



Umpiring improvements in high-goal must filter through to the lower levels

Another season has drawn to a close that, despite the rather in and out summer weather, has been generally successful. There have been few discipline incidents of note, which would indicate that the umpiring has been good, but as always it was not good enough, particularly at the lower levels.

Yes, there has been improvement, not least thanks to the introduction of the paid umpire, a rare beast indeed 20 years ago, but the good work that they do needs to be more accountable and to spread further down the chain. This is our aim.

Criticism of umpires still comes rolling in and is taken seriously, particularly if supported by both teams rather than just the losing one. I am a bit more sceptical when the criticism emanates from spectators, however experienced they may be. As a spectator you can see the extent to which the umpires keep up with the play and judge their control of the game. But unless you are in an elevated position you are likely to be guessing about fouls. Nonetheless, reports from the sidelines are welcomed, though may be taken with a pinch of salt, particularly when they concern points of law.

Time for change

It is at this time of year that we have a look at possible rule



Officials at the Goldin U18 International Tournament in China last month umpired according to HPA rules, as do many other clubs around the world. This must be considered by the HPA Chief Umpires whenever they think about making rule changes

changes for next year, taking a lead from suggestions put forward at the Chief Umpires meeting and, of course, any raised in *Polo Times* (we are expecting a flood of these after the letter in the last edition). We take into account that players

Paid umpires need to be more accountable and help spread their good work further down the food chain

are a conservative lot and, on the whole, don't like change. Also, and perhaps more importantly, as polo is played under HPA rules in many countries, we have to look at the wider picture. Finally, we must stay as close as we can to the Argentines, who are ultra-

conservative, and the Americans, who do things their own way.

We have always resisted having a different set of rules for each different level of polo, but a club is at liberty to set its own rules for any tournaments outside the Victor Ludorum, as long as any such changes are clearly set out in the tournament schedule. Recent examples have been the trials for the throw-in from the sidelines and the hit-in after a goal.

It is early days yet but, apart from a few tweaks, it looks as if the only significant change may be the placing of the ball by the umpire for the Penalties 5a (hit from the spot) and 5b (hit from the centre).

However, we are open to suggestions and any ideas for rule change or clarification will be carefully examined.

Rules refresher

These points from a pro umpire meeting in the summer are worth considering as a reminder:

- For a penalty 3 the goal judge should be well back in the centre of the goal. The umpire with the striker (the other umpire being on the back line) has to make the call: "goal or no goal".
- With player dismounts, stop play immediately if interfering with the play (consider penalty if frivolous). If not interfering, stop when play is neutral (Rule 29a)
- Umpires should stay on the field between chukkas (except when changing) and keep together. At the end of the match they should ride off together, but allow players to say thank you.
- Go for the perfect throw in – low and hard, down the line.
- Discourage players from hitting the dead ball.
- Watch out for the player who tries to work the umpires.
- When giving a technical penalty raise your arm and, if on the radio, name the referee.
- A cut shot executed at speed when the striker takes up the new line is unlikely to be a foul.
- Be lenient with the No 1 who collects the ball goal-side of the back and strays a bit off the line.
- If acting as referee do not be afraid to criticise the umpires. ❌

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

Photograph by John O'Sullivan



Foul for thought...

This month's puzzle

The referee or the umpires, after consultation, rule "No Foul". Where will the throw-in be taken?

Last month's solution

A player starts to place the ball for a penalty but his pony shies away. A teammate finishes placing the ball and the penalty is taken. What should the umpire do?

The answer is the umpire should blow the whistle and award a Penalty 7 (a throw-in) see rule 39b and 39d.