

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



It’s not just the winning, it’s how you play the game

There has been a discussion recently on rough play, both with the stick and pony, which is causing injury and inhibiting the skills of the most talented players; at least that seems to be the idea. I detect, in part, the malign influence of the team coach who instructs his lower goal players to go after the stars in the other team and try to neutralise them.

Certainly, in my day the junior player in the team (normally designated by rank) was instructed to take the big star into the car park and remain with him there for the rest of the match. Not much fun but, of course, never achieved in practice.

There is, however, a modern equivalent creeping in that is particularly prevalent at set-piece plays before the ball is thrown in or hit. This involves riding into or blocking a player so that he is, for a time anyway, taken out of the game: it is very irritating and damaging to that player, causing frustration and often leading to verbal abuse or violence.

One proposal that has growing support is to limit any contact until the umpire has called "Play", as we now do at the throw in. Another idea, which will be harder to police, is no contact when a player is stationary.

Polo is a contact sport and we must be careful not to emasculate the play too much but it must remain fair and as safe as is humanly possible.

DIVISIVE AND DISREPUTABLE

On the subject of fairness, a patron was recently incensed when an opponent shouted "Leave it", which he did, giving the other player a clear shot at goal. There is no rule against such a ploy but it is certainly not within the spirit of the game.

Following on from this theme, we were recently poring over the rules of

substitution. A certain young English player with all the right credentials was included as an emergency substitute (on the last occasion pre-arranged) in three different teams in the same tournament – and had been earmarked for a fourth!

The rules, as we read them, did not specifically forbid the practice, as long

they must be seen to be impartial. In practice, as I well remember, the responsibility usually devolves to the polo manager, who only calls in the committee in a crisis.

But it is, of course, at this time that impartial judgement is likely to be required. Should a decision be needed

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as the substitution took place during the game, but clearly it was against the spirit.

We therefore advised the tournament committee that a fourth substitution would bring the game into disrepute and therefore should not be allowed.

Watch out for a tightening up of this rule next year.

PARENTING POLO FAIRLY

This incident also highlighted the role of tournament committees. The rules give them paramount power over their own tournament, so they can do pretty well what they like, but to exercise this power

during play, it is helpful if there are those on hand who can make this judgement.

IF IT AIN'T BROKE, DON'T FIX IT

It was with a touch of *Schadenfreude* that I read of the woes of rugby adjudication in an article entitled "Referees wrestle with faulty laws".

The writer argued that the so-called visionaries behind the experimental law variations (ELVs) employed in the Guinness Premiership and internationally last season would have been better employed spending the considerable time and expense they wasted on a proper and effective review of the rules of play.

Are we guilty of a similar charge? Well, we may soon find out. We are due shortly to meet with the Argentine Rules Committee, a body that has yet to tinker with the rules at all, leaving them unchanged since polo's first arrival on the continent.

There is no doubt that our practice of issuing the *Blue Book* and *inter alia* the rules every year contributes to our tinkering practice but, apart from a major rule change, we are also able to improve clarity and precision as the years go by, and who is to say that is a bad thing. ☒

FOUL FOR THOUGHT

Last month's conundrum

Can you umpire on a pony that is blind in one eye?

When posed this question, I didn't have a clue – so, off to the *Blue Book*. The rule states that "a pony may not be played...if blind in an eye". Whether intentionally or not, when referring to prohibited tack, the rules use the wording "not allowed to be used".

I therefore conclude that a pony blind in an eye may be used to umpire, though the rider should be warned. It is a useful way to employ a pony which otherwise might have to be pensioned off completely.

This month's puzzle

You award a penalty 5B (hit from the centre). A member of the team facing advances to within 20 yards as the penalty is taken. What do you do as the parallel umpire?