

Consistency

by

J M GAWLEY

English Hockey Association

Level 3 Umpire Coach

All hockey people are concerned that there be consistency in the Rules of the Game - Indoors and Outdoors - with as few and infrequent changes as possible, and that the Rules be interpreted by umpires at all levels and in all countries in a consistent manner.

RULE CHANGES

Rule changes to reflect the development of the game are inevitable and can cause problems in interpretation for players, umpires and their respective coaches. Those problems should not persist if the groups, at whatever level of play from a club's lowest team to full international, talk to each other. This becomes especially important as player coaches find out, not unreasonably, how far they can "stretch" the Rules. All concerned should, of course, take note of the Rules Interpretations printed in the Rules Books and those issued by and within international federations and national associations, though not all of the latter do this in the same way nor necessarily in the same time frame.

UMPIRES

The charge of inconsistency is frequently levelled not just at the interpretation of Rule changes but also at umpires themselves. An umpire should always try to maintain the same interpretation of a Rule, no matter at what standard a game is to be played, provided the interpretation is fair and a reflection of the way the player coaches develop it. Umpire Coaches are well aware of the problem and do their best to help.

It is important that this consistency of interpretation be applied by all umpires, supported by both umpires in a game applying the same level of match and personal penalties for similar offences. Such consistency is a manifestation of umpiring co-operation. Nevertheless, no one person can ever be totally consistent in application. Consistency can vary simply with mood, let alone with conditions and with the nature of the partnerships in which umpires are involved. Try as a coach or umpire might, total consistency, either within a game or from game to game, is an ideal always to be sought but seldom if ever attained by those involved.

ADVANTAGE

Umpires MUST be flexible in their application of Advantage, for it is that, rather than interpretation, which may need to change from game to game, and it is this flexibility that might be seen by some as inconsistency. Even within an international tournament not all the teams, let alone their individual players, are of the same standard. An experienced and skilful international player is far more capable of "riding" a bad tackle and coming away with effective possession of the ball than an inexperienced club player. Conversely, the experienced international who breaches a Rule is more likely to be able to gain advantage from a breach than is the inexperienced player - and these comments apply down through all the levels of the game. Hence, although an umpire's determination that a breach has occurred will not change, the appreciation of the degree of advantage gained from it and hence the penalty to be applied will.

A balance has to be struck. Umpires must be able to "read" the game and adapt their application of Advantage according to the skills of the individuals as well as the teams who are playing. But that is not all. The sort of pitch in use has a marked impact on the game. Is it water-based synthetic turf, sand-filled synthetic turf, grass - wet, dry, smooth, bumpy, long - the variations are endless - shale or sand or even, as I once had, a pitch made of uneven paving stones?! What is the weather - dry? wet? blowing a gale and, if so, from which direction? sunny - in whose eyes is the sun shining? Is a synthetic turf pitch glaring in the sun? What are the pressures on the teams? Is this a full international? Is it to decide which team is to be promoted and which is to be relegated? Is it a friendly? How many spectators are there? Where and how close to the pitch are they? What is the balance of spectator support for each team? Is sponsorship money riding on the outcome of the game? Any or all

of these factors can influence the way the game is played and hence the reactions of the players and their coaches.

And, of course, the interaction of the two umpires with each other, especially if they have not umpired together before, can have a marked effect on the game. This can be particularly noticeable at international level where the umpires are under much greater personal stress than they might be in their "home" environments. Umpires have no-one to cover their mistakes - at least players who err may be substituted.

All these factors, and probably many more, affect umpiring decisions, and underline the need for umpires to be as fully briefed and prepared for their games as the players should be, not least by understanding what factors outwith the Rules of Hockey might influence a particular game.

SUMMARY

Interpretation of the Rules should change only to reflect how the game is being developed.

That is **CONSISTENCY**.

ADVANTAGE must be applied according to the oft-changing conditions in which any particular game is played.

The two together produce **FLOW**.