

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



# How much complaining is too much complaining?

Well, reading the excellent coverage in the last issue of *Polo Times*, it seems as though it was all happening in Europe in late August and September as far as exciting polo is concerned. I was also pleased that for once there was no mention made of the umpiring decisions. Until, that was, I turned to Yolanda's report from Switzerland. Maybe it was something to do with the altitude but, in the final at Gstaad (as indeed was also true in August's subsidiary final of the Warwickshire Cup in the UK), the defining memories from the game appear to have been of the final minutes of the last and defining chukka.

In the view of the players, a vital call was not made or went the wrong way, and the players had plenty to say about it. Such complaints are understandable but should always be viewed in the context of the whole match. If the umpires did a poor job, then they should be penalised in some way (easier now that so many are paid).

## PENALISING UMPIRES

Taking the decision to reduce or dock pay, or sanction an umpire by the loss of a match or two, is not easy, as there is no cut-and-dried criteria for a well or badly umpired game. However, DVDs can undoubtedly help, as can the presence of an assessor on the ground.

Now that it is the patrons who mostly pay for the umpiring, they should certainly feel confident they are getting the best possible service. This means having a credible resource to turn to should they feel hard done by.

Nevertheless, patrons should be careful not to react too quickly, making bold claims such as those made by the losing team captain in Gstaad (see page 28-30 of October's *P7*). Even if the patron's complaints are entirely true, going about it the wrong way leaves a bitter taste in the mouth. Sometimes, the idea that polo is

only a game seems an optimistically misplaced one. You could have fooled me!

## PURPOSEFUL PATRONS

What is it that makes men spend so much money on playing polo, and why are the results so important to them?

The first response is of course that polo is such great fun to play, a point that can only really be appreciated by one who has wielded a stick in anger. However, the other aim of the handicapped structure of the

not influenced by the more vocal players or the reputations of the best. This is an area we have to examine, as it is where I believe we may have failed to be consistent in the past.

A stricter code of conduct, almost amounting to "zero tolerance", has been introduced for the major tournaments in the Argentine – and early indications are that it is proving successful in cutting out the dialogue between umpires and players (see news).

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game is that polo tournaments should always offer, on paper, an equal chance of each team winning. It is an aspirational sport and this aspect must be nurtured and preserved, unlike in football where only those sides backed by the biggest bankroll usually have a real chance of success.

Each team must feel that it enters on a level playing field, both literally, in that the grounds and arenas now are all top-notch fair surfaces, but also in the quality of the umpiring. It must be consistent and

We will examine the success of this initiative, with a view to introducing a similar code here next year. In particular, we would delete the right of a captain to ask for an explanation for a decision, as this opens the door for a dialogue. This can disintegrate and suddenly you are confronted with what seems to be four captains on the field in each team. ✕

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## Play goes on until the whistle blows...



### This month's puzzle

A four-goal team is playing in a 0-4 goal tournament. Their minus-one-goal player is late. Can the team start with three players? Then, once started, when can the late player join or replace his substitute?

### Last month's solution

A defender hits the ball upfield but it rebounds off a teammate's pony and crosses his own back line. What should you award?

The umpires should award a hit in from the back, as the rule (25a) states that a penalty six (safety 60-yard hit) is only given if the ball is hit directly over a defender's own back line or off his own pony.