



Assistance from the sidelines can help umpires get more decisions right

Watching tennis and cricket in Australia recently I have been struck by how many times players correctly queried decisions made by the officials. We can deduce from this that even the most experienced officials make mistakes.

With the review system in these two sports, perhaps a fairer result is achieved, albeit at the expense of undermining the authority of the official.

We have not gone down this path in polo, with the exception being if an incident of abuse is recorded on DVD, the perpetrator may be liable to appear before a disciplinary board.

Following on from this, in football the linesman [one should probably now also include the lineswoman] has the power to influence the decision of the referee. In polo there is also a third man – the referee, who is probably as experienced if not more so than the umpires. Yet, up to now, the referee has had a very minimal part to play in the running of the match.

There is no question of undermining the two umpires, whose authority remains paramount, but changes are afoot to bring the referee more into the equation. This is made possible



Moves are afoot to increase the role of the referee (or third man), assisting the umpires more than at present in keeping control of difficult proceedings on the field

with the use of radios which are now mandatory for HPA official matches. Thus should the referee see an untoward action by a player off the ball, he will immediately inform the umpires and invite them to award a technical penalty against that player. Additionally

Changes are afoot to bring the referee more into the equation with the use of radios

he may consider that a particular player is working or abusing the umpires and this too should be reported to them for the appropriate action to be taken.

Umpire ratings

We have long toyed with the idea of asking teams to rate umpires, similar to a proposal put to the Football Association. In this suggestion, each team would grade the referees at the end of the season, with the bottom three officials relegated and replaced from a lower division.

Unfortunately we have found such a rigid system to be unworkable, not least because teams are reluctant to commit their view to paper. One also suspects that those rated highest are not necessarily the best, but those that give most favour to the team rating them.

Anyway, we have finally grasped the nettle and are reducing the size of the professional umpire group

to seven or eight, requiring a guaranteed commitment from those selected.

Riding etiquette

A study in Australia has concluded that horses don't run any faster if whipped – so why do it?

Most jockeys in this country would disagree and the whip will continue to be an integral part of their go-faster kit, although now in a fairly muffled form.

In polo we not only deploy a whip but also spurs. Most would argue that both are more for guiding the pony to the ball, rather than trying to induce extra speed. Nonetheless, in the wrong hands they make a fairly lethal cocktail, which is why we impose a restriction on length and use.

A player is forbidden, except in exceptional circumstances, to whip a pony when the ball is dead and in play may only strike twice and without intent to harm.

Spurs should be used sparingly and any that cause injury should immediately be banned and the player suitably reprimanded. If you are an inexperienced rider it is much better to ride without spurs as it is very easy to harm the poor pony inadvertently. ✕

► Read more from Arthur at www.poloimes.co.uk

Photograph by James Mullian



Play goes on until the whistle blows...

This month's puzzle

Extra time is to be played and goal posts widened. Where should play start and what other circumstances must be taken into account?

Last month's solution

What conditions must apply for a legitimate ride off? The conditions are spelt out in Rule 35 but particular note should be made of the angle of ride off. The rule is purposely not specific about this, as various factors must be taken into account, but it is the end result that matters; was the pony on the receiving end unbalanced? There seems to be a perception out there that a ride off at 45 degrees or under is okay. Not so, I say, as this angle is sure to be too steep.