

With Arthur Douglas-Nugent, deputy chief umpire for the HPA



Is there a downside to all these backhands?

We’re at that stage of the season already when it is time to take stock. Certainly, at the higher level, two elements stand out: namely, the better quality of the polo, and the improved grounds on which games are being played. Very few have cut up this year as much as in the past, presumably due in part to more money being spent on ground maintenance, almost no rain, and less hooking and turning. And so games have been faster.

However, faster polo has led to queries about turning. It is not a new rule in itself, I should point out, but the heightened interpretation and awareness of it this year has led to a sharp rise in the number of backhands being played with a teammate turning to capitalise on it. Good, because it is a great play and a match winner if carried out successfully.

But is there a downside? A letter writer in the last issue of *Polo Times* argued so, suggesting most players hit backhands blindly, which heightens the risk of the play.

However, I have seen no real evidence of more ponies or players being hit. When backhands were in vogue 20 years ago, it was considered good polo to ride them down. This is now against the rules but it remains true that the best backhands are not those hit straight but those either pulled or cut, and so hit away from the chasing player. As always, it rests with the umpires to penalise dangerous plays, whilst still being strict on the player who turns the ball in front of a following player.

THE BEAUTIFUL GAME?

With the recent goal-line controversy of the football World Cup, FIFA could take advice from the HPA. Polo employs goal judges to decide whether the ball crosses the line or not. Another relevant polo rule that football would do well to adopt states that “if, in the opinion of the umpires, a player commits a dangerous or deliberate foul in the vicinity of goal in

order to save a goal, the team fouled shall be awarded a goal”. Such a rule in football would have sent Ghana into the semi-finals rather than Uruguay. Instead, Ghana had a penalty, which they had a 30 per cent chance of missing (and did) and Uruguay’s later sending-off did little except aid the team’s next opponents (Holland in the semi-finals). Madness!

MATCH PRACTICE

I have had a query about the rule covering stick and balling on the ground before and during a match. As far as I am aware there

of minutes to stick and ball to get used to a pony he may never have ridden before. But, this, of course, should fall within the 15 minutes allowed for a substitution (but which is so seldom achieved).

RIDE ON, NOT OFF

The whistle went in a high-goal match recently which left those watching even more puzzled than usual as to why. It turned out that the umpire had penalised a player for riding off an opponent in the safety zone over the boards. There is no such rule in the book, though with so

I’m not aware of a restriction on stick-and-balling, but at games it should be done towards the outside of the field

is no official restriction, except as possibly within the bylaws of a club to restrict wear and tear on a ground. However, stick and balling should be done towards the outside of a ground and not up the middle, where a player might also surreptitiously manufacture a divot or tee on the 60-yard line. Be vigilant! Should a player come on as a substitute it is fine to allow him a couple

many cars and spectators pressed up against the safety zones nowadays, it could well have been penalised as dangerous play. ☒

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Play goes on until the whistle blows...



This month’s puzzle

A player is being ridden off. An opponent hooks his stick as he is striking the ball. What should the umpires do?

Last month’s solution

A player dismounts during play shouting to the umpire that his pony is lame. What should the umpires do? Nothing. If the player/pony are not interfering with play, he should wait until play is neutral then blow, and ascertain if the pony is lame. If yes, let both sides change and restart when the player is back.

If not, start play when the player has left the ground.