

Positioning

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INTRODUCTION

An umpire's positioning has certain significant aims: (1) to get the eyes to a place where they can work most efficiently, (2) to minimise physical movement while the eyes are actually functioning to enable the decision-making process and (3) to maximise the ability of the two umpires to work closely with each other, i.e. co-operation. A sound understanding of the game to help sensible anticipation of the phases of play by early movement to the position from which the next decision is likely to have to be made is therefore part of any umpire's basic skills. The umpires' positioning and movements were, and always will be, dictated entirely by those of the players. As the players develop new strategies and tactics, the umpires must learn to respond rapidly so as to permit further development of the game and exploitation of the Rules by the players without inhibiting fair play.

RESPONSES TO RULES CHANGES

Recent (2001) changes to the Rules provide that umpires now have less need for whistling and stopping of the game, thus allowing better flow and obviating an area of conflict between themselves and players. More importantly, umpires can find themselves with players on both sides of them and with attackers on the back-line regardless of defenders' positions. Just as players have many options for positional play so as to open up the game, so have umpires requirements to respond with fewer constraints than in the past.

Co-operation

Umpires can at times find players all around them, especially when operating within the 23m area.

THIS REINFORCES THE ONUS ON THE SUPPORTING UMPIRE TO WATCH FOR OFF-THE-BALL INCIDENTS, EVEN IN THE DIAGONALLY-OPPOSITE CORNER IN WHICH THE UMPIRE WHO IS "LIVE" ON THE BALL IS OPERATING. CO-OPERATION IS EVER-MORE IMPORTANT.

POSITIONING OPTIONS

In and Near the Circle

It is not always for the umpire to be ahead of play, especially within the 23m area, though that must remain a preference at least between the 23m lines. The umpire has the option, when play is moving towards and into the circle, to take up a position on the near side quadrant of the circle, at about 45 degrees from the nearer goalpost. How close to the circle, and whether to be in it and how far, will depend, of course, upon the number of players immediately involved in the situation and their positions. This perhaps radical position emulates that adopted by many Indoor Hockey umpires. It offers the advantages not only of having a clearer view of the goal mouth and what happens in front of it, of seeing better and more easily the action around a grounded goalkeeper but also of offering more options for movement in response to development of play within and close to the circle.

Penalty Corner Positions

The Penalty Corner consists of two elements - the **static** and the **dynamic**.

Static Element. In the static element, the involved players are stationary outside the circle, other than the striker having at least one foot outside the circle. If the penalty is well-taken, the ball will be in the net in barely one-and-a-half seconds from the time it is injected. The only major movement from players will be an attacker moving into the circle to strike the ball to goal, and defenders moving off into the circle from behind the line.

The Controlling Umpire. The umpire controlling the penalty should be so positioned that the only movements necessary as the penalty is taken and the ball is stopped and brought back into the circle are those of head and eyes.

Dynamic Element. If the penalty is not so well taken, or if the attacking team's tactics dictate that the ball will not be stopped initially but moved elsewhere before the stop and hit at goal, there is likely to be much movement both of attackers and defenders. This movement, the dynamic, will almost certainly demand movement from the controlling umpire, both to keep out of players' way and to maintain clear vision of events.

A likely movement from within defence is for the goalkeeper to go to ground. If this happens, it is imperative that the controlling umpire moves to maintain a clear view of the FRONT of the goalkeeper, given that the goalkeeper can well be the focus of activity that generates a further penalty. This is discussed in detail later.

Supporting Umpire. The supporting umpire's position at a colleague's penalty corner should be up to about 10 metres into the colleague's half and 10 to 15 metres infield. This allows for an opposite 45 degree view of the colleague's goal whilst also giving peripheral vision of the players on and beyond the halfway line and of any illegal substitutions. From here, decisions made by the controlling umpire in the circle can be verified and supported when required, and decisions can be made outside the top and left side of the circle (the controlling umpire's inside left channel) without demeaning the authority of the controlling umpire. Importantly, the supporting umpire is then well-positioned to recover to the right should the penalty corner change swiftly into attack, bearing in mind that proper control of one's own end of the pitch is an umpire's first priority. It should be noted that this advice has recently altered in response both to developments in the game and Olympic experience.

Corner Positions

Attacking set piece hits from the corner areas on both sides of the pitch invariably cause players to bunch in the circle, usually nearer the side facing the ball's origin. Given the open nature of play without offside, both umpires must exploit their movement options while keeping out of players' way.

Controlling Umpire. Umpires might still find back-line positioning useful at times but generally, especially for less-experienced umpires, a position on or behind the back-line can be more of a hindrance than a help in that, if players bunch, the umpire is trapped and unable to move infield so as to see clearly, especially when the goalkeeper goes to ground.

Given that the pre-match discussion between the umpires should have firmly established that the umpire who is "live" on the ball, the controlling umpire, may now no longer be facing all of play, but rather concentrating on the area around the ball and its potential players, the supporting umpire is responsible for all other aspects of play, such as off-the-ball contact and substitutions.

The ball is likely to go to one of 3 directions - (1) parallel to the back-line and into the circle (2) direct towards the top of the circle or (3) to a player positioned outside the circle and towards the 23m line who will receive the ball and pass it straight across to the other side of the pitch so as to change the direction of the attack.

To be able to see all this and be able to move to follow the next aspect of play, the umpire should consider taking up a position some 2 to 3 metres goal-side of the 23m line and 5m to 10m infield, facing the origin of the ball and keeping out of the way of players. This position will give a clear view of BOTH corner areas, as it will be slightly upfield of the main bunch of players in and near the circle, whilst allowing the necessary options for further movement. In particular, if the goalkeeper goes to ground, it is easy for the controlling umpire to move across and into the circle so as to see the front of the goalkeeper, knowing that the supporting umpire will deal with off-the-ball incidents that might develop out of vision.

Supporting Umpire. The far side of the pitch - a controlling umpire's inside-left channel - has always been vulnerable to questionable umpiring decisions, mainly because the controlling umpire, even when as far into the circle as is practicable, still tends to be a long way from where decisions are necessary and

often has to look through the backs of most of the players seeking to receive or play the ball. This situation can be largely remedied by the supporting umpire's moving down towards the colleague's 23m line and dealing with all, or nearly all, decisions outside the circle on that side of the pitch. This is particularly important for attackers' set piece hits - corners, sideline hits-in and free hits - but less so for defensive hits.

Nevertheless, a position reasonably close to the 23m line should still be achieved for defensive hits for it is in the inside-left channel that the previous attackers might resort to dubious tactics to break down play, thus to deny the defence the opportunity to launch an attack and too far away for the controlling umpire to see properly.

Proximity to Decisions

Umpires must be able to be reasonably close to where the action is taking place, especially in the circle, if their decisions are not only to be right but also convincing. It follows from this that, with play exploiting both width and depth of the pitch, they will not always be able to keep all the players within their peripheral vision but will need sometimes to run facing the back-line and thus unable to see much of the field. This underlines the need for an umpiring colleague, the support umpire, to be aware of the limitations of the controlling umpire's vision and to provide the necessary degree of co-operation, especially to deal with elements of misconduct.

Positional Adaptation in Response to Rules Changes

New Rules and the way that they are changing the game demand from umpires a great deal of mental as well as physical vision. They must think very carefully about what they can NOT see and be prepared to adjust their positioning accordingly. Such adjustment might need to be radical but it would probably be imprudent for umpires to make one sudden, major change to their old, instinctive positions. Better, then, that the adjustments be made in small steps - 2 or 3 metres in a game, perhaps - until comfortable operating positions can be found.

Hits from an Umpire's Right

Some umpires adopt a position relative to defensive set-piece hits, i.e. hits coming from their right, that clearly leave them vulnerable to being caught seriously out of position in the phase immediately following the hit.

Any set-piece hit to the defence, be it a hit-in, free hit or hit-out, is likely to be pounced upon by the opponents to mount an immediate attack. In umpiring, this is a worst-case situation in terms of anticipating what might happen next.

For a controlling umpire to be able to be in position in anticipation of such a reversal of play, and to minimise the relative speed of the ball in the umpire's sight-line, it is therefore advisable to take up a position some 3 to 5 metres (not more) goal-side of the hit that is to be taken from beyond the nearer 23m line or roughly opposite the origin of the hit if it is from within the umpire's 23m area. Indeed, if the defensive hit is from near the back of the 23m area, it might be preferable to adopt a position similar to that for a corner, thus to enable the umpire to move closer to the circle if play is reversed by the attackers.

Hits Coming from an Umpire's Left

Whenever a player is about to play the ball towards an umpire's right from anywhere on the field, be it in open play or from a set piece such as a free hit, the umpire MUST move quickly to the right to where the ball is likely to be aimed. It is no good waiting for the ball to be played - umpire movement must be in anticipation of the ball's movement. Where a good player considers what options are available when about to play the ball, and selects the best one, the umpire must also consider those options and move in anticipation of the worst one - that which will put the umpire under the greatest pressure. That is usually that the ball will move far into the umpire's half and be played by the deepest attacker. If the ball gets that far, the umpire will already be in position or nearly so, i.e. stationary or moving very slowly, and therefore unstressed and able to

make a calm decision. If the ball does not get that far, then the umpire has lost nothing and can merely readjust position without stress.

Back-line Positioning

As has already been noted, back-line positioning is fraught with possible difficulties for umpires, particularly for those less-experienced. The back-line position can be virtually forced upon an umpire who has moved ahead and in front of play as it advances to the circle, rather than allowing it to pass by as it reaches the area of the 23m line. Once on or behind the back-line, it can be difficult, if not impossible, for the umpire to regain a position in the circle, with a clear view into goal, without impeding the players. However, if the umpire is forced towards the back-line, the situation can be mitigated if, as play advances, the umpire turns to face across the field and steps back just a few paces towards the sideline. Play will thus develop in front of the umpire, who will now have options not only to move inwards to or outwards from the circle without stress, but also to move upfield or back towards the back-line, all so as to remain reasonably close to but out of the way of play.

The important point for umpires to remember is that, when the ball is in the circle, they **MUST** have a clear view of the goal and the goal-line. Being caught behind the back-line can deny such clear vision and could prove particularly challenging if the ball is stopped on the goal-line by a defender other than the goalkeeper - the umpire could find it hard to determine exactly how the ball was stopped and to justify any resulting decision, particularly if, for any reason, the supporting umpire has not moved in and upfield towards the controlling umpire's 23m line so as to support the decision, or is nearly unsighted.

The Grounded Goalkeeper

The goalkeeper may go to ground in open play or, quite often, when defending a penalty corner. When a goalkeeper goes down, facing away from the controlling umpire, it can be very difficult for that umpire to see what is happening in front of the body and might be too far from the support umpire for help to be relied upon from that source, even if that umpire has moved well upfield.

In open play, the controlling umpire has the problem of maintaining general position in the circle so as always to have a clear view of the goal mouth. Given that many of the penalties that accrue to either side in the circle involve the grounded goalkeeper, it is advisable that umpires consider the value of concentrating on the goalkeeper by abandoning "normal" position and moving very slightly upfield and possibly further infield so as to be able to see round and over the goalkeeper. Such repositioning is relatively easy at penalty corners, where the umpire is likely to need to move only a small distance from the initial static position.

It should be possible to see whether the goalkeeper is lying on the ball, shielding it with the body or stick, moving it with the hand or, alternatively, whether an attacker is playing the ball back into the goalkeeper's body in an unsafe manner, possibly in an effort to "con" a penalty stroke out of the umpire. Clearly, if the goalkeeper, in going down, clears the ball so that play develops elsewhere, the umpire can resume normal positioning.

The supporting umpire should, when play is in the controlling umpire's circle, move upfield so as to be able to offer convincing support to the controlling umpire. Once there, that umpire should have a better view of the situation described and be able to offer signals and help if asked by the controlling umpire. In these circumstances, the players will see how the umpires are supporting each other and gain confidence from the decisions made and hence be less likely to question them.

Upfield Recovery

It is natural that umpires who have moved up to a position to support the controlling umpire, especially at penalty corners, should be concerned about their ability to recover towards their own half of the pitch. This is particularly so if the defence is able to clear the ball to one of the defenders previously on or beyond the halfway line. In a penalty corner in particular, it would be rare to find

more than two players of the team attacking the penalty corner, other than a goalkeeper, in the supporting umpire's half of the field. Although there will be six defenders there, the ball can go to only one of them, and that player is likely to be tackled by only one opponent. It should therefore not be difficult for the umpire who has been in support, and is now the controlling umpire, to run fast so as to follow the player with the ball. Given that a player with the ball cannot (or should not be able to) run as fast as an umpire, the umpire should aim to reach the 23m line by the time the previous defence, now the attack, does so. In other words, the "tail-chase" is not to be feared, provided the controlling umpire is fit enough to run back and maintains presence of mind. The run back may be direct, i.e. towards goal; it is not necessary always to move towards the side of the pitch in such a situation. This situation demands, therefore, that the umpires must balance support positioning of their colleague with the ability to recover into their own halves.

And, of course, the previous controlling umpire, now the support umpire, should also track fast upfield in support.

The constant aim of both umpires should be that the distance between them, measured on an imaginary line drawn from goal to goal, should not exceed about 20 metres. This can be considerably shortened as umpires move infield, for there is less need to follow the old "hockey stick" movement outside the sideline.

Such proximity to each other will do much to enhance umpiring co-operation. This will be clear to players and thus increase their confidence in the quality of umpiring decisions.

SUMMARY

Umpires must understand the game and move in anticipation of play so as to be stationary, or nearly so, when making decisions.

For set piece hits coming from an umpire's end, that umpire should take up a position so as to be ready for any sudden reversal of play.

For open play or set-piece hits towards an umpire's right, immediate movement to the right is necessary to reach a position where the ball's arrival could put the greatest pressure on the umpire.

To enable a clear view of what is happening in front of a goalkeeper who has gone to ground facing away from the controlling umpire, that umpire should be prepared to move slightly upfield of or at least level with and close to the goalkeeper.

Support umpires must assist an "active" colleague who is facing towards the back-line and who is therefore unable to maintain sight of all of the players.

When controlling attacking set-piece hits from corner areas, control umpires should consider keeping upfield of the hits, near the 23m line, so as to maintain positioning options and retain a clear view of the goal-line.

Umpires must continuously study the options that changes to the Rules give to players and to themselves in positioning strategies and be flexible in adapting to them.

Supporting umpires must move upfield and possibly infield, towards the controlling umpire's 23m line, to give clear decisions in the controlling umpire's inside-left channel and to offer positive assistance at penalty corners.