

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



Taps, tweaks and a totally different atmosphere

Although there are fewer teams and players in many of this year's main tournaments, as we might have expected, the quality of the play in my view is well up.

There seems to be a general awareness that the ball is there to be hit in the direction of the goal, rather than to be pursued round in circles. This is due, in part, to acceptance of the "one tap" rule and stricter umpiring thereof. We know that the top pros don't like it, as it restricts their game, but by golly it certainly seems to work in speeding up play and thereby making umpiring that much easier.

On this subject, it is worth highlighting the rule in the positive, which states that a player being ridden off may tap the ball as he wishes and that, if he is obstructed or blocked by an opponent in his right of way, that opponent should be blown for a foul before the player with the ball makes a second tap.

Should the player with the ball hit it with force into another pony he runs the risk of being penalised. It must remain as a judgement to be made by the umpires.

WORKING OUT WHO'S WINNING

We have had a lot of fun recently with determining the order of merit between leagues and groups. The one thing that is certain is that Murphy's Law will invariably apply to come up with the answer you don't want.

For example, in a recent tournament of two leagues, the schedule stated that the two best teams would be in the final. Well, the order of merit, as laid out in Annex E to the rules, gave the first and second position to two teams in the same league, which is not what the tournament organisers had in mind.

In another tournament, which gave a tweak to the system as laid down, the order of merit was calculated overall, for good reasons, rather than taking the order from the league and group winners. It's

fine if change is spelt out in the schedule, but discontent will follow if it is not.

RED COLLAR GREEN COLLAR

The A and B groups have now been launched (see June issue) with two well-attended meetings and an encouraging level of enthusiasm. All Victor Ludorum matches at the 15-goal level and the semi-finals and finals of all 12- and 8-goal polo are to be covered by the professional body. A set level of fees has been laid down for the teams and for the payment of the umpires.

A point that can't be overemphasised is that the umpires have a direct obligation to the teams to do the best job they can. They now umpire in a totally

further sanction, pay will be docked for an umpiring mistake which involves his or her knowledge of the rules, and exposes a lack of it! Thus, the umpires who fail to continue play until the second bell in the last chukka of a tied match or who throw the ball in the wrong way on a penalty one will find themselves the poorer.

CAUGHT AT THIRD MAN

The HPA's new chairman has expressed his desire to see the referee on the sidelines more involved in the decision-making on the field.

A good idea in theory, but in practice it will depend on the experience and dedication of the third man on the sidelines and, of course, on his ability to



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different atmosphere from the time when, after losing a close fought match, a player would simply have to don the striped shirt and go out again.

Members of the Pro Umpire Group can be distinguished by a red collar on their umpire shirt, and the A and B groups by a green. These green collars will not be given out indiscriminately but earned by passing a rules test and umpiring at least one game to the required standard. As a

tract the attention of the umpires mid-chukka! Radios, which are slowly being introduced, provide a valuable tool – particularly if the referee spots rough or dangerous play off the ball – but the basic principle that the umpires have paramount authority on the field must remain.

The final point about referees is to say that when a decision is referred, they should feel confident to make a decision, even when they are not 100 per cent sure what actually happened. The referee can make an educated judgment on the basis of high-probabilities.

For instance, for the decision to come up to the referee, one of the two on-field umpires must be certain a foul has been committed. So long as one is fair to both sides in the course of a game, while it is unlikely that he too will be 100 per cent sure what happened, the referee who invariably rules "No foul" is in danger of doing himself out of a job. ☺

FOUL FOR THOUGHT

Last month's conundrum

Is the striker allowed to hit away the stick of an opponent who is attempting to hook him before he strikes the ball?

No. The rule states that that you may only hook an opponent if he is in the act of striking the ball. Nevertheless, even though the player is not in the act of striking the ball in this case, it is a fairly common play at the high-goal level and often goes unpunished.

This month's puzzle

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