



# Time for players and umpires to turn over new leaf for the sake of the game

**W**hat resolutions should the noble army of umpires have for 2011?

The first must be to go on to the field with the intention of doing as good a job as possible for the teams. The second is to brush up on the rules, keep up with the game and concentrate throughout.

In this way the overall standard of umpiring will be raised and the players will respond by accepting more readily the decisions made by the umpires.

When reduced to basics, polo is not all that difficult a game to umpire. As in cricket, the line of the ball is critical but the deciding factor is the path of the horse, which although fast is a lot slower than the ball.

Probably the most difficult aspect is the retention of the sight picture after the event, which is crucial to decision making.

The best umpires have an uncanny knack of remembering the play well after it has passed into history, though a reminder from a DVD clip can be helpful.

## Player pressure

There are numerous factors that make umpiring more difficult than it need be and they are nearly all down to the players. How often does a player change the direction



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in which he is riding after he believes he has been fouled in order to accentuate it to further impress the umpires?

Umpires make far fewer mistakes than alleged and certainly fewer than players. Many alleged errors are no such thing when seen in slow motion replay. The perception that an umpire has made mistakes is aided by the partiality of the players and often by those who are watching, who are seldom in a good position to make an informed judgement.

Players who pressurise umpires make mistakes more likely and thus are doing themselves and

their team a disservice. Which brings me on to the often-debated subject of zero tolerance.

In the last edition of *Polo Times* (November/December 2010, page four) it was stated that the HPA was ready to implement the Argentine rule on player behaviour for the 2011 season. This is not definite.

Our position was always that after the end of the high-goal season in Argentina we would review it and make our judgement based on their experience.

Although generally thought to be working well there is some backlash from the players who are not universally happy.

## Invisible conductor

It must be remembered that the umpires are on the ground to keep the play safe and fair to both sides and, to do this successfully,

they must manage the players. We do not, however, want a situation in which the umpires are the two most important "players" on the ground – indeed in the best umpired games the officials remain all but invisible.

It is for this reason that I am not an advocate of zero tolerance nor of draconian punishment for minor misdemeanours leading to the sending off of a player and thereby the ruination of a match as a sporting contest.

It must too be remembered that if a player in the Argentine is sent off, he may be replaced by a substitute, whereas in England the team has to continue with just three-a-side.

Umpires should penalise players who abuse or constantly pressurise them with technical penalties and a yellow card as discouragement, which in our experience it has proved to be. This year we are also likely to delete the right of the captain to ask for an explanation, as this has been abused in the past. It's high time we ensured that the rules there are always observed.

In any event, a directive will be issued which makes it clear that the abuse and working of umpires will not be tolerated. ☒

## Play goes on until the whistle blows...



### This month's puzzle

You aim to ride off an opponent. What conditions must apply for it to be legitimate?

### Last month's solution

If a minus-one-goal player in a four-goal team playing in a four-goal tournament is late. Can the team start without him?

The answer is no, as the team falls outside the tournament limits. They would have to recruit a minus-one or minus-two-goal player to start. The minus-one-goal player can replace his substitute at the beginning, but not the middle, of any chukka. When he does so the score will not be altered even if his substitute was a minus-two.