

Umpire Preparation

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When umpires meet on the day of a match it is important that, before they start the match, they discuss and agree certain points that will affect their ability to exercise effective control. Their very appearance at the pitch, arriving in good time, preparing themselves physically, looking smart, similarly dressed, and displaying self-confidence, is the beginning of this process.

As they carry out their physical warm-up, they should check the ground together. They can then go over the necessary details, possibly in the form of a check-off list that follows.

Ground checks should include ensuring that markings are correct and visible, where any soft or difficult patches are for players and umpires, that flag-posts are properly positioned and are of a safe and correct height (1.2 to 1.5 metres) (and fitted with flags not more than 30cm square) and that the goals are in good order, i.e. upright, nets in good condition (have an official or the home team captain arrange to mend them if necessary) and secured to the posts at sensible close intervals (not more than 15 cm) with the sideboards secured behind and not projecting either side of the uprights.

Umpires should, in addition, be aware of other factors that might affect their performance - where the sun is, pitch glare, wind and/or rain into the eyes of a bespectacled umpire, where and how many spectators there are and how close to the pitch, whether special competition rules apply to the match and, of course, what specific pressures there are on the teams involved and their likely effect on play.

The list might look more formidable than it really is. In practice it takes only a short time to cover but it is essential that the points should be agreed or noted, no matter how often the umpires have previously operated together as a pair.

1. Agree on the type of whistle to be used and that both are of the same tone. Check spare whistles. Ensure that there will not be a clash with nearby match whistles.
2. Agree on the signals to be exchanged to start each half and who will actually start. If there is a Judges' table, the umpire nearest the table normally starts, and the timing of each half and half-time is done by a timekeeper.
3. Agree on the signals to be exchanged at 2, 1 or half-a-minute before the end of each half and what action to take if you disagree.
4. Agree who will end each half. Normally, a good guide is that it should be the umpire in whose half the ball is NOT. Note that the controlling umpire of a penalty corner in progress at the end of a half should blow for the end of that half except where there is a separate timekeeper.
5. Agree on the signals for stopping and restarting time and, if necessary, for checking that the timekeeper is ready. Remember that team managers/coaches may also be timing the match, so avoid "secret" stops. Whistle and signal whenever you stop time. Check whether competition rules dictate the length of each half and of half time.
6. Agree on signals and action to be taken for incorrect substitution. Remember that, even though team managers or coaches may effect substitution procedure, ultimate responsibility rests with the team captains and thence with the umpires. Ensure that, at penalty corners, the "support" umpire is alert to incorrect substitution.
7. Use the correct Advantage signals and, if it would help, call "play on".
8. Agree how you will signal to each other if you need an urgent discussion and if you are unable to offer help if the "control" umpire looks for a signal concerning an offence that you did not see.
9. Agree a colleague's position and signals in support of a penalty corner.
10. Agree a colleague's position at a penalty stroke, what is to be looked for and how it is to be signalled if something is wrong, and how either of you will signal a need to consult.
11. Agree on the dividing line between each umpire's prime area of control and how control will be exercised in the 5-metre area of the sidelines.

12. Agree the policy for signalling and whistling in one's colleague's prime area of control.
13. Agree on who will deal with off-the-ball incidents, e.g. that the umpire from whom play is going away will normally take action. Agree also the timing of such action relative to the state of play, advantage, etc.
14. Agree the action to be taken in the event of Misconduct and when that action should be taken relative to play, advantage and so on, and the level of personal penalty to apply for different types of offence.
15. Agree on action to be taken with the raised ball, considering the circumstances in which it is lifted, where it will land and the experience/skills of the players.
16. Agree, if not done in the days preceding the match, what colours to wear so as to be different from the teams and their goalkeepers, and to be visible against the background.
17. Agree on the policy for inspection of players' equipment, with emphasis on safety, if this is not handled by an independent official.
18. Agree whether coloured cards are to be used, especially if one's colleague is not an appointed umpire, or if a special disciplinary code is applicable. How will the umpires indicate the cards to each other and to the judge? Where should suspended players be sent? To the table if there is one or to the corner by nearest the appropriate umpire. If indoor, have proper facilities been provided for suspended players? Remember that cards are not MANDATORY for cautioning or suspending players, but are useful. Keep cards in separate pockets. Ensure that you BOTH keep a written record of when and to whom cards are awarded, length of temporary suspensions (yellow cards) and brief reasons for the awards.
19. Check that the captains are wearing clearly visible armbands and remember that they may be on the substitutes bench if not suspended.
20. Agree on any additional rules applicable to the game by competition rules, e.g. extra time, "golden goal", penalty stroke competition.
21. At half-time, review the conduct of the game and that you are still "in tune" with each other, and ensure that you both have the same record of goals scored and cards awarded.
22. Agree on the circumstances that might cause the cancellation, postponement or abandonment of the match, e.g. no goalkeeper, bad weather (especially electrical storm in the vicinity), bad light, too few players to start. Agree also HOW you will deal with this matter.
23. Agree on mutual support positioning to deal with low sun, pitch glare, etc., and whether this might affect prime control areas.
24. Agree on counting each team at the beginning of each half and before the restart after a penalty stroke if the teams have moved towards their benches for drinks, etc.
25. Discuss any recent rule or competition rule changes and any interpretations that may currently be contentious or about which you are unsure.
26. Do NOT reveal to the teams who will operate at which end until the teams have made their own decision.
27. Finally, if one end is going to be easier to operate in than the other, WIN THE TOSS!