



Our New Year's resolution is to be tougher on players who still appeal

Which is the most abused rule in polo? Easy – thou shalt not appeal.

At the start of every year we make the resolution that we, that is the authorities, will clamp down on appealing and what happens – absolutely nothing.

The rule is crystal clear: “No player may appeal in any manner for a foul”. Yet they do – verbally, by gesture (watch Cambiaso) and with the stick.

Of course, were the umpires to blow the whistle every time a player raises his stick the game would never get going and this is recognised in the notes to officials in which it is stated that “umpires must use a certain amount of discretion”. Nonetheless, we must be tougher on appealing in this coming season.

Allied to this is the management of the players by the umpires. Last year we removed the right of the captain to ask for an explanation

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of the foul awarded and perhaps rather surprisingly this caused hardly a ripple.

As a quid pro quo the umpires are encouraged to state clearly, after having blown the whistle, the penalty awarded,

the side penalised and a very brief description of the foul, for example: “Penalty four against red for crossing”. That should be it.

Lessons from football

I promised to give football a break until the New Year and I was good to my word. But alas we are now in 2012, so here I go again.

Recently Tottenham Hotspur's players were given a talk from senior referee Phil Dowd, whose main point seems to have been how hard it is for referees to keep up with play owing to the increased speed at which the game is played. On occasion they will run up to eight miles during a match.

Even if they have kept up with the game and are not too out of breath to blow the whistle, all their good work can be undone in an instant by one bad decision. The chance of making this mistake is, however, much increased if the referee is not up with the play. And the same, of course, is

true of polo. Unless an umpire is correctly positioned throughout he will inevitably make mistakes. We have been privileged to have a talk from a leading sports official for the last four years at the Chief Umpires meeting and intend to



Polo can learn from football referees such as Phil Dowd, pictured here with John Terry

continue that again at Sunningdale on Wednesday 18 April.

Changing the rules

It is now confirmed that there will be just one significant rule change this year – namely that for the Penalty 5a (a hit from the spot) and 5b (a hit from the centre) the nearest umpire will place the ball, making sure there is a good lie.

The striker may not replace the ball, but must play it as it lies.

There are no changes to the rules on hooking, but they often seem to be misunderstood, so I will clarify.

The first important rule is that the player being hooked must be “in the act of striking the ball” and the player hooking (one tries to avoid calling him or her “the hooker”!) must be on the same side or directly behind.

Should the player being hooked delay making his stroke, then his opponent is entitled to take a shot at the ball, often in this case with a nearside backhand – yes, this is legitimate in polo.

Rather surprisingly, even if the player is being ridden off, an opponent may hook his stick. But if the opponent makes contact with his pony he is likely to foul under the “sandwich” rule.

Finally, for a legitimate hook all of the stick of the player hooking must be below the shoulder, which in practice includes part of his arm. In Argentina it is only the head of the stick that must be below the shoulder – this is one of the few areas in which our playing rules now differ from theirs. ❌

Read more from Arthur at www.poloimes.co.uk

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Foul for thought...

This month's puzzle

A player goes to change his pony when the ball has gone out over the boards and a throw-in is about to take place. What are the rules governing his re-entry into the game?

Last month's solution

The umpires decide: “No foul”. Where should the throw-in be taken from? “From the spot where the ball was when the whistle was blown, the throw to be towards the nearest boards or sideline”, as defined in Rule 27b. There is, however, one rather arcane exception. If a goal is scored on a foul and the referee is unsighted so that he cannot make an informed judgement, then the throw-in is taken from the spot where the “foul” occurred, Rule 20c (i).

