

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



Tanoira’s dossier proves radical change is required

No sooner was the ink dry on the draft of last month’s *Umpire’s corner* than a copy of Javier Tanoira’s 94-page dossier *Reflecting on Polo in Argentina* landed with a thump on my desk. This confirmed my suspicions that all is not well in the powerhouse of polo, and that many of the same ills from which we in the UK have been suffering during the last few years have struck there too.

Javier’s treatise, expertly translated by Sandy Harper, draws on the opinions of an array of all the great and the good in Argentine polo and uses numerous examples from other sports. It demonstrates that just because a rule has existed for 100-odd years, that is no barrier to change – if, by doing so, the game becomes more enjoyable to players and spectators alike.

Perhaps the most damning indictment of the modern game is that the top players confessed to not really enjoying playing any more and described how they would very rarely take time out to watch. How sad is that?

SO, WHERE TO NOW?

Thus armed, Javier launches into a savage attack on the modern game – highlighting, in particular, the overwhelming importance of possession that he sees as ruining any chance of open, flowing, attractive polo.

In this context, the quote taken from Horace Laffaye’s new book *The Evolution of Polo* (reviewed in this issue – see page 65) is appropriate: “It was Hitchcock who changed the old game of polo from passing to power...”, to which you could now add “and it was Eduardo Moore who changed it to possession”. And in this lies the root of the current ills.

The late Colonel Alec Harper was even more direct when he said: “Polo has

contracted a virus, the symptoms being a lot of close contact, changes of direction and dribbling, a nightmare for umpires.”

You might add that this is equally true for the poor spectators. So we should not shy away from radical rule changes, particularly if they encourage the player of whatever handicap to pass the ball and risk losing possession.

THE DEFENDER’S NOT FOR TURNING

The most important change suggested by Javier can be paraphrased as

that he would be penalised were he to ride through the old line and who thus checks up or pulls away.

Other changes Javier suggests include new rules, as follows:

- No player marking the player with the ball may be ridden off or obstructed, avoiding an unseemly accumulation of players around he who has the ball.
- Penalties 5a and 5b and the hit-in are to be taken with one hit. The striker would then be unable to hit the ball again until another player has hit it.

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follows: “If a player in defence has an opponent less than a horse’s length away when he is about to arrive at the ball, he cannot turn it but must hit a backhand.”

This may sound revolutionary but in this situation the player turning the ball, and thus changing its line, relies on the indulgence of his opponent – the opponent who, in modern polo, knows

Players other than the striker would have to be 30 yards from the ball.

- The number of lengthy throw-ins would be reduced, by giving a hit in to the team that has just conceded when a goal has been scored and a hit in to the team that didn’t put the ball out of play when the ball goes over the boards.
- When one umpire calls a foul, the other may not dispute the call or invite a decision from the referee.
- A specific amount of time for penalty taking etc would be introduced, after which the penalty would be annulled.

FOUL FOR THOUGHT

Last month’s conundrum

Can a player, not the striker, position the ball?

The answer is yes, as the rule states that one player only may position the ball without being specific about whom. However, he should only take five seconds to do so and then the penalty should be taken immediately once the umpire has called ‘play’.

This is probably the most frequently broken rule in the whole book; if it were penalised more often, that would speed things up a lot.

This month’s puzzle

The ball is in the air when the second bell goes but it crosses the line for a goal before the umpire has blown his whistle. Should the goal be allowed?

TIME TO ACT

None of these proposals are so radical that they cannot be included in the rules for 2010, so let us go ahead and give some of them at least a trial. We’ve got to do something – and fast. ☒

► Let us know what you think of Javier’s recommendations and Arthur’s assessment at letters@polotimes.co.uk