

Practical Hockey Umpiring

A Simple Guide

by

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Why Umpire?

People play hockey to enjoy themselves. They want to win, and sometimes allow the will to win to overcome their pleasure in merely playing, but essentially, they still want to enjoy the game. Umpires, too, want to enjoy the game, albeit in a slightly different way from the players. But ALL involved, players and umpires, need to work together to achieve enjoyable games.

Fitness.

Just as players prepare themselves for games, so must umpires. As players rise in the level of their games, their preparation increases, involving not just pre-match warming up but often midweek and other training. Umpires need to match these preparations. At the very least, they need to be as fit as the players they are to umpire, albeit their fitness need not necessarily extend to the full range of physical flexibilities needed by players. Umpire at national and international level must pass the bleep test before being appointed.

Basic Preparation.

If you are going to umpire a hockey match, usually at the weekend, there are some basic preparations to carry out in the days preceding it.

Normally, the home team should contact you to confirm the time and venue of the match. Use this opportunity to find out what colours the teams will be wearing. And if the team liaison officer does not call you, you call the LO.

Then, if possible, contact your colleague. Decide what colours YOU will wear, to be different from the teams, whether you can share transport to the match or where and when to meet.

Make sure that your meeting is not less than 30 minutes before the match – for the bigger matches, such as 1st XI league/cup games, you may need to meet at the ground a good hour before the game.

And do your best to ensure that you will be able to remain with the teams AFTER the match, to join them in refreshment and to be able to talk about the game if asked to do so.

Appearance.

The umpires should LOOK like umpires - shirts of the same colour, properly pressed skirts or trousers, same colour socks for women and clean footwear appropriate to the surface on which the game is to be played.

If the umpires look smart, arrive in good time and can be seen by the players to be the third team making as great an effort to prepare for the match as they are doing, the players' confidence level in the umpires will be high before the game even starts.

Pitch Checks.

Check the pitch TOGETHER. If anything is wrong, e.g. holes in the goal nets, nets not properly secured, glass on the pitch or its surrounds, ask the home team Captain, whose responsibility it is, to deal with the matter.

Warm Up.

There is no need to do your own physical preparation together, as different people have different routines, but you SHOULD each have a proper warm-up routine. Again, the players will notice, especially if you do NOT have such a routine and start the match "cold". The warm-up should include aerobic and anaerobic elements.

Pre-Match Discussion.

Reach agreement on

- a. the areas of control (normally from the far edge of one's own circle diagonally to the nearer edge of the distant circle)
- b. who will start each half
- c. that the umpire in whose half the ball is NOT will end each half unless for a penalty corner in progress
- d. what response you will each give to balls in the air, noting the need for consistency of response from the two of you, and that this response will be a reflection of the likely skill level in the match
- e. what signal you will give if you need assistance
- f. what signal to give if you are unable to give assistance e.g. did not see the incident clearly enough to offer a sound judgement
- g. what signal to give if you need to meet
- h. how you will exchange signals at 2 minutes, one minute or half a minute before the end of each half
- i. how you will co-operate to penalise offences that your colleague has clearly missed, remembering that you should not blow for an offence by either side in your colleague's circle, nor should even signal for such an offence unless clearly asked
- j. co-operation for the control of penalty strokes
- k. how far upfield you will each move to support the colleague's penalty corners and inside left channel. In this latter instance, moving no further than the halfway line may be of little help to your colleague and will not give the players confidence in your teamwork. Be prepared, in other words, to move into your colleague's half to offer support but always with the caveat that your prime responsibility is your own half of the field. Movement upfield should not prejudice your ability to recover into your own end
- l. control of substitutes, remembering that, if there are no team benches, both teams must still substitute from the same side of the pitch at the halfway line
- m. when coloured cards are used, how to ensure that the colleague knows which player is being carded and, if possible what for
- n. any competition rules such as whether extra time and/or penalty strokes may be needed to settle the match
- o. your proposed response to external events, e.g. failure of floodlights, lightning with thunder within 3 seconds of the flash, misbehaviour by spectators, other players knocking-up within the overall pitch confines, etc.
- p. how your colleague on the back-line will signal, at your penalty stroke, if the ball is stopped on or behind the goal-line.

The Captains.

Call the captains together (specifically the captains, not anyone else) to toss up and to resolve any likely problems. Do this, if possible, at least 20 minutes before the match start, so that you do not interfere with the teams' warm-up routines.

If, for any reason, you will not be able to remain with the teams after the match, make sure that both captains are told. This latter should, if possible, be done during the week when confirming the match venue and time. Remember that it is a matter of courtesy to take post-match refreshment with the teams, and an equal courtesy to give as much warning as possible if you will not be able to.

Whistling & Signalling.

In the match, whistle clearly, with a single blast for each offence. A brief blast will suffice for "routine" offences, but a longer, harder blast for those offences that you consider to be either highly avoidable and leaning towards misconduct or intentional.

Use the correct signals and make them clear - for free hits and hits-in from the sideline, hold your arm relaxed at shoulder height, with the open palm at face height, and try to keep stationary or nearly so for the second-or-so that you hold the signal.

For signalling a penalty corner, use arms straight ahead of you, with open palms facing each other, but do NOT look at the goal (we all know where that is!) but rather at the miscreant and the offended player(s).

If you are a bit quick and award the penalty corner before seeing an injury, remember that you can not then permit any substitution other than for the injured defending goalkeeper - a matter for BOTH umpires to keep an eye on.

And if another penalty corner is awarded before the first is complete, the same rule applies. Exceptionally, of course, if a goalkeeper is suspended when the penalty corner is awarded, a substitute goalkeeper must be provided, either from one of the team's field players (who must then wear a helmet and change to a differently-coloured shirt) or from the team bench, in which case a field player must leave the field.

If you blow for an offence and are asked why NICELY, by all means signal the reason and maybe even explain briefly, but do not get into discussions with the players. Otherwise, there is no need to signal the reason for all offences. It is often helpful, however, to say "Play on" when signalling Advantage.

Avoid being "conned" by players into giving or changing decisions but, on the other hand, do not be afraid of changing a decision if you are sure that you got it wrong. Simply blow the whistle and give the appropriate signal, and ensure that the players are given time to re-orientate themselves. And by all means admit that you got it wrong if that will help calm the situation.

Be firm in your whistling and signalling and, when signalling, avoid looking at your feet or at the hand doing the signalling, otherwise this displays a lack of confidence that rapidly communicates itself to the players. In other words, keep your eyes on the players.

Ball out of Play.

If the ball goes out of play, remember that your responsibility is the pitch and what is happening on it. Do not divert your attention elsewhere. It is the players' responsibility to find a ball with which the match can proceed.

Within caged pitches, avoid constantly stopping the match if the ball goes out of play - it is the home team's responsibility to provide enough balls to allow the match to proceed with minimum delays.

On uncaged pitches it may be necessary to stop play if the ball travels a long way away - a not uncommon occurrence at "low level" games.

Injuries.

Do not overreact to injuries. If a player goes down hurt but play moves well away and the player is clearly conscious, wait until the next natural stoppage before stopping time for the injury to be dealt with.

On the other hand, if the injury seems to be serious or the player appears not to be conscious, stop play immediately and have the player dealt with.

Go and look at the injured player, when you do stop play, to be sure of the extent of the injury and, indeed, that the player is not feigning injury, but **DO NOT TOUCH THE INJURED PLAYER**. If you are a doctor or a trained first-aider, you may offer to help but do not do so unless asked. Restart either with a bully (but not within the circle or 15-metre area) or an appropriate penalty.

What to do if a Player is Bleeding.

If a player is bleeding, stop the game and arrange for the player to leave the field to have the wound dealt with, the bleeding contained and, if necessary, to change into unstained clothing. If the team is unable to substitute the player, wait until the player can return before restarting the game unless this would cause undue delay.

Misconduct & Personal Penalties.

Do not allow any form of misconduct, no matter how minor, to go undealt with.

Misconduct can take many forms but it is essentially intentional breaching of the Rules or unintentional breaches that have the same effect. It can range from gently "leaning" on a player with the ball to barging a player off the ball, hitting the stick or even striking a player.

The important thing to remember is that any individual who intentionally breaches a rule - any rule - must suffer a personal penalty, in addition to any match penalty that may be awarded. This may also apply to unintentional but serious breaches, e.g. dangerously taking the stick over the head of an opponent in a close-quarters situation.

A personal penalty can range from a cautionary word (never a wiggling finger!) through a formal warning with a Green Card to permanent suspension with a Red Card.

It may not always be appropriate to award the personal penalty at the time of the offence, as Advantage is normally a prerequisite, but it must be done at the next convenient stoppage.

Do not shirk dealing with intentional offences, no matter how minor they might be. If you do, the naughtier players will recognise and capitalise on your weakness and control of the match will rapidly deteriorate.

Remember that a penalty corner awarded outside the circle but inside the 23m area is for an INTENTIONAL offence (not a bad but unintentional one) by the defence, so MUST be accompanied by some form of personal penalty. Such penalty need not necessarily be a card but should be visible to all, albeit it could be no more than a verbal caution for which there might be no need for time to be stopped.

Questioned Decision.

If you make a significant award, e.g. penalty stroke, goal, that clearly causes a great deal of doubt, stop time and consult your colleague. Your colleague cannot say "Yes, that was a goal" or "No, that was not a stroke", but CAN, when asked, tell you what was or was not seen. You can then confirm or change your decision. But remember - it is YOUR decision, not your colleague's. The very fact of the umpires conferring to determine a questioned, serious decision will give the players confidence that you are acting as a team, whatever the outcome of your discussion.

Advantage.

If you are signalling Advantage, do so clearly and with the proper signal. Remember that the signal is primarily to your colleague, to indicate that you have seen and are dealing with an offence. Nevertheless, it is of value to the players and there is no reason why you should not call "play on" if it will help keep the game flowing. If you do play Advantage, the player to whom you give the advantage must have room to move, with no opponents within playing distance, and time in which to decide what to do next.

When playing advantage in or near the circle to the attack, do not be too hasty to whistle.

On the other hand, remember that the only advantage to the defence within the 23m area is to have undisputed possession of the ball, which can usually be obtained only with a free hit, quickly awarded.

In deciding how to play Advantage, consider: what would the offending teams' captain LEAST like you to do - play on, or whistle and apply a penalty? Playing on for Advantage is, in other words, a penalty in itself.

The 5 Metre Rule.

Be firm throughout the game in ensuring that the 5 metre Rule is applied, thus to ensure that all opponents are at least 5 metres from free hits and hits to restart after the ball has gone out of play ("set pieces"). This will avoid much obstruction and physical interference and make your job much easier.

Be equally firm in ensuring that ALL players except the striker keep 5m clear of the ball when a free hit is awarded to the attack within 5m of the circle. To assist in this, the Rules provide for a dotted line 5m from the circle, but it could take some time - years, possibly, in some cases - for this line to appear on all pitches.

Opponents often intentionally remain closer than 5m to free hits and other set pieces so as to delay the taking of the hits. This is breaking down of play, and should be handled as Misconduct. To deal with it, you might elect to call for a 10m advance of the free hit (but remember that this applies only to free hits, not to hits to restart play), and/or even formally to warn the offender(s) with a Green card.

If you award a 10m advance, the team taking the hit has the option of whether to take the award and, if so, how far to go.

Taking a Free Hit.

When you award a free hit, the ball need not necessarily be precisely where the offence took place - usually within 5m suffice will suffice - but it must be stationary.

When awarding a hit to the attack into the circle within the 23m area however, and especially within 5m of the circle, make very sure that the ball is put where the offence took place.

Remember that penalty hits and hits to restart play **MUST** move at least a metre before a player of the same side can play the ball. And the striker, of course, must not remain within playing distance of the ball if an opponent then attempts to play it. If either part of the Free Hit Rule is breached, reversal of the penalty is normally appropriate. If the Hit-in / Corner Rule is breached, a Free Hit should be awarded and consideration given to cautioning the player(s) concerned.

Penalty Stroke.

When controlling a penalty stroke, stand behind and slightly to the right of the striker. You will thus be able to see both striker and defending goalkeeper and, importantly, have your colleague within vision.

Positioning.

In positioning yourself for open play, try to move so as to keep up with play.

Move upfield to support your colleague, but not so far that you cannot recover to your own end.

Whenever you see one of your colleague's defenders with the ball, expect the ball to be played towards your end, and **START MOVING** to your right! If the ball is stopped before it reaches the attacker nearest your back-line, then you will have lost nothing but, if it does reach that player, at least you will already be in a good position to deal with the next phase of play.

Do not be afraid to move into your circle but avoid getting closer than about 5m to where the ball is being played. If you do get closer, your head and eyes will drop and you will lose peripheral vision and hence be unable properly to judge advantage.

When play is in the circle, you should also be in the circle or very close to it if play is on your side of it.

You should also be able to anticipate the goalkeeper's going to ground to defend the goal and, if this happens, to be able to move round so as to see what is happening in front of the goalkeeper. Note that the grounded goalkeeper may not necessarily be cause of problems but will probably be their focus.

Being Convincing.

It is difficult to give convincing decisions if you are a long way from where the incident occurs, or if you do not appear to be confident in what you are doing. Sometimes you will need to **MAKE** a decision from a long distance, but you should move quickly nearer the incident when you actually give the required signal. **To convince, you must be convincing.**

Be smart, be confident, but avoid being overbearing. And do concentrate all the time - do not allow yourself to be distracted by off-pitch incidents or by chat from the players.

Finally . . .Umpiring, like many things in life, is an Art. It is not actually all that difficult but, with practice, can be improved upon and always enjoyed.

Have fun!