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SHF 2026 Teams and Umpires' Briefing: Rules, Procedures, and Guidelines

Updated – March 2026

Rules of Hockey : Changes and Trials

Penalty Corner Protective Equipment

It is now mandatory for all players defending penalty corners in FIH events to wear face masks. This regulation has been implemented to enhance player safety during penalty corners. Field players defending a penalty corner, must use a face mask and cannot remove it until the penalty corner is over as described in **Rule 13.5 of the Rules of Hockey**

These changes have been adopted by the Singapore Hockey Federation **with immediate effect.**

Previous Rule Amendments

Rule 4.2: Penalty Corner Protective Equipment

Defending players may now continue to play the ball outside the circle after intercepting during a penalty corner, while still wearing additional protective equipment. However, this equipment must be removed at the first opportunity and always within the 23-metre area.

No player is permitted to play the ball outside the 23-metre area while wearing penalty corner additional protective equipment.

If a free hit is awarded to the defending team, the player taking the free hit may pass the ball before removing the additional protective equipment, but may not take a 'self-pass.' Any violation will result in a free hit awarded to the opposition at the location of the offence.

Rule 9.10: Aerial Balls

Rule 9.10 now allows players to safely intercept falling balls (aerial balls), which is considered positive for the game's development. Interceptions must be a single movement that redirects the ball away from the initial receiver, and must occur outside the playing distance of the initial receiver but within 5 metres. Interceptions from the side are less dangerous than those from the front or behind. Defenders may now close down receivers and compete for the ball after the initial touch, even inside the circle, provided the initial 5-metre space is respected.

Rule Trial 2025: Aerial Ball Interceptions

Currently being trialed at the FIH Pro League, the following stipulation applies: “Players must not approach within 5 metres of an opponent receiving a falling raised ball until it has been **touched** by the receiver. The ball may be intercepted within 5 metres but outside of playing distance, provided it is done safely. The initial receiver has the right to the ball. If it is unclear who the initial receiver is, the player from the team that raised the ball must allow the opponent to receive it.

The FIH Umpires’ Briefing for 2024-25 further clarifies that the initial receiver should be in **a clear 5-metres of space**. If this is not the case, a free hit should be awarded to the opposition.

Game Preparation

Punctuality

Umpires are expected to arrive at the venue and report to the official in charge, at least 20 minutes before each game to ensure thorough preparation.

Pre-Match Preparation

All appointed umpires, including reserves, should hold a pre-match discussion and warm up together. Prior to the start of each game, confirm that there is no equipment in the goal and that penalty corner protective equipment is placed behind the goal.

Attire

Umpires must wear shirts tucked into black pants or skirts. Male umpires are required to wear a belt, and female umpires must keep their socks rolled up just below the knees.

Start and Restart Procedures

Free Hits and Self-Pass

Players must make an attempt to stop the ball before taking a free hit or self-pass. Free hits in the midfield should be taken close to the location of the offence, with no significant advantage gained. Free hits inside the 23-metre area must be taken from where the offence occurred. Umpires should proactively manage these situations to avoid unnecessary resets.

For attacking free hits inside the 23-metre area, all players must be 5 metres away from the ball. However, defenders already within 5 metres, and inside the circle, may shadow the player taking the pass but cannot play or attempt to play the ball until it has traveled 5 metres or been touched by another defender. Infringements result in a penalty corner being awarded, with repeat offences warranting a personal penalty.

If play is stopped or delayed, all players except the taker must be 5 metres from the ball. The ball must travel 5 metres or be touched by a defender before being played into the circle.

Playing the ball high over the circle is permitted if there is no danger.

Procedures for Taking Penalties

Free Hits in the Circle

Defending teams may take free hits anywhere inside the circle. If taken to the 15-metre mark, the hit must be in line with the offence and parallel to the sideline.

Long Corner

Umpires should indicate a long corner by pointing at the backline with their left hand and then drawing a line to the 23-metre mark. Defenders must be moved **proactively** to maintain a 5-metre distance from the restart point.

If the hit from a long corner goes directly into the circle, the resulting FH to the defence must be taken from just outside the circle, not on the 23-metre line.

Penalty Corner

Once a penalty corner is awarded, time is not stopped but umpires should remind players to put on protective gear as quickly as possible. Defenders making no effort to put on protective gear and get in position on time will be given, in the first instance, a green card. Repeated offences may result in a yellow card being given.

Wearing a face mask is now mandatory for defending field players and must be worn until the penalty corner is over as described in **Rule 13.5**. If the face mask is removed before the penalty corner is over, the penalty corner is re-taken.

Defenders who are still wearing protective equipment may pass the ball immediately; however they are not allowed to self-pass. If a self-pass is taken in the circle a penalty corner is awarded. If a self-pass is taken outside the circle a free hit to the attacking team is awarded. In this respect, a self-pass constitutes moving with the ball. A slight touch or push to then make a pass is permitted.

The ball must be injected with at least one foot of the injector outside the circle and immediately after the whistle. Attackers entering the circle before the injection will result in the injector being sent beyond the half-line and replaced.

The distinction between a re-awarded and a new penalty corner is crucial, especially when players have been sent to the half-line for infractions. **Read Rule 13.5 carefully.**

The ball must travel outside the attacking circle before a goal can be scored; if it enters the goal without touching a defender, a 15-metre restart is awarded to the defence.

Additional protective equipment must be removed promptly and never worn outside the 23-metre area. Any violation results in a free hit to the attacking team just outside the 23-metre area. Protective gear must be removed safely and if removed gear strikes an opposing player or any umpire, a personal penalty (yellow card) must be applied, and a free hit or penalty corner awarded depending on where the incident occurred (see **Rule 13.3n and explanation**)

If additional protective equipment is dropped and hit by the ball outside the circle a free hit is awarded, inside the circle a penalty corner is awarded, and if it prevents a goal from being scored a penalty stroke is awarded.

A penalty corner concludes only under the scenarios detailed in Rule 13.5.

Penalty Strokes

There is no need to confirm readiness with the goalkeeper and striker, provided both are in position, goalkeeper on the goal line and striker is able to touch the ball from their position. The umpire blows the whistle for the stroke to be taken, which must be pushed, scooped, or flicked from the spot.

Umpires should position themselves to see if the ball is dragged from the spot and if it crosses the goal-line.

If the goalkeeper moves off the line before the stroke, the stroke is retaken. Repeat infringements may result in suspension.

If the attacker takes the stroke before the umpire blows the whistle, and the goalkeeper remains on the spot and saves it, play resumes with a free hit out to the defence. If the attacker shoots before the whistle is blown and scores, the stroke is retaken.

Umpiring Objectives and Playing the Game

Communication

Umpires should communicate with players when clarification is needed, but avoid lengthy discussions for every decision. Effective communication builds relationships and helps players understand expectations. All interactions should be respectful.

Flow and Advantage

Umpires are encouraged to allow advantage and promote game flow. Experience will improve an umpire's ability to play advantage. Umpires should communicate they are playing advantage by saying "play on" and with hand signals.

Tackling

When assessing tackles, consider the tackler's intent and whether the tackle was dangerous or resulted in an opponent falling. The tackler should focus on playing the ball, not the opponent. Not all stick tackles are fouls; observe the direction of the ball after contact.

Physical contests are permitted, but overly physical play, such as body checking or pushing, should be penalised. Sliding tackles that take out the player, **even if the ball has been played first**, are dangerous and warrant at least a 10-minute yellow card.

Obstruction and Stick Shielding

Assess whether the tackler is in a position to play the ball and whether the player with the ball is preventing legitimate play. Obstruction can occur through the use of the body, leg, or stick.

Attacking players blocking defenders' tackle attempts with their legs is obstruction unless defenders back off. This happens frequently along the side and baselines.

Backing into an opponent or shielding the ball during a reverse stick hit is also obstruction. For stick shielding, observe the stick position, not just the ball.

Aerial Ball and Ball off the Ground

Interceptions during aerial passes are allowed if not dangerous. Opponents may intercept within 5 metres, but not within playing distance. When the ball is lifted into a crowd, penalise the team that raised it.

Ensure the initial receiver is in a clear 5-metres of space; otherwise, award a free hit to the opposition.

Defenders or goalkeepers encroaching within 5 metres on an attacker inside the circle may lead to a penalty corner.

If the ball is mis-trapped and falls to an opponent, play continues.

Raised balls within the shooting circle and playing distance of multiple players must be penalised immediately.

Balls raised below knee height are not dangerous; if a player's foot is hit unintentionally without advantage gained, play on. Assess advantage based on whether the opposing player can contest for the ball. For 3D skills raising the ball above knee height within playing distance, award a free hit against the team raising the ball.

Dangerous Play

Players must not lift sticks over others' heads; early verbal warnings should be issued, escalating to suspension if repeated. Dangerous play is also penalised when it causes **legitimate evasive action**.

Stick Over Shoulder

Playing the ball over the shoulder is permitted in all divisions except for school tournaments. Umpires judge this solely on danger.

Conduct of Play: Players and Goalkeepers

Captains

Each team must designate a captain, who must wear a distinctive armband, ribbon, or pin provided in the equipment bag. Captains are responsible for the conduct of all players, management, and coaching staff.

Misbehavior by anyone on the bench may lead to the captain being cautioned or suspended. If suspended, the armband must be transferred to the acting captain. Substituted captains retain responsibility for players on the pitch.

Players are prohibited from running directly into opponents under any circumstances; such actions result in a free hit.

Appeal, Dissent, and Verbal Abuse

Umpires will not tolerate verbal abuse from players both on the pitch and substitutes, managers, or coaching staff. Misconduct should be addressed promptly with warnings or cards.

Excessive appealing or dissent can lead to upgraded penalties. If dissent occurs after a penalty corner is awarded, apply a personal penalty without reversing the corner.

Team Penalty vs. Personal Penalty

A team penalty includes free hits, penalty corners, or penalty strokes, affecting the entire team. Personal penalties are warnings or cards for deliberate actions. In the defending 23-metre area, intentional infractions result in a penalty corner and a possible personal penalty.

Umpires must be able to recognise the difference between a legitimate attempt to tackle the ball and an intentional breach of the rules.

Crowding of Umpires

Only the captain or a single player may approach the umpire to query decisions. If more than one player crowds the umpire, the captain or offending player will be sent off. Repeated offences results in a yellow card for the captain.

Use of Cards

After other management tools are exhausted, cards are shown for misbehavior. Cards serve as both personal penalties and signals to players and spectators.

The maximum suspension for a green card is 2 minutes; the minimum for a yellow card is 5 minutes, with the possibility of extension for continued misbehavior.

Suspended players may return immediately after their suspension, even following the award of a penalty corner, except if they are being substituted. Substitutes may only enter once substitution rules are met.

Technical Area

Reserve Umpire & Technical Delegate Duties

Only registered players may participate in matches. If unregistered names are added to the team list, the reserve umpire or technical official must remind the manager of potential penalties under tournament rules.

Team substitutes must be stationed beside the technical table at pitch level, and all players and officials should remain on the team bench side of the perimeter fence. Crossing the fence is only permitted for substitutions, after which players must return to the bench. Coaches and managers should not stand outside the perimeter fence to prevent interference with umpiring.

The reserve umpire or technical official may warn or suspend players or officials on the bench and must assist the pitch umpires in maintaining discipline. Serious misconduct is reported to the Tournament Committee for further action.

Bibs and socks are available to resolve colour clashes and must be returned after use.

Substitutions and Player Numbers

All substitutions must occur within 5 metres of the center line. If 12 players are on the pitch for an extended period, the extra player is removed, and the captain receives a yellow card for 5 minutes, reducing the team by one player. A free hit is awarded to the opponents on the center line near the substitution sideline.

If a goal is scored with 12 players on the field before play restarts, the goal is disallowed; if play has restarted, the goal stands. The same applies to penalty corners and penalty strokes.

SHF Umpires' Committee – March 2026