

Line Calls

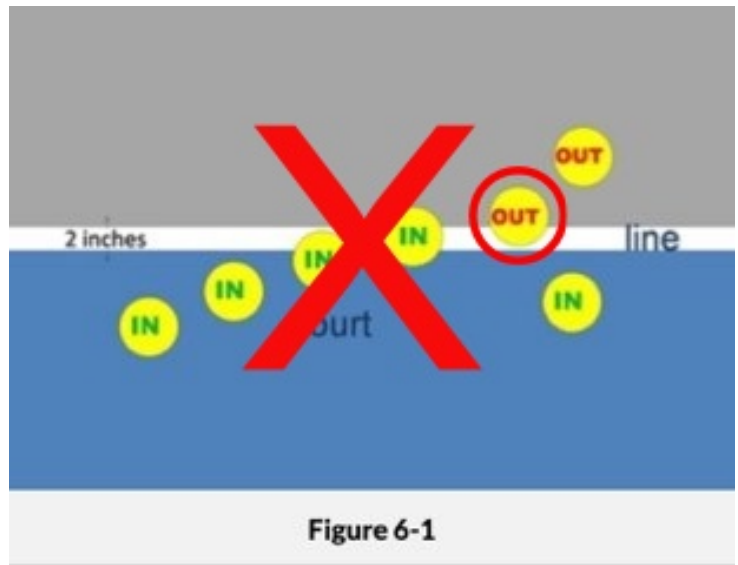
An area of the 2020 Rulebook revisions that is receiving a lot of attention is the changes in Section 6 on **Line Call Rules**. And rightly so since disagreements over Line Calls are perhaps the greatest source of conflict in recreational play.

Rule 6.C. now simply states, "**A ball contacting the playing surface completely outside the court is `out`.**" In 2019, this rule was worded, "A ball contacting the playing surface outside of the baseline or sideline, even though the edge of the ball overlaps the line, is considered out of bounds (see Figure 6-1)."

Figure 6-1 has been removed since it was inaccurate, showing a 5" ball over a 2" line and the overlapping "Out" ball circled in red was misleading.

The wording of 6.C. and Figure 6-1 led to debates about the amount of overlap allowable, discussions of the myth of the incompressibility of a pickleball, and deliberations about contact area.

What was lost in these conversations was the Code of Ethics for Line Calling in Rule 6.D., which states, "**The player, when assigned line calling responsibilities, must strive for accuracy and operate under the principle that all questionable calls**



must be resolved in the favor of the opponent." There was a little too much striving and too little favoring. Players were assuming the position of Referees or Line Judges, who "...make



impartial calls with all players' interests in mind..." rather than giving the benefit of the doubt as stated in Rule 6.D.3: "**The opponent gets the benefit of the doubt on line calls made. Any ball that cannot be called "out" will be considered "in".**"

Take a look at the two photos. The court area is blue and the out of bounds green. You make the call: "in" or "out".

Some would call the ball on the left "out" and some would call it "in" while everyone can agree that the ball on the right is "out". These two photos, one obviously "out" and the other debatably "in", are of the same ball viewed from different perspectives! The problem with calling the ball viewed from the perspective in the left-hand photo "out" is that you cannot see the contact area. You must guess or assume the size and location of the contact area. As USAPA Director of Officiating Mark Peifer has said: ***"If someone has to judge (because they can't actually see) the point of contact; they are guessing or assuming they know where the point of contact is in relation to the line."***

"Guessing or Assuming = Uncertainty = Doubt".

Reinforcing the element of "Doubt" is the factor of time. Top speed for a pickleball is about 40 mph, but they slow down rapidly, so let's assume a ball hits a line at 25 mph. That is 37 feet per second or 440 inches per second. The 3" ball must travel 5" to cross a 2" line, which takes about one one-hundredth of a second! The photos above are of a ball at rest. Now consider making that judgment in 1/100th of a second. Not so sure now, are you?

Another factor that can create doubt is a delayed call. Rule 6.D.8. says, ***"All "let" or "out" calls must be made "promptly"; otherwise the ball is presumed to be in play."*** A delayed call demonstrates doubt. If you can't call the ball definitively and promptly (before it is hit by the opponent or becomes dead) "out", it is "in. "Any time a player says "I think it was out", they have doubt and should play the ball as "in".

"I Think..." = "IN".

Here's the bottom line: **If you can't see space between the ball and the line and can't promptly make a clear and definitive call, play it "in", don't call it "out".**