

Guidance to Umpires on the 2009 Rules of Hockey

This guide for umpires on the 2009 Rules of Hockey is designed to give readers things to think about when umpiring under these rules.

It is deliberate that all the rule changes are not listed. There are many rule changes and even more sections of the rule book that have been re-written to improve clarity and understanding. All of the rule changes are highlighted in the published rules and there is no substitute for reading them, and reading them thoroughly.

The rest of this guide will assume that the reader is an umpire who has read the FIH 2009 Hockey Rules and has access to them to read alongside the reading of this guide. Any reference to “you” refers to you as an umpire.

Areas of Major Change

The rule changes are listed within the first 5 pages of the rule book. The rules have been extensively revised to convert the terminology under the old rules of “goalkeeper wearing only protective headgear” to the 2009 rules “field player with goalkeeping privileges”.

How to deal with a situation where a team plays with too many players has been clarified.

The definition of a shot has been changed. Until now a shot had to be going towards the goal. Under the new rules a shot is a shot if the player’s intention is to score, even if the shot is misdirected and is not going towards the goal. This has implications when considering whether balls lifted from a hit from within the circle are allowed or not.

The ending of a penalty corner has now been made consistent, whether the penalty corner is in normal time or in time extended at the end of a half.

Players can now “self pass” from almost all restarts of play, where the taker is now allowed to play the ball again.

Restarts to the attacking team within the 23 metres area cannot be played directly into the circle by the taker (and there are additional restrictions covering when it can be played into the circle following a self-pass).

The last two topics have the most impact on umpiring and will be topics covered in the rest of this guide.

The “Self Pass”

A player taking many types of restart is now allowed to be the next player to play the ball. This is called a self pass. This applies at any free hit situation including a defensive hit (commonly referred to as a “16”), a centre pass, a corner (commonly referred to as a “long corner”) or a side-line restart. It also applies, as it has always done, at a bully.

The self pass cannot be used at a penalty corner nor, obviously, at a penalty stroke.

The self pass does not have to move 1 metre before it is played again by the taker. The ball must still move a metre before it is played by any other player from the same team as the taker.

The rules state that “the action of taking the free hit and of next playing the ball must be two separate actions”. In practice this just means that the ball must not stay in contact with the stick and it should be clear (to everybody) that the free hit has been taken and that the ball is now in play. If the taker simply approaches the ball and carries the ball off in a “contact dribble” (where the stick and ball remain in contact) the free hit has not been taken and should be taken again.

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Aerial Passes

Because there is no minimum distance that a self-pass has to travel, you need to be aware that players have more options for aerial passes from a restart. In addition to the existing option to play the ball a metre to a team-mate, which then allows the aerial pass to be made, players can also now make a short self-pass and then play an aerial pass immediately.

The taking of the hit and the aerial pass must be two distinct actions. A player cannot take a free hit and make an aerial pass all in one movement.

This change should make aerial passes far safer from free hits as it should be far easier to get the ball up and high above any other players before they have a chance to come within 5 metres.

Location of Restarts

The rules still say that a free hit is to be taken close to the offence, where “close to” means within playing distance of where the offence occurred and with no significant advantage gained.

Just because a self pass is now an option, you should not be overly strict on where restarts are taken. The purpose of the new rules is to increase the flow in games and the last thing good umpires should do is to stop that flow by being pedantic.

The rules state that the location from which a free hit is taken must be more precise inside the 23 metres area. There is no change to this wording so good umpires will continue to operate as they have been in this respect.

Stationary Ball at Restarts

The rules continue to state that the ball must be stationary for all restarts.

Good umpires have always allowed restarts with a ball that is moving slightly where no significant advantage is gained. You should be aware that a significant advantage **can** be gained when taking a self pass with a moving ball but must also note that you should not interfere with flow unless it is really necessary. Providing the “two actions” of a self pass make it clear when the free hit is taken, you need be no more or less fussy about the ball being stationary than you were under the previous rules.

If a player makes an attempt to stop the ball before taking a self pass, you should normally allow the self pass to be taken quickly, even if the ball is still moving slightly. The same applies if a ball is returned to the pitch by a member of the ball patrol (if you are lucky enough to have them).

Restarts with players within 5 metres

The FIH guidance is that restarts need not be delayed if there are players within 5 metres who, according to the rules, should not be – **providing they are not attempting to play the ball or influence play**. This obviously includes opponents and, if the restart is within the attacking 23 metres area, team-mates of the person taking the restart.

Even if team-mates of the taker are within 5 metres for a quick restart in the attacking 23 metres area, the restart need not be delayed if this/these team-mates are not influencing play.

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Management of 5 Metres

The new rules mean that all restarts (free-hits, sideline balls, corners) can be taken much more quickly than before, as they can be taken by the first player to get to the ball without waiting for supporting team-mates. Because the restarts can be taken more quickly, there are likely to be more situations – all over the pitch – where a player is in a position to take a restart when opposing players are within 5 metres.

Opponents still within 5 metres when the restart is taken must not interfere with the play until they have moved 5 metres away from where the restart was taken, or the ball has moved 5 metres.

Good umpires have always been very strict with any opponent preventing a restart, particularly when they do so at a time when the taker has an option to pass to an unmarked colleague. With the new self pass option, the taker **always** has the option of a pass to an unmarked player as, by definition, they can take a self pass and, as every opponent needs to be 5 metres away (or not interfere) the taker should always be “unmarked”.

You need to be very firm to ensure that opponents do not interfere with restarts and punish offenders accordingly. Personal penalties (a verbal caution, warning or suspension) would be appropriate in all cases where the offender’s actions are deliberate, particularly where the offender’s actions prevent a good attacking opportunity. You should also recognise that a good attacking opportunity can exist from many different areas of the pitch. Within the attacking 23 metres area, an opponent preventing a restart would normally be punished by the award of a penalty corner, in addition to the appropriate personal penalty.

However, some players will try to take unfair advantage by attempting to take a restart very quickly and moving the ball directly into an opponent who has had no chance to retreat, in an attempt to prompt you to take action against that opponent. You need to be vigilant to ensure that you are not “conned” in this way. You have a number of options available to deal in such cases. A retake with a warning to the taker might be appropriate in the first case but you also have the option of awarding a free hit against the taker for more obvious attempts to deliberately manufacture offences, or for repeated infringements. You should only reverse a free hit for a player taking the ball directly into an opponent when you are absolutely sure that the action was intentional to manufacture an offence.

Because of the new rules, particularly the effect of the rules for restarts within the attacking 23m area, all teams will practice both attacking and defending options in training. It is important that umpires allow players to be 5 metres away and not insist that players are 6 or 7 metres away. Forcing players to be significantly more than 5 metres away is as bad as allowing them to be within 5 metres for the affect on both attacking and defending options at these restarts. Players and coaches will be (rightly) aggrieved if the things they have practiced and trained for are not allowed by an umpire who insists on a greater distance than 5 metres.

Managing the 5 metres all over the pitch is the key to the self pass working. Understand the options the player has to play the ball, and then make sure that no opponent within 5 metres influences their ability to take one of those options.

Remember that this includes the centre pass where, in the past, umpires have not been too vigilant on players from the opposition being 5 metres away. It is more important now that there are more options for the team taking the centre pass.

Moveable Free Hits

You need to be particularly aware of the potential problems caused when the position of a free hit can be determined by the player taking it.

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This applies to defensive hits (“16s”) and free hits that have been moved “up 10”. In the first case, the defender can take the free hit anywhere up to 15 metres from the back line and in the second anywhere up to 10 metres up-field of the original offence. Players will instinctively propel the ball to where they want to take the free hit with their stick and this can be confused with the player actually taking the free hit. Once the player has stopped the ball, umpires should normally accept that the next action taken is the taking of the free hit.

In these situations, the taker’s actions need to be such that the taking of the free hit is obvious to everyone. If not, the free hit should be taken again (if, and only if, an opposing player has been disadvantaged).

Attacking Free Hits within the 23 metres area

The ball cannot be played directly into the circle from an attacking restart within the 23 metres area. Additionally, if the restart is taken as a self pass, it cannot be played into the circle until it has travelled 5 metres in any direction, or has been played by another player. Remember that this applies to side-line restarts and corners as well as free hits.

Attacking Free Hits - Travelling 5 metres

The 2009 Rules and the associated FIH Umpires Briefing makes it clear that travelling 5 metres means in any direction.

By way of example, if an attacker takes a restart as a self pass within the 23 metres area and dribbles the ball 2.5 metres to the left and then 2.5 metres to the right, the ball is back where it started but can now be played into the circle as it has travelled 5 metres.

Attacking Free Hits - Playing the Ball into the Circle

Remember that the offence only occurs when the ball enters the circle. It is not an offence to hit the ball towards the circle, only if the ball actually enters the circle (without being touched by another player etc.).

Attacking Free Hits - Near to the 23 metres line

If a free hit is taken inside the 23 metres area and the player chooses to take a self pass and carry the ball outside the 23 metres area, the requirements of the free hit are still in action (e.g. ball still has to travel 5 metres before it can be played into the circle by that player if no-one else plays it).

There is now a potential advantage for an attacking team taking a free hit outside the 23 metres area instead of inside it (as that means they can play the ball directly into the circle and that their team-mates can be within 5 metres of the free hit). The advice from the FIH Umpires Briefing is ...

- Be pro-active and use your common sense regarding the placement of free hits close to the 23 metre line.
- Be flexible, only penalise if the ‘wrong spot’ for the free hit is chosen in order to either gain an unfair advantage or for reasons which are against the spirit and aim of the Rules.
- Intentionally moving the location of an attacking free hit outside the 23 metres area to create an opportunity to play the ball directly into the circle must be seen as an unfair advantage and penalised accordingly.

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You should make your requirements known before allowing any restarts to be taken from the wrong place. If you want the free hit to be taken inside the 23 metres area, call to the players immediately the decision is made so that they have a chance to restart the game accordingly. Players will be extremely frustrated by poor umpires who give no warning and then penalize a player for trying a restart “from the wrong place”.

Attacking Free Hits - Players' Positions

The optimum places for players to stand at free hits will change as a result of the new rules. It is hard to predict all of the implications, but thinking about a few of them in advance will mean that you are better prepared when and if they arise.

In the past, the optimum place for defenders to “ring” any attacking restart was just outside the circle so that any accidental infringement by them only resulted in a free hit and not a penalty corner.

For a defender who is simply trying to intercept the ball and is not marking an opponent, this is no longer the case. The optimum place is now just inside the circle as this will mean that if the ball reaches them directly, they will be awarded a free hit as the ball cannot be played directly into the circle. This position means that there is no chance of an accidental touch before the ball enters the circle, which would make the ball entering the circle legal.

However, as soon as an attacker comes close to them, their optimal position changes to being alongside or in front of the attacker. This is particularly true as the attacker is likely to be looking for a slight deflection into the circle following a hard hit towards them. The last place a defender wants to be now is just inside the circle where any deflection onto their feet may result in a penalty corner.

These changes may result in more “scrimmaging” on the edge of the circle.

In some circumstances, defending teams may make no attempt to “defend the circle” as they have done historically. As the ball cannot be played quickly into the circle, defenders may just have one player ready to tackle the taker if they use a self pass but not to have a “ring” of players as has been the case in the past.

As long as you recognize that the new rules may change the places players will want to stand, you can manage these situations pro-actively by ensuring you are in a good position to see any jostling for position and to be aware of the consequences. This may mean adapting your previous “starting position” for some restarts (particularly corners) so that you can be sure of a view to the likely infringements.

Umpiring the 5 metres around the circle

For attacking free hits that are awarded within 5 metres of the circle, the free hit must be moved to “the nearest point at least 5 metres from the circle”.

You need to recognise that the new rules make it very difficult to take a quick free hit if the free hit is awarded just outside the circle (i.e. within the 5m zone). The taker has to take the ball 5 metres away from the circle to take the free hit, which will inevitably slow the play and allow defenders some time to get into position.

You should take this into account when reading both actual advantage and the possibility of advantage accruing in these areas. As a result you should “hold the whistle” momentarily to see if an advantage might accrue before awarding a free hit.

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Attacking Free Hits - “Corner of the Pitch” Restarts

You should recognise that the options for taking free hits and other restarts for the attacking side that are wide on the pitch and close to the back-line are now more limited than before. This applies mostly for restarts near the back line but also (albeit to a lesser extent) for all restarts wide on the pitch within the attacking 23 metres area.

For a number of years the first attacking option for most restarts in this area has been to hit the ball directly into the circle to an unmarked colleague or into a crowded circle in an attempt to get a deflection towards goal. This is no longer an option as the ball cannot be played into the circle directly. As a result, attacking teams will be looking for other options and methods of play in these areas.

This is one of the areas of the pitch where restarts are likely to be taken far more quickly than before. It will often be that the first attacker to the ball will take a quick self pass to get the ball back into play as quickly as possible rather than wait for a “set piece” scenario where the attacking options can be limited. You need to ensure that you get into a good position, very quickly, anticipating the quick restart in these areas. Traditionally these are the times that umpires (at all levels if they are honest) “took a breather”. You cannot afford to do this under the new rules.

It also means that there will be more passes backwards from these areas to rebuild an attack.

By recognising that restarts for the attack in the corner of the pitch are not as good an attacking opportunity as they used to be, you should incorporate this thinking into your umpiring. Good umpires used to play advantage to give a corner if there was a foul wide on the pitch around the 23m line and the ball came off a defender. Now the better advantage may be the original foul as there may be more options to play the ball and build an effective attack.

Advantage or not?

The new rules will require all umpires to rethink their understanding of advantage. What has changed with the self pass is that players can now take the free hit quickly, without necessarily waiting for supporting team mates. As a result, a quickly awarded free hit when the player has control of the ball will give the player the option of taking a self pass and effectively continuing with the same passage of play if **they** choose to.

For the last few years umpires have been actively encouraged to look for situations where advantage can be played, rather than stopping the game by penalising an offence. This is still the case, but you need to be aware that awarding a free hit quickly may be the best “advantage” for the team more often than it has been in the past.

For certain situations you should think through your “advantage philosophy” before you umpire under the new rules, taking into account the speed and skill level of the matches you umpire. Without doubt you will adapt your approach as the players adapt their playing styles to the new rules, but it is important you think through any likely changes to your philosophy for the different situations and areas of the pitch.

In particular, think about what the new rules mean for situations where your options are to award a free hit or to play advantage...

- ... to a defender inside the 23 metres area?
- ... in midfield (i.e. between the 23 metres areas)?
- ... to the attack inside the 23 metres area (generally)?
- ... to the attack within 5 metres of the circle?
- ... to the attack wide on the pitch and near the back-line?

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The Other Rules!

The experience of umpires (and umpire managers) at tournaments where the new rules have been used, or trialled, has been that umpires have concentrated so hard on the new rules that they have lost sight of all of the other rules!

When you are umpiring for the first few times under the new rules, do not worry excessively about them to the point that serious offences are missed or that you spend your time slowing the play by forcing free hits to be taken from a different place. Continue to concentrate hardest on the things that really matter!

“Reading the Game” and Fitness

There is a suggestion that length of time for which the ball is in play has increased by up to 50% more than under the previous rules and that play moves from one end of the pitch to the other far more quickly, far more often. It does move more quickly more often, however, at this stage there is no data to support the claim of a 50% increase. If it is 50%, this would imply in-play-time of 55 to 60 minutes, but if you then take account of 8-10 penalty corners in a match taking up 6-7 minutes in total there’s only 3-9 minutes down-time. Umpires might feel the game is 50% faster – but the reality at this stage is the in-play-time hasn’t actually increased that much. It will be interesting to see how this develops as we all get more used to the rule.

Every umpire, at every level, uses a combination of reading the game and fitness to ensure they get into good positions to see offences. There is no doubt that all umpires will have to improve in one or both of these areas just to maintain the personal umpiring standards they had before the rule changes.

At all top levels (International, National and Regional) umpires will need to be fitter to cope with the new rules.

The authors of this guide are only too aware that many umpires at lower levels are perfectly competent at their level without being Olympic athletes. If you are in that category, make sure you work on reading match situations so that you can predict and pre-empt passages of play to help you to get into appropriate positions.

Watch hockey under the new rules, talk to the players, player coaches and umpire coaches in your local association, talk to colleagues about the ways they are adjusting and incorporate those things that work for you.

Under the new rules there will be more actual hockey played, less time wasted waiting for restarts and less opportunity for an aggrieved offender to complain because the game has now often moved on – literally and, consequently, umpiring should be more enjoyable than ever before.

This guide has been collated by David Lane with invaluable input from the following people (in alphabetical order): Tim Benford, Mike Bloodworth, Paul Box-Grainger, Dave Dowdall, Martyn Gallivan, Chris Horton, Jane Nockolds, Liz Pelling, and Martin Twist.

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