

# Tables Tennis Has Changed

Almost everyone who plays table tennis in the Villages has the same story. They played when they were younger but then didn't play for 30–40 years until moving to the Villages.

**ALERT!** the game has changed.

## the paddles have changed

Back in the day paddles had the same rubber in the same color on both sides. By the 1980's some players were using very different rubber on each side, sometimes extremely different, one side with extreme spin and the other with no spin. And a few players like Danny Seemiller of the USA only used one side of the paddle for all shots but had different rubber on each side. When they served the ball they would "twiddle" the paddle in their hand, spinning the racket so their opponent could not tell which rubber surface hit the ball. In 1986 the International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF) put an end to that changing the rules to require one side be red and the other side black.

## the balls have changed

The first big change came in 2000 after the summer Olympic Games. The International Table Tennis Federation changed the size of the ball from 38 mm to 40 mm. They decided that the game had gotten too fast and they wanted to slow it down. The 40 mm ball is slower, spins less and most importantly made it easier to watch the game on television.

The second big change was the material used to make the balls. Effective July 1, 2014 only balls made from plastic were legal for ITTF tournament play. These are commonly referred to as "poly" balls. Celluloid, the material of choice for decades, is no longer legal at the highest levels of the game. Celluloid is flammable, and in its raw form it is a very severe health hazard. It is banned in many countries. The ITTF felt that the supply of raw celluloid for table tennis balls could become a problem. Better to change the balls now than face shortages later.

*Side Note: With the change to "poly" balls the ITTF slipped in another change in the size of the ball. The old specification was 39.5 mm to 40.5 mm in diameter. Typically celluloid balls came in at 39.6-39.7 mm. The new specification is 40.0 mm to 40.6 mm. They typically run about 40.2 mm. That will slow the balls down even more.*

## the rules have changed

We used to play to 21 points with each player serving five times in a row before the other player served. In 2001 they switched to games to 11 points with each player serving only twice in a row before switching.