

Some advice and guidance to all

It's that time of the season when the first round of committee meetings have taken place. The letters of "complaint" are already arriving despite the recent postal dispute. There is a lot of confusion as to the role and duties of the umpires, the captains, the players (and spectators).

Start times:

You normally confirm the starting time with your opponents and the umpires well before the game, for the higher leagues, by the start of the season even. However, local circumstances sometimes means games have to be re-scheduled. It is vital that the first game of the day gets underway on time, else the whole day's programme is thrown off. The game can now start without goalkeepers. League rules usually state that a minimum of 7 players on the pitch constitutes a team and so the game can proceed.

Umpires have a duty to start each game on time. Umpires should allow 10 minutes after the stated start time for which the team (players) get themselves ready. If after this time the game is able to start, then the playing time has to be reduced to allow the next game to start on time. This should be reported on the team sheet, with a note of explanation on the back. If a game is abandoned after 50 minutes and a team is three goals clear, the "result" normally stands.

Normally teams/players are allowed the courtesy of 10 minutes "warm-up" time on the pitch surface. This can be waived by mutual agreement, but if a team arrive late they can not expect this courtesy. So make sure you are all ready for the start time. Do not warm up on the pitch surround whilst another game is in progress. In fact players for the next game should not enter the playing area until the game has finished – no matter what league level the game is, respect the game in progress.

Injuries & stoppages:

For an injury (or change of goalkeeper) the umpires can allow up to 10 minutes for the matter to be resolved. If after this time the injury can not be resolved the game must continue or the team with the problem must forfeit the game. We are all concerned about a fallen colleague. It is important you can cover for this situation. The rules allow for up to 5 substitutes. The home team (club) must have access to emergency services and have basic first aid to hand. If U18s are playing there must be adults around responsible for their "overall safety". So the injured player can be left in the care of a responsible person. If a trip to hospital is called for (and the injured player is a transport provider etc.) then abandonment might be in order.

Head injuries are of great concern, and unless there is someone present medically qualified, medical assistance should be called for. If the casualty is prostrate and collapsed on the pitch the advice is not to move them. The game will have to wait (or be abandoned). For a blood injury the player has to leave the pitch and repair themselves (possibly changing to clean kit).

Clubs/teams must be aware of this possibility and have first aid supplies and water to hand. If there is blood on the pitch, it should be washed away. It's absurd that players should be off the pitch for minutes whilst all this stuff is

rounded up. Properly prepared, a player can return to the game very quickly. Unless medically qualified the umpires should not get involved with injuries.

Otherwise play on!

Playing Kit:

The umpires are NOT responsible for what kit the players are wearing. As an umpire all one is concerned about is identification. Can the umpire tell the two teams, the goalkeepers, the captains and the individual players apart? One number missing or two number "7"s should not be a problem if the two players can be identified. Umpires can ask the captain to identify players if needs be. Teams having the same coloured tops/strip helps. As do socks (dark please) and shorts or skirts. Substitutes should wear different coloured tops to both sides so they can't be mistaken, or distract the players on the pitch and the umpires. League rules state women outfield players are to wear skirts. It is NOT the umpires job to enforce this or refuse to start the game. The matter should be reported to the appropriate league secretary and a note put on the team sheet.

Conduct:

Both players and spectators should seriously re-think their treatment of umpires.

Why on earth do you think it is so hard to find umpires for your games? It's not rocket science. The sport is haemorrhaging umpires and good potential umpires at that.

From the moment they arrive at a venue, until they leave, umpires must be treated with due respect and courtesy, you don't have to like them or agree with them – just be polite. It goes without saying this applies during the game and immediately after when a lot of problems can occur.

Umpires need to be aware of a reporting procedure – Matchday Misconduct Offences (MMO).

Umpires can not issue a red (or yellow card) outside of the game they are umpiring. When the final whistle blows, that's it! If a red card offence is committed after the game it becomes a MMO – and is treated in exactly the same way as if during the game. The same form is used.

Clubs and teams or individuals can be reported for their after match behaviour and this includes the conduct of spectators. The various associations/committees will support umpires in this and if you are subject to an MMO (or witness one) please contact the county disciplinary officer – Julia Hutchinson (or her deputy) or any senior umpire for advice on how to proceed. It is an urban myth that umpires won't issue red cards/MMOs because of the paper work. NOT TRUE – it is a quick and simple process. Another myth to be busted is the showing of cards during a game. Whilst it is desirable for the umpire to have a set in their pockets, just because they don't doesn't mean action can't be taken. You can suspend players and "red card" them without showing the cards, best if the umpire does though. The cards are a very visible way of "telling" everyone present (including spectators) what is happening and the nature of the offence; green, yellow, red.

The card also denotes that ALL the players (both sides) should be aware that the umpires will not tolerate the behaviour that lead to a player being shown a card (green) and there is the real possibility that the next offence of that type will result in a yellow, and then a red.

Likewise a verbal warning may be given instead of showing a green card.

There is no requirement that says the umpire(s) can't send someone off because they haven't been warned with a green or yellow card first!

Wise teams/captains should realise that they must moderate their behaviour and not repeat the offence(s), else they are in trouble. Identification of the culprits can be hard at times. Shirt numbers can help. Just because the umpire can't remember who committed the offence doesn't mean the culprit "gets off". Use the captain. Ask the captain to identify the culprit, and if they refuse remind the captain they are responsible for their players and refusal could result in their suspension instead! This soon produces the correct result, especially if the captain is the goal keeper.

Umpires must NOT coach players during the game (this includes half time).

Coaching means giving advice/instructions in the playing, tactical, and organising the team. Umpires can explain the rules and their decisions, it can be useful, if it doesn't distract or delay the game. This can be to individuals, the captains, the coach behind them, if the situation is best handled that way - at the umpire's discretion. We can't have a debate over every decision and the umpire(s) do not have to justify their every decision, they are not on trial.

Umpires are NOT required to explain or signal for every offence blown up.

Although use of the recognised signals for offences can be of help to the players and spectators. In the same vein, umpires must behave in a professional manner and not be over-familiar with the players during the course of the game. Better not to refer to individual names, use the shirt number if you must attract the attention of a player. This does not mean you can't talk to players or make comments providing it's not distracting the umpire's (or player's) attention. It is not good management practice to call a player over by name and then send them off!

Pitch-side behaviour:

Where possible only players and team officials should be on the pitch, inside the playing area. Where this is impractical, the "bench" should be opposite and away from the spectators. You separate the players from the spectators. If the spectators become abusive to the umpires or opposing players then a MMO can be issued to the club. If the spectators are supporting the visiting team, their club/team will be penalised. Suspended players must go to a "neutral" area to serve the suspension. Players are allowed to collect clothing and a drink etc. on the way. But obvious dawdling and dissent might add to the suspended time, which will start when they are in position. The suspended players are "*incommunicado*" in other words they must not be chatting to their friends/team mates, coach or team officials etc. during the suspension. The umpire(s) decide on the time of the suspension. The umpires are not obliged to inform anyone how long this will be. BUT the minimum time will 5 minutes for a technical offence and maybe 10 minutes for a physical offence. A repeat offence will result in a longer suspension (at the umpire(s) discretion). Players will not normally be suspended for great lengths of time. If the offence was that heinous then a red card might be a more appropriate penalty.

The Team Sheet:

This is an important document that should be completed and handed to the umpires BEFORE the match starts. The players used and their shirt numbers should be recorded, along with the result at the end. Both captains and umpires should then sign the sheet after the game. Umpires please PRINT your name clearly and use your England Hockey L1 registration number. Any comments about the administration of the game or any irregularities should be noted on the back of the sheet and preferably counter signed by both umpires.

The umpires are not there to adjudicate on league rules. The umpires apply the rules of hockey and ensure fair play. The best you can expect is that they act as independent witnesses and record the details on the team sheet and let the relevant committees decide what action(s) to take.