

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



# What polo can learn from football and rugby

So there are 23 men on the pitch but only one gets all the flack. And that, of course, is the referee. I refer most specifically to the Chelsea v Barcelona football match (the second leg of last month's Champions League semi-final) in which some, for Chelsea losing the match, held the referee responsible. That is as maybe but there is an undercurrent that he may have been encouraged by the management to achieve a Barcelona win and that, with his lack of top grade experience, he should not have been out there in the first place. This is really the point as it affects polo.

We had this discussion at the recent chief umpires' meeting and it was agreed that the factors of experience and age came into the equation when assessing the merits of an umpire and the decision as to whether or not he should be entrusted with a top game. Whatever the decision, it is vital to ensure that after the game, if things have not gone well, the accusation of bias or inherent incompetence cannot be levelled.

## FROM RUGGA TO CHUKKA

Those of us who attended the Umpire Seminar at Sunningdale Park at the end of April were treated to a clear and concise synopsis of the art of officiating by Ed Morrison, Head of Referee Development of the RFU. Although talking from his experience in rugby, the same principles for good umpiring apply to polo and it was a very relevant discussion indeed.

In particular, he made the overriding point that good officiating leads to a good game. Consistency, knowledge of the rules, firmness and courage to make the right decisions when the game gets tight are all principles we recognise and indeed highlight in our various umpire briefings.

Assessment and training are also vital ingredients and we have moved into this area with the appointment of Howard Hipwood to assess the performance of the Pro Umpire Group (see news, *Polo Times*, April issue). He has been appointed by the HPA and will report to the chief executive, having direct access to the teams but only to the umpires through the chief umpire. It is hoped to extend the scheme to the newly formed A group (see news, page 8) next year.

## PENALTY HITTING WITH INTENT

There has been considerable discussion on the rules introduced for the 2009 season, in particular those

the opinion of the umpires, play will continue as before.

Thus the option of tapping the ball towards the goal with a view to manufacturing another foul is no longer on offer. This undesirable practice was particularly prevalent during the closing stages of a tight game.

Finally, on the subject of penalties, a word of caution on the hit from the 30-yard line (penalty 2). The defenders have no play but must keep alert to avoid being struck by the ball hit by the penalty-taker.

## RENEGADES WITH RESPONSIBILITIES

As polo has spread throughout the country, and continues to do so despite

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effecting the taking of penalties. Although covered in grey (not due, one hastens to add, because it is a grey area, but because it has changed) in the rule book, in practice the only really significant change is that when taking penalties 4 and 6 (taken on the 60-yard line) the hitter must have the intent to score with one hit. Should he have this intent, in

the recession, some brave souls have decided to branch out and run matches and even tournaments outside the direct aegis of the HPA.

In a timely reminder, the HPA has issued a set of guidelines stating that such an event must be staged and played according to HPA rules, though some minor changes may be agreed – such as the size of the ground to suit local conditions. Nonetheless, there is to be no concession on matters that concern player and public safety and the welfare of ponies.

This is highlighted, if it needs to be, by the horrific occurrences in Florida so graphically covered in last month's issue of *Polo Times*. The brutal fact is that, whatever polo is played, any misdemeanor or tragedy reflects on the whole sport and its governing body and not just the local organisers. ☒

## FOUL FOR THOUGHT

### Last month's conundrum

*A player goes to take a Penalty 6 (60 safety) and taps the ball to a team-mate on the 30-yard line. What should the umpires do?*

Under the new rule, the umpire should blow the whistle and award a penalty to the defending side, to be taken from the spot where the original penalty was taken (Rule 37e).

### This month's puzzle

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