

UMPIRES RULE: General advice in how to umpire indoor hockey



In indoor hockey if an umpire was to call everything that might be a foul and be fussy but technically correct with every aspect of the game, the game would be stopped constantly and no one (except possibly that umpire) would enjoy themselves. For the game to be safe and enjoyable it is very important for the umpires to only involve themselves in the game appropriately. The art of being a good umpire is to understand how to negotiate the gray area between absolutes. Common sense and simplicity need to guide us through the grey.

Steve Simpson, FIH Umpire Manager, in his article in indoorhockey.net, lists his philosophical views that can be used as a guide for anyone called upon to do indoor hockey umpiring:

1) Encourage as much play as possible. We should allow the players to play as much as possible. The Advantage Rule is one of the most important rules in hockey. Do not stop play if that will give an advantage to the offending team. This encourages more flow in play. Umpires can always go back to an earlier offense if the “advantage” didn’t come about, or can give a ‘card’ or some other ‘communication’ for an earlier offense so the teams know when a line has been crossed. This also means that the umpires will allow restarts to be positioned with the attitude of keeping the flow going instead of starting the play from the exact place the foul occurred (and the ball may even be rolling a bit!).

2) We should not be afraid of competition between players. Sport has competition, and indoor/field hockey is a sport. Our role as umpires is NOT to eliminate or discourage competition. We want to encourage competition! This brings the effort and courage to our sport that makes it appealing to watch and play. Our role as umpires is to see and respond to plays where one player is preventing an opponent from doing something that they would otherwise be able to do. Because an action was ugly or made a noise doesn’t mean a foul was committed. We want to be alert to negative play, where a player just acts to stop an opponent who is in an advantageous position. Negative play in these situations needs to be dealt with by more than a gentle whistle. This goes along with our role of protecting skill.

3) We must speak more to the players. In our management of games we would be willing to talk to the players during the game to be proactive in setting up distances (3m, “please be behind the line”) and

give guidance on behaviour we want to have changed. We also want to be approachable after the game to answer questions or have discussions as long as the conversations are mature and respectful. This should describe our behaviour as well as what we should expect of others!

4) Try to create a safe playing environment. Indoor hockey has many areas where the type of danger that exists is different from field hockey. For us to be consistent and proactive in these areas will go a long way towards helping prevent these dangerous behaviours.

5) Simple is best. Our life as an umpire is much more consistent and better if we have simple reasons for the decisions we make. Don't try to justify the height of the bobble was or how far away (2m instead of 1 ½ m) the defender was before the attacker scores. It is simpler (if there is a defender anywhere nearby) to call the bobble.

Some areas of concern: Set up your boundaries from the beginning of the game. Successful umpiring is about managing the environment of competition (and judging flow and the mood of the game). If you can create a positive environment from early in the game then there are areas that you can relax (giving longer for advantage to develop, etc.). If you start out with no boundaries for the players to play within, then it is very difficult to establish them later. From very early in the game try to show the players what your 3 metres is like, and where you will be strict with the placement of the ball at restarts. The first time there is a tackle that is not the way you want you must treat it differently from earlier fouls... make some connection with the player who did it and show what you want/don't want.

Balls in the air. This comes down to three main scenarios: – In indoor hockey it is intended that the ball be on the ground except when it is in the attacking circle when it can be raised for a shot at goal. This would mean that all bobbles might be a foul, but then the game would stop all the time. Think about what is important. In order to have some flow in the game, only call the bobbles that are in playing distance of an opponent. Think whether the opponent was disadvantaged by the ball being in the air. – If a shot is taken (into the air, or along the ground) it is allowed to be defended (by the GK or a defender). If the ball rebounds into the air because of the action of defending the shot, there is no foul. What happens subsequently is judged on its own merits. If the goalie/defender does an overt act to play the ball, and the ball travels dangerously, then there would be a penalty corner. – If the ball is in the air (and it is not a shot), it can't be played until the ball is on the ground. Players from opposite teams must let the ball stop bouncing before playing it. The exception is for one player, standing alone, who collects the ball in the air and presses it smoothly onto the ground.

Playing the ball dangerously into an opponent. A major difference between indoor hockey and field hockey is that opponents stand very near each other when competing for the ball. As umpires, we have a big responsibility to discourage behaviours that lead to danger without changing the nature of the game. If a defender is in position close to the player with the ball and is in a low position to defend, then we must not let the attacker fire the ball into her/him, or blindly turn and shoot the ball through the space the defender is occupying. This is dangerous, and the attacker will have other options that they must choose. This is a practice that the umpires must stop! In the same way, if a defender has taken a position near the ball carrier, and is in a low body position, that defender needs to be protected from the attacker's stick following through dangerously after a pass. (This is different from field hockey, where the attacker is able to choose from a wider range of passes, and the defender has the responsibility for taking a safe position).

Obstruction. Obstruction exists, but doesn't happen very often when two good teams are playing. Recognizing it when it does happen is very important as this is where rough play can start, and this is an area where players can lose confidence in an umpire. For obstruction to exist, ALL of these three things have to happen: the defender must be in playing distance of the ball, the defender must try to play the ball (without going through the body or stick of the attacker!), and at that moment the attacker must move their body to prevent the defender's attempt at the ball. (If the attacker is actively moving the ball somewhere and their body goes between the ball and the defender, this is probably nothing). Remember that we are trying to encourage an open, skillful game. When players turn very slowly with the ball, or walk down the boards with their body positioned so it will block a potential tackler then their action is to block a challenge for the ball in a negative way. This is obstruction. Attackers can also obstruct by running their stick ahead of the ball to prevent a legitimate tackle from getting to the ball (shielding). Umpires must not guess! Be very sure that shielding is happening. Third-party obstruction should be looked at with the same three criteria. Was there an immediate advantage to the team that obstructed and was the defender in playing distance? In indoor hockey, holding the ball against the side-boards is also obstruction.

Bully. Indoor hockey has many moments of competition between opponents. We want to encourage the competition, but limit situations where competition escalates. When the ball is caught between the sticks of two opponents and there is no movement (stalemate), then give a bully fairly quickly – less than 2 seconds. The restart is where the 'stalemate' was, but not in the circle or close to the side-boards.

Penalty Corners. Setting up corners correctly and early can solve many problems. If things don't matter, don't worry about them (raised push-out, most bobbles on stop). If something is important, be completely vigilant (ball pushed out before defence is ready, defence breaking early, ball not going outside circle)! If the defence comes out early, stop the play right away. Use your management skills to prevent this continuing. In indoor hockey the shot at goal can be any height. There are two areas of danger that can come up. As the ball is passed around and then shot, if there is a defender who is hit who is within 3 metres of the shot, then it is a PC if she is hit below the knee or a free push for the defence if hit above the knee. If the shot is taken quickly after and near the first stop, and the shot hits a defender who is running out in a way that will ONLY result in her being hit (!), then give a PC and let the team know that they have to choose a safer way to approach! This often happens when the ball is pushed out on the defences' left and the flyer runs straight at the ball. There is often competition for the ball when the first shot is being taken (flyer reaching for the ball as the shooter is flicking). If both players are playing the ball there CANNOT be a foul!! If the defender is making a legitimate challenge for the ball, regardless of noise, ugliness or where the ball goes, there is NO foul.

Goalkeepers outside the circle. Again, indoor hockey is played in a smaller area and with more moments of personal competition between opponents than field hockey. We want to discourage the goalkeeper from coming into these competitions unexpectedly when their equipment makes them much wider than the court players, and who's helmets can be dangerous. If the goalkeeper comes out of the circle to move the ball on a restart, or to play a ball upright and with her stick when no opponent is near, then there can be no danger and is allowed. If the goalkeeper comes out of her circle to compete with opponents for the ball, this can be very dangerous and should be stopped. Goalies come out of the circle intentionally, so a penalty corner is appropriate to stop this dangerous behavior. The goalkeeper is allowed to play the ball while on the ground when the ball, and ALL of the

goalkeeper are in the circle. If the ball or any part of the goalie are outside the circle, and the goalie is on the ground, then there should be a penalty corner given.

Hitting/slapping the ball. Players are not allowed to “hit” the ball in indoor hockey. What is a “hit”? If the stick comes from the air to the surface to play the ball, then you are probably looking at a hit. In indoor hockey almost all actions of the stick along the court are allowed. There are clearly allowed skills and clearly disallowed skills. In order to have more play and to encourage more variety of skills almost all of the “gray area” is allowed. Look at whether the passer’s wrists ‘break’ in the passing action rather than how close to the ball the stick starts. Consider that every umpire will allow the ball to be deflected. On every deflection the ball comes onto the stick from a distance, and there is a noise. Never decide based on noise!

Three points of contact with the ground. There are two ways players can be on the ground: while playing in a game players can come to have a hand or knee on the ground, or players may intentionally throwing themselves onto the court. In the first situation the umpires should keep in mind “Advantage” and the thought that we are trying to encourage more play. Did the 3rd point on the ground change whether the player could or couldn’t play the ball? If the hand is barely touching the ground for balance, or the knee is against the court but the ball is being played within easy reach, then the contact probably has had no effect on the game. What we are trying to eliminate is a player resting her weight on the 3rd point so she can reach a ball that otherwise would be unplayable – she gains an advantage. The second situation, usually defenders throwing themselves onto the ground reach a ball or to limit the space an attacker has, can be very dangerous and umpires must be particularly aware as these are intentional acts can change the environment of the game. The umpires must stop these actions – appropriate use of penalty corners, penalty strokes and cards should be considered. Keep in mind that some of the most exciting attacking and defending play (deflecting the ball into/out of the goal) happens when a player is diving but still in the air. If it is not dangerous, and the player is in the air and not on the ground (yet), this is allowed.

Cards/5 metre bump. Umpires need to use common sense in using the tools the Rules of (Indoor) Hockey gives us. Know what happened in the game, and know the way you want the game to be played. Don’t be afraid to use cards, but know that once cards have been given you are committed to using cards again in the same situation. Umpires need to develop other management skills: speaking to players, listening to players, varying whistle tone, varying presentation, changing the timing of your whistles (less or more advantage). In giving a yellow card, know what the different lengths of suspension are for. For dissent or not being the correct distance (don’t give a card the first time!) you could give a 2 minute yellow card. For physical fouls against the body of an opponent the yellow cards start at 5 minutes. Again, common sense needs to guide us in how we create a flowing, enjoyable game for the players. Use other management tools first if you can. (In tournaments the umpire would signal the length of the suspension to the Technical Table as the Table is responsible for letting the suspended player know when to return to the court). The ‘5 metre bump’ is one tool available to encourage players to change specific behaviors (dissent or interfering with a restart only!). If you want those behaviors to change, other tools are almost always more effective. The tool of advancing a free-push is overused in our hockey competitions.

Substitution. Substitutes must come onto and leave the court within 3 metres of the centre line. The players’ ability to substitute properly will be much better if the umpires make sure they interchange

from the correct place. If the ball is out of play don't worry too much about who is on/off. Know if things are correct when the ball is in play. Either umpire can give a penalty corner for an incorrect substitution – and the players involved return to their roles before the illegal substitution. Teams can't substitute after the award of a penalty corner. (Know when the PC ends).

Placement of the ball before restarts. We want to let the players play as much as possible. We also don't want the team who fouls to get an advantage from fouling. If the umpires make the ball go to the exact spot of the foul each time we stop flow, and we always give the defence time to get organized. This is against the spirit of the game. In most of the court we can actually encourage the players to start earlier if the ball is near the foul ("you can start there"). As we get closer to the attacking circle we will want to be more exact. In the same way we don't want to be completely worried about the ball moving. If the player has clearly tried to stop the ball, and then passes, that should be clear to both teams and can be allowed. Balls that go over the sideboards are restarted near where the ball went out, but not within 1 meter of the attacking circle. Don't worry if the restart isn't right beside the boards. Balls over the back-line are either a 9-metre push (off attack or unintentionally off defence) or a penalty corner. If you would give a long-hit outdoor then it would be a 9-m indoor. Have the 9-m restart be on the same side it went out, but allow "near" the line up from the back-line. Balls put intentionally, by an overt and deliberate movement of the defender's stick, over the back-line are a penalty corner.

Acknowledged Source: Steve Simpson FIH Umpire Manager

<http://indoorhockey.net/umpiringindoor.html>

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