AND OUR SEASON OFFICIALLY BEGINS...

*I’m excited about the changes taking place to the game of field hockey; I hope that you are too!*

**Item 1:** Misconduct Penalties/Card Progression/Coaches

PLEASE REMEMBER THAT “When possible, umpires should use preventative officiating” (Officials Guide G.2.a. on page 82). The intent of the new rule shifts the onus of compliance from the players to the head coach, but this is not intended to become open season to ding a coach or two! Instead, let’s help the coaches out, support the players, and keep the game safe.

Please eyeball the players as they come out onto the field. Ask the keeper if she has her throat protector and her mouth guard. Check for a mouth guard bulge at the top of the sock or the shoulder of the uniform. If one exists, please remind the players that those mouth protectors do more good in the mouth than they would on the shoulder, rather than going after a coach! Remember, the intent of the rule is player safety and that we are in this together... “all participants have the obligation to minimize risk whenever possible” (Points of Emphasis; Rough and Dangerous Play, page 66).

While not required nor prohibited by the rule book, in the Northeast District we still line both teams up and walk the line inspecting uniforms, equipment, jewelry, etc. prior to all games/levels for the first couple of weeks of the season...

**Item 2:** Uniforms and Misconduct Penalty

Unfortunately, I need to start the season with instructions to officials regarding appropriate player uniforms! The current uniform rules (1.5.1.a. on page 10) were identified in 2009 to become effective in 2011. They call for a solid color on both the front and on the back (white or dark). It’s really pretty simple! Guidance from the OHSAA office is that there shall not be any exceptions granted to high school teams (varsity, junior varsity, or 9th grade) who have illegal uniforms.

So what is the procedure to follow if one or more team members take the field with illegal uniforms?
First, please know that the game will be played even if a team is not properly attired. [The game would, however, be forfeited if an entire team did not have the required equipment (mouth protection, shin guards, or eye protection).] Second, as indicated by the new rules, illegal uniforms shall result in a misconduct being awarded to the head coach. Remember, multiple simultaneous misconducts shall result in the assessment of a single misconduct card (not one for each illegal uniform).

Procedure: At the captains and coaches meeting, after the coin has been tossed and possession determined, the officials will ask the coaches if their teams are legally and properly equipped according to NFHS Rules. At that time, the coach needs to identify deficiencies that exist (Officials will help them if necessary) and if a team’s uniforms are not compliant, a green card (for illegal uniforms in this case) shall be given to the head coach and recorded in the scorebook. The game shall begin and there is no change of possession. The next misconduct to that coach must escalate to a yellow card and the team shall play short.

Item 2 Comment: Please remember to use preventative officiating techniques when possible but to adhere to the rules as written. Sometimes we need to card. Sometimes we can alleviate the situation before it becomes an issue!

Item 3: New Opportunities! Playing the Ball at any Height

Some food for thought:
As stated in Bulletin 2015-02, there are no changes to the definition of danger or dangerous play (these still require judgement of the official). The real difference is that the ball can now be played at any height providing it is not dangerous and does not lead to dangerous play. Defenders and attack players may raise their sticks anywhere on the field. They may play the ball at any height. The wording is that they may PLAY THE BALL AT ANY HEIGHT! They could stop aerial ball with their sticks above their shoulders or they could PLAY the Ball above their shoulders providing that it is not dangerous, leading to danger, or intimidating.

The official’s judgement comes into play here, and this is new to all of us. I encourage teams to try a new approach and help players and officials to safely grow into the accelerated playing style.

Remember:

1. Sticks may be raised anywhere on the field. (Could opponents be standing next to each other and raise their sticks without causing danger or being intimidating?) Yes, they could. But danger could also ensue.

2. All attempts to play the ball must be controlled and safe. The stick does not have to be still and the players do not have to just try to stop the ball. (Could a player swing her stick at an aerial or bouncing ball?) Yes, provided the action is not dangerous, leading to danger, or intimidating.

3. Swinging and missing the ball above the shoulder is not a foul. (Can a player jump for that aerial, take a wild swing, and miss it without causing danger? Yes, they could. But danger could also ensue.)
4. Defenders setting up for a sixteen yard hit, a free hit, a long hit, etc. can have their sticks in the air! (Would the attack look for an outlet pass instead of trying a scoop? Could that attack player drive the ball between defenders with raised sticks?) **Possibly! Yes, provided the action is not dangerous, leading to danger, or intimidating.**

5. If players are playing the ball dangerously during practice sessions, it is unlikely that they will play the ball safely during a game. (Should officials hold their whistles for advantage when they see a dangerous action?) **NO!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! We must whistle danger at the moment that it is recognized.**

There are some good clips to watch at these links. (Be sure that when watching the FIH video, your attention is on high school rules/mechanics.)

http://www.dartfish.tv/Player.aspx?CR=p38316c12660m2642515

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hu9_4xheod4

http://www.dartfish.tv/Player.aspx?CR=p38316c12660m2642538

Please be sure to review Roman Numerals IV (Use of the Stick) and V (Aerial Balls) in the Officials Guide (pages 72-74). I know there will be much more on this as we move forward.

I look forward to some great opportunities as we move to grow our sport in Ohio

As always, your ideas will be considered (and presented anonymously) for inclusion in subsequent Field Hockey Bulletins!

*Have a great start to your season!*

Rick