

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



Watch, focus, control – and thank God it’s not football

So battle has commenced and we are enjoying polo up and down the country. As an appetiser our top umpires and club officials were treated to a talk by Peter Walton of football’s Referees’ Association. After his talk, which was based around incidents that had occurred in the professional game, there were few in the audience who wanted to swap polo for football. Its referees seem very vulnerable to attack, mostly verbal or by gesture, suffering a high level of abuse from players and managers. That this is tolerated, in contrast to rugby union, may be because it encourages press coverage and thus additional publicity for the game. It is not a path down which we want to go.

However, we have much to learn, too. The principles around which the FA guides its referees are similar to ours, as follows: observe the spirit of the game, watch the body language, give yourself thinking time, remain focused, decide quickly whether to play advantage and, finally, keep control.

LEARNING CURVE

A major point of interest at the start of the season has been the reinterpretation of the rule governing turning across the line.

A DVD has been widely circulated showing examples of a player turning the ball leading to a foul, or not, as the case may be. Many nuances have been raised, such as what if he turns the ball to the left. As ever, it is down to the umpire to make a judgement as to whether the player turning the ball crossed the right of way of a player committed and following down that line.

The concept of speeding up the game by encouraging a player to play a backhand rather than risking a foul by turning the ball is at the heart of the matter. Furthermore a player who turns the ball to his left, unless he is very skillful, is likely to fall foul of the one-tap rule. As a further indication, if the gap between the turner

and the following opponent is closing then the turner has probably fouled.

Indications from home and abroad are that the reinterpretation works well, but the rule has yet to be umpired consistently. It’s this area we have to work on.

SPOT THE AGGRESSOR

The “no contact” rule, which now applies to the hit-in and penalties as well as the throw in, is relatively easy to umpire. As a

penalty 5a cannot be given against a defender within his own 60-yard line but a penalty 4, 3 or 2 as the umpires decide.

RAPPORT WITH THE RANKS

The other day I chanced on an appreciation of Dick Shepherd, the cricket umpire, in which an excerpt read as follows: “Like his colleague, Dicky Bird, he had a natural rapport with players, which, coupled with fine decision making, made him the ideal

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guide, the player who the umpires judge to be the aggressor should be warned and if he persists then penalised. Generally a hit from the spot (penalty 5a) should be given from the spot where the foul occurred and not from where the hit is being taken.

There may be occasions, however, when a throw-in (penalty 7) is appropriate, particularly if the umpires can’t decide who did what and to whom. Remember that a

adjudicator”. In a few words this describes what all umpires should aim for. ✘

▶ See also Letters, page 18. Email Arthur at whistleblower@polotimes.co.uk

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Play goes on until the whistle blows...

This month’s puzzle

You blow for a foul for a play just in field from the back line. The other umpire disputes your call and refers to the referee, who rules “no foul”. From where should the throw-in be taken and in which direction? As a sideline to this question, the umpires should try to decide themselves if it was a foul as the referee is a long way from the action and is unlikely to have had a clear view.

Last month’s solution

You blow a foul as a goal is scored. The other umpire disagrees and you ask the referee, who was unsighted and can’t make an informed call. You could go through your umpiring life without having to invoke this rule, but it has happened. Rule 20c(i) stipulates a throw-in from where the ball was when the whistle went. But if the ball had gone through goal by then the throw-in should be taken from where the incident occurred. Were the referee to signal “no foul”, the goal would be allowed, and only if he is unsighted would a throw-in be given.

