

Executive Summary of Changes

2024 → 2026 Foam

What changed? (high level)

- Foam match flow is now time-boxed at the set level.** In 2024, foam sets were not time-restricted. In 2026, every set is capped at up to 3 minutes, then administered into No-Blocking under defined conditions. This is a foundational gameplay change that affects pace, strategy, and scheduling.
- No-Blocking is now a defined endgame mechanic.** Players are still allowed to “block” during No-Blocking, but the block is treated like a hit. The blocker is only safe if the blocked ball is caught before it becomes dead. This creates a consistent sudden-death finish without banning the physical action of blocking.
- Clock administration is more explicit.** 2026 clarifies when the half clock stops, adds a last-minute pause rule, and adds a “0:05 rule” that forces the next set to begin immediately in No-Blocking. [OBJ] [OBJ]
- Forfeits and standings are now standardized.** 2026 introduces a “Forfeit Standings Score” on a 12-point scale for standings and tiebreakers only. Pre-match forfeits record as 12-0. In-progress forfeits preserve all completed sets and are then recorded using a tie-safe normalization method (12-B when total set wins are under 12, or recorded as-is when already 12+). If tied at the moment of forfeit, one additional set win is awarded to the non-offending team for standings to ensure a forfeit always produces a winner.
- Penalty timing is simplified and better defined.** Player Yellow moves from 5 minutes of match time to 3 minutes of active match time, with “active match time” defined as half-clock-running time only. [OBJ] [OBJ]
- Challenge rules are tightened for operational sanity.** Both versions limit challenges, but 2026 adds clearer timing, and more explicitly excludes judgment calls like hits, control, and simultaneous contact. [OBJ] [OBJ]
- 2026 introduces a governance-level improvement.** The new Interpretation Standards section makes rule hierarchy explicit and pushes officials toward objective indicators over inferred intent.

Change Log (major changes)

1) Match format and timing (Foam)

2024: Foam sets are not restricted by time. End-of-half includes foam transition into sudden death and No-Blocking (blocking suspended).

2026: Every set is up to 3 minutes (foam). Clear last-minute half-clock behaviors, including the 0:05 No-Blocking final set rule.

Why it matters: More predictable scheduling and broadcastability. Also materially changes strategy and end-of-half dynamics.

2) Half clock administration

2024: Match clock stop conditions include a “last 60 seconds after a set ends” case, and references a final set mechanism tied to cloth format.

2026: Half clock stop conditions are enumerated. Adds a standardized last-minute pause rule and immediate No-Blocking start rule at 0:05.

Why it matters: Reduces table disputes and inconsistent end-of-half administration across courts.

3) No-Blocking endgame

2024: “No blocking” primarily existed as a concept tied to late-half or end conditions, but enforcement was easier to interpret as “blocking is not allowed.”

2026: Blocking is permitted, but during No-Blocking a block is treated as a hit. The blocker is out unless a teammate catches the blocked ball before it becomes dead. Rule explicitly applies only after No-Blocking is officially declared.

4) Card accumulation and forfeiture logic

2024: Match forfeiture can be triggered by accumulating **4 yellow cards** (with red counting as 2 yellows).

2026: Explicitly: **no match forfeit due solely to yellow accumulation.** Team Red triggers match forfeit. Carryover is tracked within formats and does not change results retroactively.

Why it matters: Prevents standings being decided by paperwork-like accumulation thresholds. Keeps forfeiture tied to severe misconduct.

5) Forfeits and standings

2024: No standardized technical scoring method for forfeits in a timed-set context. Forfeit handling did not explicitly normalize match results for standings while preserving already-played sets.

2026: Adds a Forfeit Standings Score (12-point scale) for standings only.

- Pre-match forfeit: 12-0.
 - In-progress forfeit: completed sets stand. If combined set wins <12, final standings score becomes 12-B (B = forfeiting team's earned set wins). If combined set wins ≥12 and not tied, record the score as-is. If tied at forfeit, add one set win to the non-offending team for standings.
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6) Yellow card penalty duration and definition

2024: Player Yellow is **5 minutes of match time**.

2026: Player Yellow is **3 minutes of active match time**, and active time is defined as only when the half clock is running.

Why it matters: More consistent penalty math across timeouts, stoppages, and venue delays.

7) Team Yellow escalation behavior

2024: Team may only receive one Team Yellow per match. A second would be treated as a red card.

2026: Team Yellow affects set results only and **does not convert into Team Red**. Team Red is reserved for severe misconduct.

Why it matters: Cleaner separation between “competitive penalty” (set loss) and “disciplinary ejection/forfeit” (Team Red).

8) Blue card construct

2024: Blue card exists (cloth-only), with a “short-handed across current and next set” mechanic.

2026: Not present in the foam draft, replaced by clearer use of timed penalties and yellow/red structure. (Implied by removal and restructured penalties section.)

Why it matters: Fewer card types. Easier training. Less confusion for table crews and teams.

9) Challenges and dispute resolution

2024: Two challenges per match. Stop play immediately. Must be misapplication, not judgment.

2026: Two unsuccessful challenges max. Must be immediate before next restart. Explicit list of non-challengeable judgment calls (hit, control, simultaneous contact, intent unless required).

Why it matters: Less gamesmanship. Faster resolution. Clearer boundary between “rule error” and “ref judgment.”

10) Interpretation Standards (new governance layer)

2024: No comparable “hierarchy of interpretation” section.

2026: Adds Interpretation Standards, including hierarchy (safety, black letter rules, definitions control) and “objective indicators over intent,” plus least-disruptive remedy.

Why it matters: This is how you get consistency across tournaments and officiating crews without rewriting the entire book every year.