

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



For happy days, grin, play fair and accept the blame

The qualities of a good umpire have frequently been covered in Umpire's Corner, but as the season approaches I want to focus on the players. They too have a responsibility to make the game safe, fair and enjoyable. Firstly they should play to the rules so there are few occasions for the umpires to stop the game. This includes playing within the spirit of the game, which means fast, open polo. For some teams, perhaps those that are short on horses, this may not be the best way to win, but better to lose by fair means than win by foul: just ask the French and the Irish!

Players and ponies should be well turned out and professionals ever conscious that they owe respect to the patrons who employ them. On and off the field they should demonstrate sportsmanship by treating "triumph and disaster just the same", and taking the blame for mistakes rather than rounding on the umpires.

Unfortunately in almost every sport the result can be influenced by officials but this has to be accepted, the rough taken with the smooth and due allowance made; in the best case being so far ahead that even the most outrageous decision does not affect the result.

Pity the poor footballers when one incorrectly given penalty or offside decision can win or lose the match. Players thus should respect officials; not only the umpires but all those who contribute: the referee, goal judges, timekeeper and even the poor old polo manager, all of whom have been subject to abuse in the past.

Why I'll miss the sultan

I read with sadness that the Sultan of Swing is ceasing to write his monthly column. I often disagreed with much of what he wrote – but then that was his style: amusing, provocative and informed. What more can you ask for? Life will continue but Polo Times will be the poorer.

Club chiefs join pros

As the season approaches we prepare as best we can to improve the standard of officiating. This year for the first time the seminar to be held at the end of April will include not only those who are or aspire to be on the professional umpire list but also the club chief umpires. In this way we hope to start the season singing from the same sheet, in particular focusing on how

playing country that has not enjoyed, if that is the right word, the sound of an HPA-sponsored whistle. We still have to break into the Argentine market but have made inroads into areas in which they previously held sway.

Most recently we covered the two major tournaments in Dubai, where the new interpretation on the turning rule was applied, leading to more open play

Hardly a polo-playing country has not enjoyed, if that is the right word, the sound of an HPA-sponsored whistle

the "turn-across" is to be umpired. A short DVD, in addition to updated versions of the Rules and Umpire DVD, showing examples of turning, blocking and no contact will be widely distributed.

Forging ahead, from Dubai to Nigeria

Our umpires have not been idle during the winter: far from it. There is hardly a polo-

and the emergence of the backhand from the freezer.

One of our intrepid umpires, at the invitation of Albert Esiri, is spending Easter at Albert's club in Abraca in the Delta region of Nigeria, a marvellous oasis in a troubled land. The "we will go anywhere" approach is how it should be to ensure that our standards are accepted worldwide. ☺

Play goes on until the whistle blows...

This month's puzzle

You blow the whistle for a foul as a goal is scored. The other umpire disagrees and you refer to the referee. He admits to being unsighted and therefore cannot make an informed judgement. What should you do?

Last month's solution

A player delays the hit-in to let a team-mate return to the ground having changed his pony. The umpire blows his whistle. What penalty should he impose? The umpire nearest the hitter-in will have already called "play" and so he should call again for the hit-in to be taken. If the striker does not respond immediately he should blow his whistle and award a Penalty 6 against the striker's team. He will probably be a bit speedier next time!

Email comments and questions to
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