



# Glowing mid-term report for English season as players embrace new rules

The ponies may be galloping but so is the season as the Queen's Cup and many other tournaments have already drawn to a close. It is therefore about time for a mid-season stock take and the evidence is pretty good.

Not only has the polo community, and here perhaps one thinks mainly of the patrons, responded magnificently in entering teams despite the ever rising cost, but they and all who watch and play have been rewarded with some really excellent polo.

It does seem that the stricter umpiring directed at those who turn the ball has worked beyond expectation and the backhand shot is becoming more the norm than the exception.

One rally of backhanders I saw recently would have been more in place on the tennis court than the polo field and how good is it when the backhander is picked up by a turning teammate who carries the ball unopposed to goal. Equally there seems to be less backchat between the players and the umpires as each now can be in no doubt as to where they stand.

There seems to be a bit of confusion still, however, regarding the "one tap" rule, the necessity for which I would love to see



The free-flowing Queen Mother's Centenary final at Guards has typified the exciting start to the English season, which has thus far been enhanced by the new rules

disappear. A player is challenged when an opponent is less than two horse lengths away, but not if that opponent is being ridden off by

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another player. The award of a hit from the spot rather than a throw in for breach of the rule seems to have worked well.

**On trial**

We cannot afford to stand still even in our traditionally conservative sport and thus some ideas to improve the game are

worth trialling, with a view to possible rule change in the future.

The first obvious focus is the line out, as it has been in rugby where changes have been made recently to speed up the game.

Should we, for example, go to the centre for a line out every time a goal is scored, having changed ends to the confusion of all?

What about a hit out from the back or 60 yard line by the team that has just been scored against to get everything moving again with the minimum delay? Is this fair and does it deny the ponies, or even some players, a chance to catch their breath?

Perhaps more seriously, should we look at the throw in when the ball has jumped the boards or

crossed the sideline off the stick?

Here, as has been successfully trialled at the RCBPC at low-goal level, a hit five yards inside the boards could be given against the side that hit the ball out. This would speed up play.

**Dangerous play**

There will always be concern about dangerous play leading to injury to both players or ponies.

Perhaps the increased use of the backhand may have an adverse effect and umpires must be aware that no player may ride into a backhand shot. Equally the player taking the shot has a duty of care to ensure that he does not hit straight into a player or pony already in a position. It is not always easy, but the umpire must decide who created the danger.

Another foul, which led to a serious accident recently, involved the careless use of the stick in the vicinity of another player. In this instance a player riding with another played a shot under the neck with the stick coming round to hit the other in the face. This is a serious foul and should lead to a very severe penalty and potentially a sending off for the remainder of the chukka or match. ❌

► Read more from Arthur at [www.poloimes.co.uk](http://www.poloimes.co.uk)

Photograph by Alec Whitby, Centaur



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

**This month's puzzle**

*A penalty two is taken and a defender stops the ball – then a teammate comes out through the goal immediately afterwards and hits the ball. What should the umpires do, if anything?*

**Last month's solution**

Jot down the incidents which may occur in a match which would cause you as the umpire to stop play immediately. *The first most obvious one is a foul. Play will also stop if any of the following occur: a player is clearly injured or a pony falls, a ball is trodden in, a pony is seen to be in distress or lame, a player carries the ball, the use of illegal equipment on the player or pony, or a pony shows blood. Finally play should stop immediately at the sound of the second bell or the first in the last chukka if teams are not tied.*