic stipend will be determined by the size of your team.

Wildcards: Sometimes wildcards are used to round out the number of teams that advance to post season play. When the USTA-Virginia Tennis calls and offers Richmond a wildcard, teams will be chosen by the following procedures.

- If all first place teams are progressing to the state tournament, then the second place teams from the same championship year will be eligible for the wildcard. The second place team with the best win/loss record will be awarded the slot. If this team decides to pass on the wildcard then it will be offered to the other second place team. If both second place teams decide to pass, it will be offered to the best third place team, and so on.
- If a playoff occurred to determine which team would progress to the state tournament, the runner up will be offered the wildcard.

Note: Teams accepting a wildcard to the District Tournament will be responsible for paying their own tournament entry fee.

13. RULES

There are four layers of rules that govern USTA Richmond League Tennis matches:

USTA League Tennis National Regulations
Mid Atlantic Sectional Tennis Regulations
Virginia Tennis Regulations
And finally...Richmond League Regulations

You can find a copy of each of these on our website on the rules page. Some of it is pretty dry reading, with some cumbersome language. Most of you will skim through it and put it aside, until you or your team is involved in some thorny issue. Keep in mind that the rules work from the top down, so a Richmond local league rule can't override a District rule, and a District rule can't override a Sectional Rule, and so on.

A LITTLE TIP: Study the Richmond League Rules & Procedures. THESE ARE IMPORTANT! These are additional rules applicable only to Richmond. Make copies and give them to each of your players. This is better than having a player who does not know the rules interrupt a match in which you are playing in the zone, out of your mind and unbeatable. This is also better than being the big ignoramus when the other captain throws a rule at you and you haven't a clue.

Friend At Court (FAC) is a very nifty little publication that includes lots of very valuable information, and is written in a manner that makes it very enjoyable reading. Players can purchase this from National USTA by calling toll free, 1-888-832-8291. The cost is around \$5.00 plus shipping. USTA members

receive a 10% discount. You may also view and print a PDF version. The link to the PDF version is on our website on the League Rules page. The FAC includes:

1) The Rules of Tennis.

2) "Knotty Problems"...56 real life situations and what to do.

Example: Just as you are serving, a bird crashes into your opponent's head, causing her to scream and throw her racquet which hits your partner, who inadvertently calls "Out" instead of "Ouch", causing the receiver to let your incredible ace go by.

3) "The Code..." a summary of procedures and unwritten rules which custom and tradition dictate all players should follow."

USTA National Regulation Q&A is another handy document that can answer a lot of questions you may have about league rules. You'll find a link to the document on our league website League Rules page.

Check them out...and have your players check them out too! We promise it will help you have a more pleasant experience playing league tennis if you and your players know the rules!

14. GRIEVANCES

A grievance is a complaint against another player or team. There are specific guidelines that must be followed when a captain files a grievance. These directions are described in more detail in the USTA League Tennis National Regulations, Section 2.00. Grievances are handled by the Local Grievance Committee, not by local league coordinators.

Grievances generally revolve around sportsmanship issues or a rule dispute. Poor sportsmanship is inexcusable and can turn an enjoyable match into a heated and extremely unpleasant encounter. Because the eyewitness reports that come to the Grievance Committee could be from two different planets, they can be difficult to adjudicate. "The other captain put her fingers near my throat and imitated choking me!" "He called me a #%\$&(@."

When sportsmanship is a problem, the match should be played out whenever possible, and the grievance filed afterward. When the Grievance Committee investigates a complaint of poor sportsmanship, it frequently turns out that there was unpleasantness on both ends of the court. The Committee does not care who started it. It is no justification to have received the first insult. The best advice, very difficult to follow, is to ignore the bad behavior, play the match, and then file the grievance. Captains, remember that you are responsible for the behavior of your players. If you know your player has a short fuse and a big mouth, don't play him. His behavior reflects on you and your team.

Disputes about rules are easy to settle before they become grievance issues. Just know your rules. Keep your League Rules and a copy of *Friend at Court* in your tennis bag. A word of advice: if your opponent breaks a rule, and you continue to play, don't think you can file a grievance later (after you have lost) and have the match overturned. Stop and settle the dispute. If you can't settle it, stop the match. Do not be the captain who calls the ALC on Monday and moans "We all knew the ball was going long, but their player caught it before it bounced. I insisted that he had broken the rules, but they made us keep playing and we lost the match." "She wouldn't let me go to the bathroom and so I lost the match."

We have an official Richmond Grievance Committee that handles grievances and appeals. The committee members are approved by the District and Sectional Leagues Administrators each calendar year.

15. TEAM DEFAULT

A Team Default occurs when a team doesn't play enough individual matches to give their team a chance to win. That means you must play at least 3 individual matches for Adult Division leagues and at least 2 individual matches for the doubles only Division leagues. PLEASE – PLEASE – PLEASE ...do everything you can to keep from defaulting. A full team default affects all teams in your level. When a team defaults an entire team match, we have to make sure that all teams in contention have actually played that team so that no one benefits from the default. Teams in contention are teams that have a mathematical chance of advancing to post season. If all teams in contention have not played the defaulting team, we must have the District office DQ the team from the overall standings. If that happens, any remaining matches should be played as scheduled. Scores should be entered for all matches played. While the scores will not count for team standings, they will count for NTRP ratings and for qualifying players for advancement.

16. SELF-RATE NTRP COMPLAINTS

Self-Rate NTRP Grievances may be filed by Captains or League Coordinators. Mid Atlantic has established a committee that will review the complaints and render decisions. These complaints allow action to be taken against **self-rated players** who enter the program clearly below their actual skill level. There are specific procedures that you must follow, and they're available on our website under "Grievances" and on the USTA Mid Atlantic website. Otherwise, you should rely on the Dynamic National Tennis Rating Program to take care of those players you are sure, well pretty sure, are out of level. That's right, National USTA has developed the Dynamic National Tennis Rating Program, with its Three Strikes component, to monitor the playing level of self-rated players.

17. DYNAMIC DISQUALIFICATIONS (the Three Strike rule)

Starting in 2009 all players **except "C" (computer rated) or "B" (benchmark)** are subject to the Three Strike rule. Dynamic NTRP ratings will be run by the computer to determine if any players are "clearly above level" using the current Disqualification Procedure Guidelines. Players will be disqualified if they achieve the currently established "clearly above level" status three times based on all matches reported in the national database. Remember, you must reach this disqualification level three times during the championship league year in order to be disqualified. So rest easy, big brother is watching!

For a chart showing who can be DQ'd, visit our website on the NTRP ratings page.

18. USING THE WEB & EMAIL

Richmond leagues have rocketed into the computer age. You captains provide much of the information by entering your rosters online and by entering matches throughout the season. By entering the information directly, it gets to the web quickly and accurately.

What is web scouting? If you are captain of a seriously competitive team, you can do a lot of scouting on *TennisLink* from the comfort of your den. Visit our website and click on the link to *TennisLink* right from the home page! Or save *TennisLink* in your internet favorites and jump right to league standings. <http://tennislink.usta.com/leagues/>. You will find that there are links all over the place and you can jump from team to roster to player to match to opponent and back, just by moving your cursor around until that little hand appears. You can find a player's history back to 2002. You can look at old team rosters as well as current rosters. When you have a list of match dates showing, click on a date to see the whole line-up with scores. Click on a team name and you will see their record to date, their schedule, and their roster, with ratings and expiration dates for all their players.

You don't have to be an army general plotting battle strategy to click around our web site. Take a look at how your friends on other teams are doing and cheer them on. Use the e-mail addresses of other captains to set up fun matches or get the recipe for that incredible artichoke dip that your opponents brought to your last match.

Speaking of e-mail, that is the easiest and fastest way to get in touch with the ALC's, so get to your keyboard and let us hear from you. Please be sure you identify yourself by team name, level and gender, so we can respond quickly to your questions and comments. If you ask us a question and we reply that we need more info, please include a copy of your initial e-mail when you respond. We try to respond to all emails within 2 days. If you send an email on the weekend, it may take longer since we don't work 24/7!

19. COURTESY, SPORTSMANSHIP AND OTHER STUFF

We know you are all adults, but please remember to use common sense and courtesy in your dealings with other captains and in your behavior on the court. Each league participant is expected to know, and is bound by, these Local League Rules, the USTA League Tennis Regulations, the USTA Mid-Atlantic Section League Rules, the USTA Virginia District League Rules, the Rules of Tennis, and The Code: The Players' Guide for Unofficial Matches (printed in Friend at Court, published annually by USTA). ALC's and Grievance Committee members may be asked to observe matches if too many complaints/grievances are filed against particular teams, captains or players.

We have listed below some situations that should be avoided and have led to heated disputes in the past. (Believe it or not they happen every year!)

- Do not ask another captain to re-schedule a match and then argue with them if they answer no. They are not obligated to accommodate you, and you really shouldn't be re-scheduling matches anyway.
- Do not wait until match time to check playability of your home courts after it has rained. For example, if it rains all Friday night and you have a match scheduled at 9AM Saturday morning, don't show up at the courts at 8:45AM to see if they are playable. Give the other team at least an hour notice if the weather appears OK but the courts are not playable due to last night's rain. That gives all players time to cancel babysitters, go on to work, go to class, get started early on their weekend trip, etc.
- Do not argue with the home captain over court surfaces and indoor vs. outdoor courts. Many clubs have courts with different surfaces and they may be used in any combination for league matches.
- Be cooperative when a captain is trying to make contingency plans when rain is forecasted. It rains a lot in Richmond in the springtime, and it is in everyone's best interest to get matches played on match day. If there's a 90% chance of rain and the opposing captain reserves 5 indoor courts at match time, why not go ahead and play?
- Do not wait until the last minute to communicate your home match times to visiting team captains. You should work with your tennis club/facility to set home match times as soon as you get your schedule. It's best to send all opposing captains your home match times out as soon as they are set.
- Do not get into heated arguments with captains who follow the league rules. (Yes, this happens every year!) That age old excuse of "We just want to play tennis" to try to persuade the other captain to let you get by with breaking a rule is just that. An excuse.

That's it. Go play. Go win. Go enjoy yourself with USTA League Tennis.

GLOSSARY OF FREQUENTLY USED USTA & GENERAL TENNIS TERMS

ALC - Area League Coordinator (aka Local League Coordinator)

BENCHMARK RATED PLAYER – A player, who advanced to championship or was disqualified, by who other players' NTRP ratings are calculated.

BENCHMARK RATING – A computer rating determined by the USTA NTRP Computer Rating System for a player using a combination of their dynamic rating and their rating derived at championships.

CHAMPIONSHIP LEVEL – Any USTA League Tennis Program competition held beyond local league competition or playoffs.

COMPATIBLE – A match where the outcome is predictable, with the higher rated player winning routinely.

COMPETITIVE – A match where the outcome is unpredictable.

COMPUTER RATING – A rating generated by the USTA NTRP Computer Rating System based on two or more matches.

DEFAULT – When a player fails to appear on time or is removed by a tournament official for misconduct.

DISQUALIFICATION – Action taken to remove from a team, a player deemed ineligible to participate.

DIVISION – Any one of the National league programs offered and administered by the USTA (USTA League Tennis – Adult, Senior, Mixed Doubles, Super Senior) and any other USTA area, State/District, Section sanctioned program identified as part of TennisLink and entered as part of the USTA NTRP Computer Rating System.

DYNAMIC RATING – A rating associated with a player that has the potential to change with every match played by the player.

ELIGIBILITY – Qualifications to play.

FLIGHT – A group of teams competing at a specified NTRP level within a local league or Championship competition where every team in that group plays every other team to declare a winner. When flights are established, a playoff must be held at Championship level to determine a champion in that NTRP level. Below championship level, the playoff may be held to determine a champion in that NTRP level.

FOOT FAULT – A fault called against the server for stepping on the baseline or into the court with either foot during delivery of the service.

FORFEIT – The results of a default or disqualification.

GRIEVANCE – Written formal complaint regarding an alleged violation of a regulation or procedure.

INDIVIDUAL MATCH -Any singles or doubles match played as part of a team match.

LEAGUE COORDINATOR – Person appointed or hired to implement and administer the Program.

LEAGUE PROGRESSION – Local league team winners have the opportunity to advance through state, sectional and national championships competition.

NO-AD – A system of scoring a game in which the first player to win four points wins the game. If the score reaches 40-40 (or 3-all), the next point decides the game.

NTRP- National Tennis Rating Program, is a classification program that identifies and describes levels of tennis ability.

TIEBREAK GAME (“tie-breaker”) – A system used to decide a set when the score is 6-all.

Appendix A: What is a Tiebreak?

For Richmond league purposes, there are 2 types of tiebreaks:

1. The **set tiebreak** determines the winner of a set which has reached the set score of 6-6. The winner is the first team to get to 7 points with a 2-point spread (i.e. the tie-break is not over at 7-6.) This is also called a 12-point tiebreak.
2. The **match tiebreak** determines the winner of the match in which one team has won the first set and the other team has won the second set. The winner of the match is the first team to get 10 points with a 2-point spread (i.e. the tie-break is not over at 10-9.) This is also call a Super Tie-break.

Since match tiebreaks are used at the district, sectional and national levels of play in USTA League Tennis, Richmond has chosen the same format (two out of three tie-break sets, with a 10 point match tie-break being played in lieu of a third set) for all Richmond league matches.

Richmond uses the Coman tiebreak for both set and match tiebreaks.

Coman (Balboa) Tie Break Procedures:

Still first to seven, win by two or first to ten, win by two. The first server serves one point from the deuce court. Immediately change ends of the court and the second server serves two points, one from add, followed by one from deuce. The next server serves two points - add followed by deuce. Change ends of the court after these four points are played and every four points thereafter until one player or doubles team reaches seven points and wins by two.

Advantages of the Coman Balboa tiebreak as opposed to a regular tiebreak:

- No player or team is exposed to adverse sun or windy conditions for more than four points in a row.
- Switching ends does not occur in the middle of a player serving his/her two points (ad followed by deuce)
- In doubles, every player always serves on the same side of the net he/she served on during the set.

Note: Remember when playing a tiebreak, if the score totals an off number, serve to the ad court. Serve to the deuce court when the score totals an even number.

For instructions on how to play a tiebreak, refer to the information below *or you can read about it under the USTA Rules of Tennis [Score in a Set] if you have a copy.*

Singles

- i. A player who first wins seven points shall win the game and the set provided he leads by a margin of two points. If the score reaches six points all the game shall be extended until this margin has been achieved. Numerical scoring shall be used throughout the tiebreak game.
- ii. The player whose turn it is to serve shall be the Server for the first point. His opponent shall be the Server for the second and third points and thereafter each player shall serve alternately for two consecutive points until the winner of the game and set has been decided.
- iii. From the first point, each service shall be delivered alternately from the right and left Courts, beginning from the right Court. If service from a wrong half of the Court occurs and is undetected, all play resulting from such wrong service or services shall stand, but the inaccuracy of station shall be corrected immediately it is discovered.
- iv. Players shall change ends after every six points and at the conclusion of the tiebreak game.

Doubles

In doubles, the procedure for singles shall apply. The player whose turn it is to serve shall be the Server for the first point. Thereafter each player shall serve in rotation for two points, in the same order previously in that set, until the winners of the game and set have been decided. Rotation of Service The player (or pair in the case of doubles) whose turn it was to serve first in the tiebreak game shall receive service in the first game of the following set. [Excerpt from USTA Rules of Tennis]