

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



## Why I always have time for clockwatchers

Probably one of the best pieces of advice I was given by the incomparable Martin Trotter – the HPA's chief umpire throughout the 1990s – was never to umpire oneself. As it happened I needed little persuasion to follow his advice as the last time I had held a whistle, I went through all the checks – are the medics in position, is the timekeeper ready, is the third man awake, is the correct score posted on the board, are the team colours of sufficient contrast and so on – and within 15 seconds found myself on the floor, waking up in the ambulance on the way to hospital.

Yes, for the 15 seconds I was on the field I was brilliant, but then I toppled off into oblivion. The point I am making is that players have only to turn up on the ground, albeit with a few horses, and go straight into the game. Not so the umpire, who has a list of duties to perform before the game and thereafter during play has to be alert to every twist and turn.

### OUT OF SIGHT, EYES PEELED

The other piece of the equation that is often forgotten are the officials – most particularly the polo manager, the match supervisor and the timekeeper.

Apart from being in overall charge during the day, the polo manager has to ensure that the teams due to play are qualified, and informed of the time and place of their match.

The real star of the show is the match supervisor, who has to make sure the goal judges, gatekeepers and others are in place before the start of every match: cleared, trained and equipped for their important task.

The timekeeper is perhaps the most unsung of all; often out of sight but not of hearing. Not only has the timekeeper to stop the clock as the whistle goes but to restart it as the ball is thrown in, hit or hit at and then to ring the bell at the correct time to signify the end of a chukka.

The rule states that the chukka ends on the first sound of the second bell, and on occasion the umpires are required to make a decision as to whether the ball crossed the line before or after the bell was rung. This problem was highlighted at the 2008 International at Guards when a goal was wrongly credited, and more recently at an

### A HIT WITH INTENT

I have been watching a number of DVDs of last season's high-goal games and believe that as well as tightening up on turning to encourage the backhand we could introduce the one-hit Penalty 5a and b (hit from the spot and from the centre) as well as the hit-



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ice hockey match in the Winter Olympics, eventually sorted out through television replay which – rightly – is denied to our umpires as a help in their decision making.

Finally, spare a thought for he or she who has to wrestle with the problems of health and safety and risk assessment – covering everything that can possibly happen to players, spectators and officials; life has become overwhelmingly complicated.

in. This would open up the game immeasurably and stop the present practice of tapping the ball, albeit at a canter, all over the ground.

There would have to be some rule to prevent a team-mate coming in behind after an initial tap but we seem to have got round the problem with the more severe penalties; indeed the one word "intent" seems to have done the trick. ☒

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

### This month's puzzle

*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?*

### Last month's solution

*A pony pecks and a player is deposited on the ground ignominiously but without injury away from the play. What should the umpires do?*

Last month's Whistleblower question concerned the unseated player, on his feet and not interfering with play. In this case the umpires should let play continue until such time as the play is neutral. This ruling is of longstanding and is designed to discourage a player throwing himself from his horse to save a goal; a drastic step, you might say, but one regularly practised in pre-war days.

Email comments and questions to [whistleblower@polotimes.co.uk](mailto:whistleblower@polotimes.co.uk)

