

HOCKEY UMPIRING TOP TIPS and GUIDANCE

by

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World Cup and Olympic Games Panel, 1975 to 1995

Please find a series of umpiring tips for umpires at all levels of the game based on my own experiences over the past forty years of my umpiring, together with my observations of umpires in recent times.

WHISTLE

I have noticed during the past couple of seasons the habit creeping in with certain umpires, some of whom are quite senior, of keeping the whistle in the mouth. A lot of things relating to umpiring involve developing good habits, but this is not a good habit for the following seven reasons :

- 01. It looks awful. The FIH are concerned about a number of umpiring issues and “**Presentation**” is certainly one of them. Moving round the pitch with a whistle in your mouth looks just like the umpire has a dummy in the mouth and it gives completely the wrong impression to players and spectators.*
- 02. It is a well known medical fact that babies breathe through their noses, but children and adults breathe through their mouths. Keeping the whistle in the mouth increases the risk of the umpire blowing the whistle accidentally while simply breathing normally.*
- 03. The umpire could swallow the whistle!*
- 04. The umpire may blow the whistle too soon and inadvertently spoil a potentially good advantage. Already this season I have seen a good national league umpire do precisely that no less than three times within ten minutes in one match.*

05. *Umpires are being encouraged more and more as part of their match management skills to **talk** to players. **If** the whistle is kept in the mouth, then the umpire cannot talk to the players. This season I have observed one instance where an umpire attempted to talk to a player while he still had the whistle in his mouth and that created quite the wrong impression.*
06. *The whistle could drop out of the umpire's mouth onto the pitch and while the umpire is trying to pick it up and recover the situation, that umpire will of necessity have to take his eyes off the players which is not good practice. I have seen this happen this season in more than one top match. It was quite embarrassing for the umpire.*
07. *There is a view that it looks arrogant. This may or may not be true, but most importantly it certainly does not convey the correct image to the players.*

The solution is quite simple and it is to have your whistle on a lanyard or nylon cord with the lanyard or cord attached to your wrist. If the whistle is then held down by the umpire's side until it is needed, then this looks better and gives the umpire time to bring the whistle up to the mouth and consequently reduces the risk of blowing too early. The other negative points about keeping the whistle in the mouth are therefore eliminated. Tie your spare whistles on lanyards as well and keep them in a pocket.

The Ball in the Air

This is probably the worst umpired rule in hockey and the most inconsistently applied. The interpretation is as follows :

Most importantly THINK DANGER and NOT lifted.

There are three areas to consider.

01. The take of zone when the ball is lifted into the air -- The player putting the ball in the air has a responsibility to make sure that it goes up in a safe manner and clear of any opponents. If it does not, then the umpire should blow the whistle and award a free hit against the player raising the ball and that free hit is taken from the spot where the ball left the ground. On most occasions nowadays the ball is likely to be safe when it goes up.

02. *While the ball is in the air -- Players are not allowed to play the ball with their stick above the shoulder, i.e. "tennis smash type" shots are not permitted and, depending on the circumstances, such action may warrant a yellow card and inside the defending twenty three metre area a penalty corner would then be the appropriate decision.*

03. *The landing zone -- This is the area which is frequently the most contentious and controversial and where even good umpires sometimes have difficulties! The team that puts the ball into the air has the prime responsibility for ensuring that it is safe and that no danger arises when the ball is landing on the ground. Firstly, to this end, the player arriving **first** in the landing zone to try to receive the ball sensibly and within the rules should normally be given priority. At this point all opposing team players must remain five metres (which is almost six yards!!) away from the player receiving the ball until that particular player "has received the ball, has it under control and it is on the ground" (to quote from the current rule book as of 01-01-2011). Secondly, if the ball is landing between two or more players of opposing teams, then the umpire has to decide and judge which player was there first and penalise his opponent as may be necessary. Thirdly, if the ball is landing between two (or more) players of different teams who were both in the landing zone at the same time, then the umpire blows in favour of the team that is the opposite one to the team who put the ball in the air. Frequently, but not now exclusively, the decision will go in favour of the defender. In all cases the good umpire will need to be positioned well, scanning to see the disposition of the players in the landing zone and also those moving into the landing zone and will blow early to prevent any danger or accidents preferably when the aerial ball is its highest point during its trajectory so that all players have full confidence in the umpire's ability to reach the correct decision and prevent (serious) injury. The alertness of the umpire to the various possible scenarios and the timing of the whistle are critical together with a astute reading of the game. Sometimes with good coaching an aerial pass may go to a "forward" who is in space but a "defender" opponent moves towards the landing ball in order to try to "persuade" the umpire to give him the free hit. In these circumstances the decision should go to the attacking team and it may also be appropriate to warn the defender about his future conduct. The good umpire will "manage" these situations with appropriate use of the voice and / or coloured cards may be necessary.*

04. *It is pertinent to remember that perceived DANGER from an aerial ball is affected and influenced by three factors, namely (a) the proximity of the opposing player, (b) the height of the ball off the ground (Please do remember that this is NOT indoor hockey!) and (c) the speed or velocity of the ball. If the ball is hit or propelled at high speed and the opponent raises his stick in "self defence", then the player propelling the ball into the air is the one who should be penalised.*

05. *When considering what penalty to impose against and just how strict to be with any player who plays the ball above the level of his own shoulder, it is essential that the umpire considers*

the **intent** of that player together with the state of the match and the disposition of the players. Above all use **common sense** and be **consistent**. If the player receiving the ball is trying to do something legitimately within the rules and but inadvertently breaches them by a few inches, then he should be treated with more sympathy than the player who behaves either in a reckless manner or one designed to stop the opposition gaining a clear advantage and / or preventing a goal-scoring opportunity. In the latter instances the award of a yellow card is a distinct possibility. Whenever possible, the umpire should use his voice to explain his decision and interpretation of a particular instance or circumstance.

COMMUNICATION

(including stopping time and working with tables and Technical officials)

In recent years it has become common place for a third official to be appointed to hockey matches. This third official has been given various names including Technical Delegate (now out of date), Tournament Director (TD), Technical Officer (TO), Match Delegate (MD) and most recently Match Official (MO). The duties of the MO vary depending on the seniority of the particular match. At higher levels the MO has the responsibility of “controlling” the respective team “bench personnel”. At lower levels the MO may simply be someone who records the goals as they are scored and any coloured cards.

In all cases the MO will also keep the time and both umpires need to be aware of this.

Both umpires need to keep in constant communication with the MO. The MO may be able to help the umpires on occasions and at the very least the MO should be a reliable witness to anything that occurs on or off the pitch relating to the particular match.

Whenever there is a stoppage in play during a hockey match, as well as communicating to each other that they are stopping the time, the umpires must indicate that clearly with a loud whistle and a very clear signal and concisely to the MO so that the MO knows precisely how much stoppage time to add on at the end of each half. Umpires must be really positive about doing this so that there is absolutely no doubt.

It has been known for the MO to be distracted or even doze off!! Consequently it is essential that the umpires have eye contact with the MO as well as with each other when stopping and also when re-starting the match at any point. It is vital that the umpires use a clear loud whistle so that there is no confusion. It is also important that the umpires make the correct signal clearly and demonstratively for stopping and re-starting the match.

When the umpires issue any coloured card, they make it clear to the table the colour and ensure that the relevant player turns to the MO as well as the other umpire to show the shirt number.

It also helps if the umpire indicates to the MO just how long a player is suspended for as they or their coach invariably ask how long!

At higher levels the MO has the power to issue yellow cards to team members on the bench or remove them from the playing area altogether. The MO may have “control” over all those on the bench listed on the Team Sheet.

At the conclusion of the match, the last thing the umpires have to do is to check the match sheet carefully before they sign to make absolutely certain that all cards recorded have been recorded accurately and that the score is correct. Mistakes have been made and that is most embarrassing!!

Pre MATCH PREPARATION for HOCKEY UMPIRES

Proper and thorough preparation is vital if success is to be achieved. If the preparation is poor, then the umpiring performance is almost certain to be equally poor.

FAILING TO PREPARE IS PREPARING TO FAIL!!

Preparation for a particular match or tournament event may begin several days or even weeks before that event. It continues, changing emphasis and intensity, right up to the whistle that begins the match.

Each individual umpire will have his / her own routine in the days leading up to the match and indeed also during those last few hours and minutes before the match starts.

In their match preparation both umpires will need to consider the following :

- 01. Physical fitness (training)*
- 02. Kit, including appropriate footwear for the surface, shirts, pullovers, whistles, coloured cards, etc.*
- 03. Contact with colleague and any Match Officials, Assessors, Coaches, etc. in plenty of time prior to the match. As soon as you receive your particular appointment(s), contact your colleague(s) and have a brief discussion about when and where you will meet prior to the match. Also discuss shirt colours but remember to bring alternatives just in case one or both of the teams decide to change their shirt colours. It has happened and you certainly do not want to be taken by surprise and embarrassed!*

04. *Contact with the home team's representative.*
05. *Directions to the match venue and post match refreshments venue if different. Always allow sufficient time for travel.*
06. *The relevance of the particular match and any necessary information about the two teams.*
07. *Anything else which is sensible, appropriate and helpful.*

Both umpires will need to have an organised routine.

PRE MATCH DISCUSSION WITH HOCKEY UMPIRING COLLEAGUE

It is essential that the two umpires act together as a team before, DURING and after the match. They must co-operate sensibly and unselfishly in order to operate effectively and efficiently as a proper unit. So that they may achieve this end, the two umpires should consider the following points together :

Both umpires should arrive at the match venue at least one hour before the scheduled match starting time. On arrival they should link up with each other and inform the home club's representative that they have arrived so that the teams know and do not worry. The umpires should also liaise with any Match Official(s) and Umpire Assessors / Selectors / Coaches.

At the appropriate time the two umpires should go to their designated "private" place for their pre-match discussion. If an Umpire Coach (UC) has been appointed, then the UC may allowed to be present for this pre-match chat but normally Assessors and Selectors will not attend that meeting.

The things that the two umpires need to discuss are as follows and it is invariably useful for both umpires to have a plan of the pitch with them on which areas and points may be marked.

This is not an exhaustive list and you may think of other points that may be important for discussion.

01. *KIT (i.e. shirt colours). What shirt colours are the teams wearing?*
02. *Whistles and whistling.*
03. *Choice of ends (Consider the sun, spectacles, crowd, team benches balanced with the relative experience of each umpire.).*

04. *Who starts each half of the match?*
05. *Control of substitutes.*
06. *Timekeeping for each half and what happens if the umpire who is supposed to be taking the time (the controlling umpire) is occupied with play at the end of that particular half. What is the role of the supporting umpire here?*
07. *Who starts the match again after a stoppage? Is the umpire nearer to the stoppage incident or is it the umpire on the table side by the MO?*
08. *AREAS of CO-OPERATION!! Invariably it helps to use a diagram of the pitch. Consider what an extra loud blast on the whistle may mean to your colleague in certain positions on the pitch.*
09. *Type and manner of co-operation.*
10. *The role of the "supporting" umpire in helping the "controlling" umpire.*
11. *Use of the team captains as may be helpful or necessary*
12. *Set pieces (penalty corners and penalty strokes) and positioning. Every umpire needs to know where his / her colleague will be in particular circumstances during a match and what form co-operation will take so that there are no embarrassing situations during the match!*
13. *The Ball in the Air. Think and discuss danger and not lifted.*
14. *Advantage / Control BALANCE. There is a need to talk about protecting skill and promoting flow and encourage the playing of good hockey. Use the "ladder" of sanctions and techniques available sensibly. Monitor the "temperature" of the match and react accordingly to changes in player or team behaviour and tactics. There are certainly occasions when shortening the advantage and giving a series of quick sharp whistles will help the smooth running of the match and calm down over aggressive play. Never sacrifice control or use it as an excuse for trying to allow advantage. Use your voice to indicate advantage. The advantage signal in the rule book is often not seen by most players. It is also helpful and on occasions imperative to use your voice to convey your intentions and feelings to the players. Use of body language.*
15. *Dealing with (persistent) breaking down of play.*
16. *Dealing with any dissent from the players and those on the team benches.*
17. *The self-pass rule and its interpretation. Discuss the appropriate course of action to be taken.*
18. *Five metres (almost SIX yards!) at all free hits. It helps to be firm / strict early on in the match. Do not be too lenient and then suddenly become strict during the last fifteen minutes of the second half!*
19. *CONSISTENCY in interpretation and application.*
20. *Anything else sensible, appropriate and helpful that you think of!!!!*

READING the GAME

The three principles of reading the game are :

1. AWARENESS
2. RECOGNITION
3. TIMING of the ACTION

AWARENESS

1. Aware of everything that is going on, both off and on the pitch
2. Understand what the players are trying to do
3. Ability to recognise playing formations and patterns of play
4. Ability to recognise different skills and the tactics which negate skill at the particular level
5. Ability to differentiate between poor technique (clumsiness) and the breaking down of play

RECOGNITION

Is the umpire

1. in the **best position** to see clearly?
2. able to identify correctly what has happened or does the umpire misunderstand incidents?
3. able to read the body language of the players?
4. able to anticipate and think ahead of play, especially with the self pass?

5. *able to anticipate where the ball will go next and importantly what is most likely to happen next?*
6. *able to decide when to blow the whistle or play on for a sensible advantage?*
7. *manage the match well or is subject to lapses of concentration?*
8. *reading the danger signs and reacting quickly enough to changes in the match “temperature”?*

TIMING of ACTION

Can the umpire

1. *select those incidents that require attention?*
2. *decide when to blow quickly or play on for an advantage?*
3. *select the correct sanction to deal effectively with a particular incident?*
4. *know what action to take to lower the “temperature” of the match?*

The TWELVE Cs of hockey umpiring

Concentration

Calmness and Coping with pressure [TCUP]

Composure and coolness

Communication

Co-operation

Confidence with Common sense

avoid being Casual and Complacent

Courage (See the DVD of the 2006 men’s world cup final!!)

Convincing

Consistency

Control

CAUSES of UMPIRING ERRORS

Why do umpires make mistakes? The good umpire will know the rules and will or should be up to date with their modern interpretations.

So what things cause an umpire to make mistakes?

The following is a list of suggestions that may be applicable.

- 01. Often the problem is one of **positioning** and so is the umpire actually in the wrong place perhaps because of not reading the game correctly?*
- 02. Was the problem caused by one of a lack of mobility?*
- 03. Was the umpire too close to the incident?*
- 04. Was the umpire looking from the wrong angle or position?*
- 05. Did the umpire misread precisely what actually happened?*
- 06. Was the mistake caused by a loss / lack of concentration?*
- 07. Did the error occur as the consequence of a distraction?*
- 08. Did the mistake occur because of a lack of help from the supporting umpire?*
- 09. Were there any conditions or factors such as driving rain or a low sun that contributed to the mistake?*
- 10. Did the umpire choose the wrong sanction?*