

The Raised Ball and Danger

by
J M GAWLEY
English Hockey Association
Level 3 Umpire Coach

INTRODUCTION

No player should ever be put into a position of self-defence against a ball put into the air at any height, be it 15 or 50 centimetres. A player having to face a ball approaching in the air should have a clear view of the full flight of that ball and also have time either to move out of its way, or to play or attempt to play it in a legitimate and safe manner. So far as Goalkeepers are concerned, they deliberately put themselves "into the firing line" but are equipped to do so. Nevertheless, even they can be forced into self-protection rather than protection of their goal by dangerously-raised balls.

INTENTIONAL LIFT

Lift at an Opponent

If the ball is intentionally put into the air at an opponent at any height anywhere on the pitch in contravention of Rule 13.1.1 f: ("*Players shall not play the ball dangerously or in such a way as to be likely to lead to dangerous play*") and Rule 13.1.3b ("*Players shall not intentionally raise the ball so that it lands directly in the circle*") the player who raises the ball is in breach of the Rule. Furthermore, the shot may be dangerous or likely to lead to danger. Such a shot may legitimately be defended by the hand in accordance with Rule 13.1.2 a. ("*Players shall not stop or catch the ball with the hand. There is nothing to prevent players using their hands to protect themselves from dangerously-raised balls.*") That statement stands despite the fact that Rule 13.1.3 a ("*Players shall not intentionally raise the ball from a hit except for a shot at goal.*") permits a shot at goal to be made at any height. A raised shot has to be made at **goal**, not deliberately at a defender standing either in goal or between the goal and the striker.

Tackling Lift

There is nothing in the Rules to prevent any player in possession of the ball from lifting it over the stick of an opponent to resist a tackle, be it in the outfield, in the circle, or entering the circle, provided that the condition of Rule 13.1.3 b ("*Players shall not intentionally raise the ball so that it lands directly in the circle.*") is met. The last point is important: where the ball is lifted in such a manner over an opponent's stick and enters the circle while still in the air, there is NO offence.

Tactical Lift

When a ball is deliberately raised in a legitimate manner (normally a scoop or flick) anywhere on the pitch the umpire should decide upon its merits as advised in the Rules Interpretations of the Rule Book. This form of play is used for tactical purposes, often to reverse the opposing defence. In general, it is fair to say that players who raise the ball in this manner consciously try to avoid danger to anyone in the flight path of the ball. The umpire is therefore seeking reasons why such a raised ball SHOULD be penalised. A player receiving a dropping ball should be given time and space in which safely to do so without real or threatened interference from an opponent. (Rule 13.1.3 c "*Players shall not approach within 5 metres of a player receiving a falling aerial ball until it has been played and is on the ground.*") Note that the ball, having been intentionally lifted in this way, may not fall into the circle.

ACCIDENTAL LIFT

On the other hand, the ball is often raised accidentally, usually by a stick interfering with the flight of the ball, rather than by any deliberate attempt to play it. In such circumstances, the ball is likely to fly upwards in an unpredictable trajectory, thus being both dangerous in itself and likely to cause danger. A ball hit some 15 cm in the air into a crowded circle is an example. The Umpire, therefore, is likely to be seeking reasons why this raised ball should NOT be penalised but should wait to determine whether there is actual danger.

INTERPRETATION

No matter where on the field the ball is raised, and no matter what the circumstances of the lift, the umpire must always judge whether a player has been genuinely endangered in any of the ways described. Umpires should be on their guard against players who simulate ducking out of the way of raised balls simply to try to "con" them into thinking that such a ball is dangerous. Similarly, umpires should not be misled by defenders, often in goal, who allow themselves to be hit by the ball so as to be able to claim that the shot was dangerous.

The same standards of judgement must be applied wherever and whenever the ball is raised. It is therefore important that umpires recognise, and agree before each game according to the level and playing conditions of that game, what is the likely distance inside which those particular players are likely to have to defend their own persons instead of playing the ball properly. Other factors need to be considered for raised shots at goal, however.

RAISED SHOTS AT GOAL IN OPEN PLAY

The goal is there to be shot at. The goalkeeper is well-protected and has no grounds for protest about high shots at goal. So far as any other defenders are concerned, if they stand in the goal to defend high shots, they must accept the penalty if the ball hits them contrary to Rule 13.1.2 b ("Players shall not intentionally stop, kick, propel, pick up, throw or carry the ball with any part of their bodies."). They can be said, perhaps, to have arrogated to themselves the duty of goalkeeper without having goalkeeper's privileges. High shots include hits, flicks and scoops.

Having said this, it must nevertheless be remembered that no player should ever be put to the necessity of self-defence, and that includes goalkeepers. Although properly protected, goalkeepers can still be injured by balls projected at them from so short a range and in such a manner that they are unable to adopt a naturally protective posture.

In high level games, with physically fit, young, skilled players, it is possible that the minimum safe distance for a rising shot is about 3 metres. In less skilled games, that distance will probably be not less than 9 metres and could be more. In all cases, the distances may increase dependent on other circumstances, not least whether the players defending the goal have a clear view of the whole flight of the ball from the moment that it is first propelled upwards. Judgement of what is dangerous must necessarily be subjective. Perhaps the soundest advice for the umpire is to consider that any raised ball is dangerous unless proved otherwise. Players close to or near the line of a shot at goal must have time and room to react safely and play the ball legitimately.

In general, it is probably fair to say that a rising ball that would not be permitted on the grounds of safety in the outfield should not be permitted, for the same reasons, in the circle, whether for a shot at goal or, indeed, for clearing a shot at goal - a goalkeeper's kick, for example. The exception is that the intentionally raised hit is permitted in the circle for a shot at goal; otherwise the same parameters apply.

Note, however, that this advice is concerned mainly with high shots in OPEN PLAY. In these circumstances, there are usually few players in the circle and, as often as not, the shot is made in a one-on-one situation. During Penalty Corners, where numbers of players are required by the Rules to operate within the circle, other considerations apply, all concerned primarily with **Safety**.

Summary

During open play, rising shots at goal are permitted provided the defending players have time to defend the goal rather than themselves. No player should EVER be permitted to raise the ball, anywhere on the pitch, that is dangerous to other players. If defenders other than goalkeepers dressed in protective clothing or helmeted "kicking backs" (who have goalkeepers' privileges in the circle), elect to defend their goal, then a shot that would have been permitted against a fully-equipped goalkeeper should be permitted against them. And if defenders other than goalkeepers (Rule 13.2.1b) stop or play the ball with their bodies or sticks above their shoulders, they should be penalised unless they were endangered.

RAISED SHOTS AT GOAL AT PENALTY CORNERS AND FROM CORNERS

Players in the Circle

The Penalty Corner demands a maximum of 5 defenders behind their back or goal-line and places no limit on the number of attackers round the circle, though in practice the attackers usually number six or seven. There can thus be twelve or so players in the circle during the conduct of a Penalty Corner. For a Corner, and for other forms of Hit-in and Free Hit to the attackers where there has been a delay in play so as to allow players to gather in and near the circle, there is no limit to the numbers of players who may be in the circle.

Although hits to the attack from the area of corner flags (corners, hits-in & free hits) are taken in open play, they are considered here with the Penalty Corner as likely to cause crowding within the circle.

It can thus be seen that any ball raised into or within the circle in such circumstances has a great potential for danger. Such crowding underlines the need for umpires to judge whether players close to or in the flight path of a raised ball have time properly to react to it. This is not to say that all raised balls in the circle are dangerous, nor that balls raised unintentionally into the circle are necessarily dangerous, but merely to indicate the potential for danger and hence the need for acute awareness and observation by the umpire.

Penalty Corner

The defenders (including the Goalkeeper) are prohibited from deliberately raising the ball from a hit within the circle, or indeed outside it - Rule 13.1.3 applies.

The attackers, however, MAY deliberately raise the ball from a hit or other type of shot in the circle, but only for a shot at goal - not for a hit across the circle, for example. The one caveat to this permission is that the FIRST hit at goal at a Penalty Corner must comply with Rule 15.2 I (*"If the first shot at goal is a hit, the ball must cross the goal-line at a height of not more than 460mm (the height of the backboard) for a goal to be scored, unless it touches the stick or body of a defender."*) Generally, the ball that is raised in the circle has a possible element of danger. But remember that any player may raise the ball over the stick of an opponent to resist a tackle.

Once the first hit at goal in a Penalty Corner has been made, all subsequent hits may be at any height consonant with safety, as already described. However, still with the Penalty Corner, any other stroke to raise the ball may be made at **any** time, with no limit being placed on the height of the ball at any part of its flight. The only caveat on these forms of shot - usually scoops or flicks - is that of safety. In this context, if a defender in a normal stance is within 5 metres of the first shot at goal which has been flicked and is hit by the ball below the knees, a penalty corner should be awarded. If the defender is hit above the knee, a free hit should be awarded to the defending team. And let us remember that the Penalty Corner Rule - specifically those sections applying to the first hit and the need first to stop the ball on the ground - ceases to apply if the ball goes beyond 5 metres from the circle before re-entering it (Rule 15.2 (*"If the ball travels more than 5 metres from the circle, the penalty corner rules no longer apply"*)).

The Scooped Ball

The ball that is flicked or scooped from near the inside edge of the circle so that it goes high over all heads and falls so that it will enter the goal just below the crossbar is not very likely to be dangerous when falling; the player(s) in the goal-mouth will see the ball raised, will see it during its flight, and will have time to decide how to defend the falling ball. They therefore have no excuse for playing the ball with their sticks whilst it is above their shoulders, for hitting the ball away in a dangerous manner, nor for using any part of their body to stop the ball. Only if the flick or scoop is at very short range, or if there are players in the line of sight between striker and goal, might the striker be penalised, and then usually only if the ball is still rising or if it is so low throughout its flight as to be obscured, for the receiver, by other players.

Umpires should remember that the same conditions for dealing with a dropping ball apply for shots at goal as elsewhere on the pitch i.e. the player receiving the ball must

be given time and space (5 metres) in which to receive it safely, i.e. the receiving defender should not be harried by a close opponent.

The Rising Shot

Having accepted the caveats noted above for the Penalty Corner, let us broaden thought to embrace the crowded circle. The same considerations previously mentioned still apply, i.e. the goal is there to be shot at, and defenders who arrogate to themselves the duty of goalkeeper must accept the penalty if they prevent a goal other than legitimately with their sticks. But, given the crowding already discussed, it is even more important that players defending any raised ball, regardless of its height, should have a clear view of the ball's trajectory and have time either to remove themselves from its path or to play or try to play the ball legitimately. If they do not have such time, the ball raised at them must be considered dangerous and penalised immediately. But umpires should be on their guard against players who deliberately allow themselves to be hit by the ball so as to be able to claim that the lift was dangerous.

It is the **rising** ball that is most likely to cause most danger, either because it can strike a player's body, where its energy is likely to be absorbed, or because it can touch part of a stick and fly off unpredictably, with no loss of energy, to hit another player.

Summary

When the circle is crowded, such as at Penalty Corners and for hits from near the corner flag areas, there is a high potential for danger from any raised ball. Umpires must be alert to the risks involved but should not overreact merely because the ball is in the air or the body of a defender in the goal is struck by the ball. They should instead consider whether players have the necessary time and distance to avoid physical contact with the raised ball in favour of playing or attempting to play it legitimately, and not flinch from applying the appropriate penalty if avoiding action could have been taken.

The necessity for the first HIT at goal at a penalty corner not to cross the goal-line at a height greater than 460mm should also be borne in mind.