

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



Brits abroad, volume control and checking for foibles

Our umpires are everywhere, which is great. In this field, if sadly in few others nowadays, it can be said that English is best, if you include the odd Kiwi. At last it seems we have broken back into the USPA circuit now that Julian Appleby has been asked to officiate there, although he may not go as he is recovering from an operation.

We have yet to crack Argentina. All is far from lost, as we are cooperating with the Argentine Polo Association (AAP) more than ever on rule change and interpretation. On this score HPA chief executive David Woodd is having another go at a universal set of rules, with one part to cover the way the game is played and another to cover rules specific to an individual country, such as those governing pony welfare.

The focus for the coming season is, however, on turning and blocking. We plan to produce a DVD for circulation to clubs with examples of a fair turn and an illegal turn or block. The wording will be slightly altered to reflect a stricter interpretation than that which has been applied in recent years.

Thus should a player turn the ball in front of an opponent following down the old line the turning player will be penalised if the following player, to avoid a collision at his original speed, is forced to check or pull away. This, along with a stricter interpretation of the rule on blocking, should speed up the game here as it has this winter in the Argentina.

THE ELLERSTON-CS BROOKS EFFECT

I read with interest my colleague John Horswell's article about silence on the polo field. I vividly recall John as captain of Sladmore winning the Harrison Cup on Ambersham 1 by the sheer power of his personality, transmitted to his team by his voice. He is right, of course, that we live in quieter times, but voices are

still raised in abuse of the umpires rather than as encouragement, if you can call it that, to your team.

The rule is clear that only the captain may speak to the umpires, and then only to seek clarification on a decision. We

Finally, back to the question of sanctions against an umpire who is not cutting the mustard. Yes, we do have frequent assessment of performance, even more this year in high-goal as Howard Hipwood has been given increased



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rather discourage umpires from talking to players before a game or vice versa as John suggests. This can lead to all sorts of problems. I well remember the hoo-ha raised by Ellerston when they learnt that Tom Hughes, who was to umpire the Gold Cup final, had spent the previous evening with their opponents, CS Brooks.

It is part of a manager's duty to brief the team on the particular foibles of the umpires appointed for their match; for example they might warn that Tony Keyte is focused on a clean line up or that Jason Dixon is intolerant of verbal abuse.

powers, and we do fine or rest those seen to do a poor job.

Sometimes this is based on reports submitted by teams. In every case these are followed up and clubs should do likewise. There is no stigma attached to a team that files a report against the umpires (remember they act as a pair); indeed it is only via these reports that we get an overall picture of performance. We now have three grades of professional umpire, with different levels of payment, and we intend to use freely the system of snakes and ladders. ☒

Play goes on until the whistle blows...

This month's puzzle

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 solution

In taking a Penalty 4 the striker tries to hit the ball to goal with one shot, but on the downward swing his stick catches in his pony's tail and so he overruns the ball without hitting it. Can he turn to hit a backhand?

The umpires must first decide whether the striker intended to make a full shot, which we'll assume he did. Thus the ball is in play and he has every right to turn and hit a backhand. He will, however, foul if by turning he crosses an opponent who has moved quickly from the 30-yard line or, more probably, if he raises the stick above his shoulder, ie he takes a full swing.

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