



Hampshire Hockey Umpires' Association

www.hampshirehockeyassociation.co.uk

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Organising an umpire's first game - tips for the club, captains, and partner umpire

Umpires, like players, give up or move away, and without a steady stream of new recruits, a gap can become a crisis. Fortunately there are people who really enjoy umpiring. The club just needs to find them, and get them started.

The most difficult step for raw recruits is that very first game. But if they enjoy that, then they usually enjoy the next... and soon they are on their way.

New umpires who tried out the tips overleaf produced some very confident performances, and most went on to become active umpires.

This is much more effective than the usual approach; to send some club members on the Level 1 course. On recent Hampshire courses: few 'never umpired' candidates went on to umpire any hockey at all; everyone who obtained their Level 1 Umpire award was already umpiring before the course.

The best solution is for clubs to develop their own umpires: each season offering the whistle to one or two people per team. A few will not like umpiring, but that's no shame and no loss to the club. Most will take to it and soon be ready for their Level 1 badge. Then is the time to enrol them on your Umpire Association's next course.

So you've asked someone to umpire?

Whether a club member has offered, or has been asked, to try umpiring hockey, the very first game with the whistle is a daunting prospect.

Your main aim, as team captain or club's umpiring manager, is that the experience should leave the new umpire keen to try a second and third game.

At the least you add another to your 'can umpire' list, and there is a good chance your apprentice will develop into a regular club umpire.

Be sure to provide a current Rule Book to study for some days before the game; ideally a week.

Pick the right game

Avoid any fixture that will load unnecessary pressure on the inexperienced umpire; such as a relegation or promotion clash, cup tie, or any long-standing 'needle match'.

Better to pick a youth game, with U-14 or U-16 on a full pitch being more relevant than mini-hockey. Even a new umpire will know the rules better than the players, who should not yet have learnt the tricks of disrespecting and undermining umpires.

If it must be adult hockey, be aware that the more veterans, school-teachers, coaches, or even umpires, among either team, the more confidence-sapping 'feedback' the new umpire might get.

Captains...

... are responsible for their players' behaviour.

That means dealing with whoever starts to undermine the first timer's fragile confidence, before it affects the umpiring, or brings out the cards.

You could move any trouble-maker off to the substitutes' bench, or under the nose of the veteran umpire. If that leaves 5 left backs marking 4 right wings, then maybe it was the wrong game?

Umpiring partner

You have the rare privilege to be shepherding a potential umpire through this crucial first game.

During the chat before, after, and at half time, be positive and encouraging. Recall the best decisions. Ask how the umpire feels, and listen before offering advice, which should be in terms of "if you do this, that will work better", rather than "don't...".

It helps if you, as experienced partner, can deal with all the timing, scoring, and cards, leaving the first timer to get the feel of umpiring.

And getting the feel of umpiring teamwork is as important as the decision-making. So suggest that your partner gives thumbs-up for your good decisions, to start making the eye contact a habit.

Of course new umpires miss some fouls and make mistakes. But the more decisions they make by themselves, the more confident they and the players will be that they can umpire. So stick to the areas of control that you agreed in the pre-match chat, and wait for the look that says "Help?" before assisting.

If it is the right game, and the new umpire has prepared well, everything should go fine. But if anything serious does start, then step across and protect your colleague: remind captains of their responsibilities; take on any criticism of the umpiring team; and if necessary use your cards.

Acknowledgements

This paper's advice has been collected from various sources, including the England Hockey web site, Jane Nockolds' book *A Guide to Umpiring Hockey* 2007-08 edition, and umpiring topics on www.talkinghockey.net: 'Getting Started', Oct 05; 'First Game Survival Tips', Aug 07. There are good links from 'Grade 3 Umpire Course', Sep 08, at www.fieldhockeyforum.com.

And special thanks to those umpires who survived their first game using the trial versions of this paper, and who now have, or will soon obtain, their Level 1 Umpire award.

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First game survival – tips for the umpire

You have been offered your very first game as a hockey umpire. These tips will help you rise to the challenge and enjoy it.

Prepare by learning the Rules

You don't need to know all the Rules yet, but to survive you must learn a few Rules really well.

Borrow a Rule Book, or google 'Rules of Hockey' and print out the .pdf file out from FIH as 4 pages of rules per sheet of A4.

As a regular player or spectator, you will know most Rules in the conduct of play sections 9 and 10.

The sections you must learn in detail are 12 (what penalty), and 13 (conduct of penalties).

Find the signals in the Umpiring section, and practise them in front of the mirror.

Read as much of the rest as you can.

On the day

Check that whoever asked you to umpire has followed the tips on the other page: "So you've asked someone to umpire?"

Wear a bright colour, different from either team. This is so that the umpires can spot each other for working together as a team.

Be there a good half hour before the game starts.

Your umpiring partner will want a chat and to answer your questions. You may ask your partner to deal with all the timing, scoring, and cards.

Then the only 'umpiring tool' you need is a whistle, which someone will lend you if you don't own one.

Allow time afterwards to unwind with your partner and players. They will want to praise you for doing so well – don't miss out on that.

When the game starts

The first time you think "Oi!" or "Hey umpire..."

That's you! So blow your whistle, and signal which way the free hit is to be played.

The first few offences you see: blow every one.

You will very soon settle into the umpiring decision pattern, and see when the whistle is not needed:

- no offence = play on;
- offence but no disadvantage = play on;
- offence causing disadvantage = whistle and signal the right penalty from Rule 12.

Blow the whistle sharply and signal clearly, with straight arms, hands at eye level, broad shoulders.

Do watch how the players react to each decision, and not where the ball has gone. With that eye contact they see a confident umpire, whatever you might be feeling inside.

Call out "Play it" or "You have it" whenever you signal advantage or decide there is no offence.

That tells players and your partner that you saw what happened and have made your decision.

When the ball goes off your backline or side of the pitch you should just signal not whistle.

The pre-match chat will agree which areas of the pitch are yours to umpire. Beyond that, only blow if the other umpire has clearly not seen a bad foul. And never blow anything in the far circle. But keep watching so that, when your partner does look for your help, you are ready to signal how you saw it.

Good positioning makes decisions good. So move close enough to: "see what is happening here", rather than "watch play over there". Decisions are much easier, and really you will not be 'in the way'.

Think ahead and move to keep play roughly between the umpires; but as it comes into your circle, be already near the goal for that big decision. You will be right, and the players will know it.

When a position works, remember it for next time.

Just in case it goes wrong

Accept that you can and will make mistakes.

If you miss something, look out for the next thing that happens, and make that decision right.

Never 'even it up' with the next penalty.

Bad fouls must be penalised, even if the whistle comes much too late; "Sorry, I'm not letting that go."

Sometimes you just point the wrong way, or else you accept your partner's correction. When that reverses a free hit, delay it until both sides have re-set, or bring it back if it was taken too quickly.

When it seems you are wrong on a big decision in your circle, it calms players if you stop time and meet with the other umpire. You can find out what your partner saw and check which rules apply. But then the decision is still yours to award and signal.

Don't let appeals make or change your decision. Smile and tell them "Yes I saw it too" if you agree, and "Not how I saw it" if they are mistaken; and "No need to appeal, thank you" either way.

For dissent after your decision such as knocking the ball away, be ready to advance the hit 10m or, in a defender's 23m area, upgrade to a Penalty Corner.

If any back-chat starts to upset you, then stop time and bring together your partner and both captains, who must make their players behave. If they can't, then the yellow card might be needed. And that is their fault, not yours, so do not feel bad about it.

If you have been given the right game and followed these tips, it will never come to that.

But even if it does, have you survived? Yes.

Once you have done it

Despite being your first game with umpire's responsibilities, you can and should enjoy it.

You will make mistakes; that is how you learn.

The more you umpire the better you will be.

So try and umpire another game soon. Watch other umpires and ask them about umpiring; they will be glad to offer more tips and help you improve.

After several games you should be ready to take the umpire course. Not many months after that, you could be achieving your Level 1 Umpire award.