

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



Opening up the UK game – and a Pandora's Box of ideas

The debate on how to improve polo for players and spectators initiated by Javier Tanoira has gathered pace and now everyone is wading in. Fear not: the HPA has taken all the suggestions and arguments on board and is in ongoing discussion with the Argentine Polo Association (AAP).

The main focus this year will be on turning the ball and blocking the right of way of a player in possession. HPA rules on crossing are to be brought into line with the AAP's, to state specifically: "No player shall cross a player following the line of the ball except at a distance that no risk of a collision or danger to either player is involved".

It is on the basis of this rule that the AAP has instructed its umpire team to penalise a player turning the ball in front of an opponent even if that player has checked or pulled away to avoid a collision. We will do likewise.

Similarly we will instruct our umpires to be much stricter on the rule that states: "A player may not position himself or his pony so as to block or obstruct the legitimate progress of a player trying to move forward with the ball". In this way the game will be opened up, as has been shown in the Argentine.

PEPE'S RADICAL REFORMS

Now that Pandora's Box has been opened other ideas are flooding in, many of which are open to serious consideration. In general it is felt that the player in possession is too well protected, which encourages him to keep possession rather than pass with a forehand or backhand shot.

In one recent article in Argentine magazine *Polo Mundial*, Pepe Heguy has come up with some good ideas. These can be summarised as: (a) Stricter umpiring on the "one-tap" rule; (b) Penalising the player who is blocking; (c) No contact before "play" is called (we are going one further and allowing no contact until the

ball is hit or thrown in); (d) All penalties to be one hit; (e) Ponies may only be changed in the pony lines; (f) The umpire to drop the ball for penalties – in other words, no positioning by a player; (g) Umpires to blow fewer fouls but each penalty that is

awarded should be more severe; (h) No dialogue between players and umpires. players to tire. In rugby, as in polo, there are many grey areas but players accept that playing to the referee's interpretation is an important skill. Perhaps we should plant the same thought into the minds of our players.



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LE RUGBY PROTECTS ITS OWN

It is perhaps some comfort that we are not the only ones navel-gazing; the same sorts of problems have beset rugby in that the game is degenerating into mauls and kicking with a dearth of open play.

I have in front of me five suggestions on how to improve rugby, including one that recommends a reduction in the number of substitutes to allow the

Staying with rugby I was interested to read the headline "French to restrict the Foreign Legion". The French are worried about the number of foreign players, mostly English, who are playing in their clubs – rather like polo's overseas influx. From next season 50 per cent of each squad will have to have come through the French system before the age of 21. The ruling is likely to be challenged in the European courts but this will probably do no more than induce the shrug of a Gallic shoulder. ☒

Play goes on until the whistle blows...

This month's puzzle

A Penalty 4 (60 yards) is awarded. As the striker approaches the ball his stick gets caught in his pony's tail. He overruns the ball but turns quickly and hits a backhand shot through the goal. What should the umpire do? Would it be different if a Penalty 2 had been given, to be taken from the 30-yard spot?

Last month's solution

A player's helmet falls off during play. What should the umpires do? If a player loses his helmet the umpires should stop play when the ball is neutral unless the player is in danger of injury. The rule aims to prevent a player discarding his helmet to stop play when his goal is under threat – slightly less drastic than throwing oneself off a pony, a practice at which some were once rather skilled.

Email your comments and questions for Arthur to whistleblower@polotimes.co.uk

