



An awful lot of improvement is still needed in umpiring at low-goal level

Are we back to square one, or is the score two all? Have we moved on? I am not sure. I refer to the umpiring of matches at the lower level.

A number of complaints have emerged from patrons and my own observations bear out their concerns. These range fairly widely from bad decision making by umpires, failure to penalise dangerous play and even favouritism being shown to home teams. This toxic combination is death to the enjoyment of any game and is a huge turn-off to those who pay to play, to the extent that they will not bring their team back to certain clubs.

This is a disaster of tsunami proportions for some of the smaller low-goal clubs who rely on visiting teams to swell the numbers in their tournaments and to give their members a chance to play against varied opposition.

In illustration of this I recently watched a 4-goal match umpired by two professional players, one of whom seldom strayed from the centre line and when questioned blamed the pony and said he would have tried harder if it had been a higher goal match.

To a player, at whatever level, playing to win is all-important and the chance of victory, or indeed avoiding injury, should



Umpiring at low-goal level still has many stumbling blocks to overcome, as this brilliant picture by Paul Froud from August's *Polo Times* illustrates perfectly

not be jeopardised by slack and inconsiderate umpiring.

All this is very easy to say and indeed has been said before – but what can we do? In theory, paying umpires for carrying out the duty should help, as the threat of non-

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payment for a job badly done is adequate incentive to do it well.

But, the majority of low-goal games are umpired by those who have not been paid and who often will have just played a game themselves, or are just about to.

This is not perfect, but unless a club is lucky enough to have someone who is prepared to umpire as a service to polo and the club, what else can be done?

As a start, the club chief umpire must be made more accountable.

Some, as at Guards, take their duties seriously, but I fear the majority are just names in a book who, even if they are watching, fail to bring umpires to account if they patently have done a poor job on the field.

The concept, which I am ashamed to say I upheld during my time as a polo manager, that anyone in a striped shirt is a good umpire no longer has a place.

It is now in these straitened times absolutely in the club's interest to keep the umpires,

whether visiting or their own, up to the mark and if they do not do so they will be the losers, as teams from outside will not enter their tournaments any more.

Pony power

Following on from this theme, and perhaps in some slight mitigation of the pro mentioned above, it is incumbent on a team to produce a pony which "must be suitable and fit to umpire the level of the game being played".

This, of course, means a pony that has played polo, can keep up with the game and will not shy away from an onslaught of ponies, as some herd animals are inclined to do. Sometimes ponies which are happy enough to play become very fractious when umpiring, particularly early on at the throw. This was so wonderfully illustrated in August's *Polo Times* (page 16-17).

Indeed, almost the last time I pulled on a striped shirt I threw the ball in and the next thing I knew I was waking up in an ambulance on the way to Chichester Hospital.

The moral is that a team cannot expect good umpiring if they do not supply a suitable vehicle on which to do the job. ❌

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

Photograph by Paul Froud



Foul for thought...

This month's puzzle

A player starts to place the ball for a penalty but his pony shies away so that he cannot complete the job. A teammate finishes placing it and the penalty is taken. What should you do?

Last month's solution

Name all the occasions during a match when the ends are changed?

When a goal has been scored; if a match goes to extra time and goals are to be widened; when no goals have been scored by half time; if during play teams line up on the wrong side and there has been no score by the end of that chukka. I think that covers it.