

Dealing with bad line calls

As a player, coping with a cheating opponent is about the most difficult thing that you have to deal with in tennis. It is also incredibly frustrating for a parent or coach watching your child or pupil being cheated, and finding the right things to say to them after the match is almost impossible.

*The following article is aimed mainly at **players** and **parents**, however, the advice within it is appropriate for **coaches** as well. It won't solve the problem completely, but hopefully it will give you a few ideas about how all the people involved can deal with this situation next time it happens.*

Seeing your child being hurt in some way by another child, be it through their behaviour or their cheating, is just about the worst thing that a parent has to deal with in tennis. Every parental instinct tells you to intervene in some way and try to protect your child, yet you know that as a sporting contest you have to stay out of it and suffer on the balcony!

Children also tend to have a very acute sense of right and wrong, so thinking of something to say after the match when they feel that they have been cheated is pretty tough. A parent's instinct is to take away the pain, but that's pretty much impossible.

By far the most common situation is the difficulty in playing an opponent who makes bad line calls. We've come up with some suggestions in the following areas:

General advice to players

What to do during the match

What to say after the match

What to say at a later date

General advice to players

- Under the rules you are allowed to question calls by asking if they are sure. If the opponent confirms that they are sure then the call stands. If they are not sure then the point should be replayed.
- On clay courts players can ask to examine the mark made by the ball, and this mark can be used to decide the line call. The problem with this is that the players have to reach agreement first on which is the mark that the ball made.



- If you feel that a player is consistently making bad calls against you then you can call the referee. However, don't expect the referee to do anything about what has happened, as they cannot overrule calls in the past - although they will hopefully stay to watch and monitor calls going forwards.
- The crucial point to remember in terms of beating cheats is that the matches are rarely decided by the line calls; it is decided by how the two players react to those calls. So the key to beating a cheat is not to get too wound up by them but to stay cool and calculating and stay focused on your tennis.

We asked a player who we think is pretty good at dealing with this sort of situation and they came up with the following thoughts:

'If it's just one call then I just forget it – but if they start doing it loads then I feel I have to do more than just ask if they're sure because they just keep saying yes.....If I'm sure they're cheating I go and get the referee – not because I expect the referee to do anything, but more to show them that I'm not going to just stand there and let them take points off me.....'

'You've got to put it to the back of your mind though – winning the match is the most important thing to me and I know that if I think about it loads then I'll get annoyed and I'll lose'

What to do during the match

- Unfortunately, very little! Tennis at all levels is full of this kind of problem (even on the Tour where the players have line judges). So to a certain extent dealing with this is a skill that your child has to develop if they are to progress.
- A golden rule in all stressful situations is to concentrate on the things that you can affect. In this situation you can have a positive effect on helping your child stay calm and playing well despite the calls.
- Stay calm and consistent with your normal behaviour; applaud good play and good effort and make sure that you are not projecting your stress through your body language.
- Remind yourself that it is only a tennis match and that you would much rather it be your child who was the one who had to deal with this rather than the one who was making the bad calls.

What to say after the match

- Give your child a bit of space; best not talk about what happened straight away. Check that they're ok; see if they need a drink or some food. Praise them for their effort and the way that they handled themselves during the match, but perhaps leave it at that.
- When they're ready to talk to you about it let them tell you what they think and feel. Remember here that you can't take away what happened. The most important thing to do is to sympathise with how they are feeling and agree that it was really tough.



- Praise them and let them know that you are proud of them for how they dealt with that tough situation. Make sure that as the parent you are reinforcing the good moral values that they displayed during the match. It is important that they understand that to you, how they were and the attitudes that they displayed, are more important than the result of the match.
- Now make sure you back these words up with actions. Time to talk about something else or get out of the tennis centre and to go and do something positive together. If your positive words are then followed up by a quiet and disappointed trip home then that will be picked up on.

What to say at a later date

- It is worth explaining/discussing at some point that players who cheat usually do so because they feel pressure to succeed (from somewhere), but lack the ability to achieve it. In a way they are like playground bullies – and as with playground bullies they will get some short term benefits, but long term they will not succeed.
- It is also worth discussing at a later time that dealing with this kind of situation is an unfortunate aspect of all sports. The nature of the cheating varies between sports and ages, but it is always there. So it is important to work on dealing with it and as they get better at coping, it will happen to them less – just as the playground bully moves on when a child shows strength in dealing with them!
- Look for examples of when your child has coped well with this situation since there will be lots of them. However, often it is only discussed when it ends with a bad result. Reinforce to your child after a match how well they dealt with a bad line call or a similar situation, and then refer back to that situation in the more difficult times.

Hopefully this might give some of you a few ideas on how to deal with this tough situation. We're sorry that we can't give you an assurance that it stops in the future or provide a perfect solution. However, making your way through the ups and down of competitive sport is a fantastic character shaping experience, and although it's no consolation, if you see your child upset – it will help them to be stronger in the future.

Just as one final point, *'demonstration of and insistence on strong moral values from parents'* came very high in research on athletes who won Olympic gold medals. So perhaps in the very long term there is some truth in the saying that 'cheats never prosper'!

