

# History of the Rules of Hockey

[Slightly adapted from <http://www.fih.ch> and published for download on [www.northernshockey.co.za](http://www.northernshockey.co.za)]

Just like the history of the game itself, the official hockey rules have constantly evolved throughout the years. Take a look back at how the game was played in the past and see what warranted a whistle in previous generations. The following chronology begins with the extracts from the 1876 rules gleaned from the Surbiton Hockey Club minute book.

## 1876

- The pitch was 100-150 yards long and 50-80 yards wide; goals consisted of 7 feet tall posts placed 6 yards apart;
- The sticks were “curved and wooden approved by the Committee of the Association”; the ball was an “ordinary sized cricket ball”;
- Offside is specified as requiring three opponents to be near their own goal-line;
- If the ball goes out of play over the side-line play was restarted by rolling the ball back into the field at right angles to the line;
- Players were not permitted to raise their stick above their shoulder;
- A circle does not seem to be marked on the pitch but the rules do say that “no goals shall be allowed if the ball be hit from a distance of more than 15 yards from the nearest goalpost”;
- If a rule was infringed “the ball shall be brought back and a bully shall take place”;
- The flat playing side of the stick is not defined but the rules do say that “the ball shall be played from right to left”.

## 1886

- The Hockey Association (England) drew up a code of Rules based on those used by clubs in the London area;
- The pitch should be 100 yards long by 55 to 60 yards wide; goals should be 4 yards wide with a cross bar 7 feet from the ground; there would be a striking circle with a radius of 15 yards; flags (not lines) indicated the 25 yards area;
- The game was to be started (and re-started after a goal) by a bully which involved three taps of the stick between two players at the centre spot; a bully would also be taken at 25 yards after the ball had gone over the back-line;
- All non-involved players had to be 5 yards from the ball at free hits, rolls-in and bullies; rolls-in by hand were used to put the ball into play after it had gone over the side-line;
- Teams comprised eleven players – five forwards, three half-backs, two full-backs and one goalkeeper; no substitutes were allowed;
- The game was controlled either by two umpires or one umpire (referee) assisted by two linesmen;
- Hockey sticks were made of wood with leather-covered handles;
- Balls used were traditional leather-covered cricket balls painted white;
- There was no mention of goalkeepers equipment;
- The ball was played with one side of the stick (the left hand side) only; the ball could not be played above the shoulder or with the rounded side (back) of the stick;
- It was not permitted to kick, trip, shove, or obstruct an opponent;
- Hands and feet could be used to stop the ball but then had to be moved out of the way; feet and legs could not to be used behind the ball to resist opponents;
- Goalkeepers could kick the ball but only within their own circles;
- Hooking of sticks was allowed but only within striking distance of the ball;
- Offside (with less than 3 defenders) was applied from the half-way line;
- A bully was taken in the circle for an offence by a defender; free hits were given for other fouls.

## 1900

The International Rules Board (later the Hockey Rules Board) was formed on 23 April 1900 in London by the men's Hockey Associations of England, Ireland and Wales; the Rules of the Game were decided thereafter by the Board. The first meeting of the International Rules Board was held on the 25 July 1900. Advantage was recognised; not every offence was to be penalised immediately.

## 1904

Intentional undercutting and raising the ball from a hit was to be penalised. The scoop stroke was permitted.

## 1905

Each umpire was to take half of the pitch for the whole game without changing ends and to take decisions on rolls-in for the whole of their side-line, but not for corners. Umpires were also empowered to warn and/or suspend players from the game. A weight limit of 28 ounces was laid down for sticks. The width of the pitch could be up to 66 yards.

## 1907

Umpires were allowed to apply the Rules without waiting for an appeal. Prior to this time appeals had to be made by players before an umpire could give a decision.

## 1908

The penalty corner was introduced for offences by defenders in the circle. At a penalty corner, the Rules required the ball to be stopped before a shot at goal but this was not umpired rigorously. All defenders were behind the goal-line with attacking players outside the circle. The bully was replaced by a penalty bully for deliberately stopping a certain goal.

## 1927

Advantage was formally written as Rule. By this time there were routinely two umpires for each match.

## 1936

Notes and suggestions for umpires were included in the Rules book. Later this became an appendix entitled 'Advice to Umpires'.

## 1938

Any form of interference with the stick of an opponent, including hooking of sticks, was forbidden as was the use of any part of the body, except the hand, to stop the ball.

## 1949

Deliberate offences by defenders within the 25 yards area and persistent offences by defenders at corners were given a penalty corner.

## 1957

The 25 yards bully after a ball had gone over the back line was replaced by a free hit at 16 yards.

## 1959

Umpires were empowered to suspend players for a temporary period.

## 1961

At a penalty corner and for corners, a maximum of six defenders were behind the back line with the remainder of the team at the 25 yardline.

## 1963

The penalty bully was replaced by a penalty stroke taken from a spot 8 yards from the goal. For a penalty corner, the remainder of the defending team were moved to be behind the centre (and not just the 25 yards) line.

## 1970-1979

- The roll-in from side-line was replaced by a push-in.
- Offside was changed from three to two defenders.
- Two substitutes were permitted but once substituted a player was not permitted to return.
- A penalty stroke was awarded for a deliberate offence by a defender in the circle, regardless of whether a goal might have been scored.
- The first common Rule book for men and women was published. Changes made at this time included:
  - At a penalty corner the ball was to be stopped motionless by an attacker before a shot at goal; there was to be no latitude;
  - Notes on the Rules became 'Guidance for Players and Umpires';
  - A code of signals for umpires was published for the first time;
  - A temporary suspension for offending player(s) was to be at least 5 minutes;
  - The width of the pitch was specified as 60 yards;

- The penalty stroke spot was moved from 8 to 7 yards from the goal-line.
- Colour control cards (green, yellow, red) were introduced into the Rules book

## 1984

- A hit-in replaced the push-in from the side line;
- A pass back replaced the centre bully to start or re-start the game;
- The bully was retained only for accidents or unforeseen events;
- The Rule explicitly limiting the height to which the stick could be raised was deleted;
- The use of the hand except by a goalkeeper was abolished;
- At free hits only opponents had to be 5 yards from the ball;
- No free hits to the attacking team were to be taken within five yards of the circle;
- The "long" corner was changed from being similar to the penalty corner to instead essentially being a free hit taken from a spot on the goal-line within 5 yards of the corner flag with all players (other than the striker) at least 5 yards from the ball.
- Definitions of 'Hockey Terminology' were included for the first time.

## 1987

- The number of defenders behind the back line at penalty corners was reduced from six to five;
- At corners and 16 yard hits only opponents were required to be 5 yards from the ball;
- At penalty corners the first hit at goal should not cross the goal-line higher than 18 inches and if the ball travelled more than 5 yards outside the circle then the penalty corner Rules no longer applied;
- The penalty corner was finished after the ball the ball travelled 5 yards from the outer edge of the circle;
- Offside applied only in the 25 yards area;
- A deliberately raised ball falling into the circle was to be penalised;
- Free hits to defenders could be taken within the circle;
- At free hits to the attacking team within five yards of the circle all players had to be five yards from the ball.

## 1994

Captains were made responsible for their team's behaviour and for substitutions. Goalkeepers were required to wear protective headgear.

## 1995

- At a free hit the ball was required to move at least 1 yard;
- Umpires were empowered to order a free hit to be advanced by 10 yards for dissent or a subsequent offence;
- Goalkeepers were permitted to deflect (in addition to stop as hitherto) a ball above their shoulder;
- Substitution was allowed at penalty corners and penalty strokes;
- The ball was put back into play at a penalty corner from a spot exactly 10 yards from the goal-post and not at least 10 yards as hitherto.

## 1996

- At a penalty corner the ball had to be stopped outside the circle before a shot at goal could be made;
- The pass-back to start or restart the game became a centre pass which could be played in any direction;
- Goalkeepers' gauntlets were re-named 'hand protectors' with a maximum length of 9 inches and a maximum width of 14 inches;
- Mandatory Experimental Rules introduced were:
  - No offside;
  - Players may not intentionally enter their opponents goal, stand on their opponents goal-line or intentionally run behind either goal;
  - A corner to be taken on a spot on the side line 5 yards from the corner flag;
  - Within the 25 yards area all players, except the taker, to be 5 yards from the ball at free hits, hits-in and 16 yards hits.

## 1998

- Substitutions at penalty corners were no longer permitted except for an injured defending goalkeeper but were still permitted at penalty strokes;
- All measurements and distances were now stated in metric form with an imperial-metric conversion table included at the end of the Rules book;
- 'Technical Information and Advice' was published as an appendix
- Metric rather than imperial measurements and distances.

## 1999

- Acknowledgement of a continuing study of the composition of the stick but metal and metallic substances were already banned;
- An experimental Rule allowing use of the edge of the stick subject to the normal safety considerations;
- Clarification of the Rule when a goalkeeper is suspended at a penalty corner: another goalkeeper must be the replacement with the team consequently having to withdraw one field player until the period of suspension is completed;
- The experimental Rule to require prolongation for completion of a penalty corner at half-time and full-time was confirmed as a Rule.

## 2000

- More precise specification of the shape, size, weight and material of the stick;
- A broken white line to be marked on the pitch 5 metres from and beyond the circle line;
- The ball was put back into play at a penalty corner from a spot on the back-line inside the circle

## 2001

Allowing the edge of the stick to be used to play the ball was incorporated as a formal Rules change with effect from 2002.

## 2002

Using the edge of the stick to play the ball was confirmed as a formal Rule and when the penalty corner is completed for substitution purposes was clarified.

## 2003

- Defenders were permitted to use their stick above their shoulder to stop or deflect a shot at goal;
- It was no longer necessary to stop the ball outside the circle before a shot could be taken at a penalty corner but, instead, the ball was only required to travel outside the circle.

## 2004

This year saw a radically revised Rules Book. The Rules had been completely re-written to make them easier to understand. The opportunity was taken to simplify a few Rules without changing any of the fundamental characteristics of the game.

- Simplifying how a penalty corner is completed for substitution purposes and at the end of half-time and full-time;
- Requiring field players who leave the field for some reason other than substitution to re-enter only between the 23 metres areas;
- Specifying how the result of a match is decided;
- Rationalising procedures for starting and re-starting play so that the procedures for taking a free hit also apply to the centre pass;
- Retaining the fundamental characteristics of the bully but simplifying it by requiring sticks to touch only once;
- The Rule which specified that a ball must not be raised intentionally so that it lands directly in the circle was deleted;
- Simplifying the obstruction Rule;
- Specifying that players must not tackle unless they are in a position to play the ball without body contact;

- Requiring the player taking a penalty stroke to start by standing behind and within playing distance of the ball and not permitting them to approach either the ball or the goalkeeper after taking the stroke;
- Specifying that the whistle must be blown to start a penalty stroke when both players are in position;
- Rationalising how offences at a penalty stroke are dealt with;
- Permitting the intended duration of a temporary suspension to be extended for misconduct by a player while suspended;
- Introducing new umpiring signals to indicate dangerous play and stick obstruction.

## 2007

The Hockey Rules Board (HRB) went to a two-year cycle for all Rule Changes, the major changes in 2007 included:

- Permitting a team either to have a goalkeeper on the field or to play entirely with field players.
- Specifying the face protection which field players are permitted to wear especially in relation to defending a penalty corner.
- Prohibiting hitting the ball hard on the forehand with the edge of the stick.
- A defender is not penalised if their stick is not motionless or travelling towards the ball while attempting to stop or deflect the shot;
- Permitting a goalkeeper to use their hands, arms or any other part of their body to move the ball away but only as part of a goal saving action and not to propel the ball forcefully so that it travels a long distance.

## 2009

A “self-pass” from a free hit was introduced. It enables the player taking the free hit to play the ball themselves again after taking the free hit to encourage free-flowing hockey. Small changes to wording and some additional notes were included to improve interpretation of certain rules. In particular, the following were clarified:

- If a team which has too many players on the field, time is stopped and a personal penalty awarded against the captain.
- The ways in which a penalty corner is completed were all consolidated within the penalty corner Rule.

## 2011

- The “self-pass” rule and restrictions on hitting the ball directly into the circle from free hits in the attacking 23 metres area which had been introduced as mandatory experimental rules in 2009 were confirmed as full rules.
- The rule which specified that “players must not force an opponent into offending unintentionally” was deleted. Any action of this sort can instead be dealt with under other Rules.
- “Anywhere inside the circle” was deleted from the rule which said that “a free hit awarded inside the circle to the defence is taken anywhere inside the circle or up to 15 metres from the back-line in line with the location of the offence, parallel to the side-line”.
- The penalties applying for an offence during the taking of a penalty corner were listed in detail for the first time. The penalties applying for an offence during the taking of a penalty stroke were rationalised.

## 2013

- “Own goal” introduced; that is, a goal can be scored after the ball is touched in the circle by either an attacker or a defender.
- The ball can be raised directly and intentionally from a free hit using a push, flick or scoop action so long as the action is safe.
- Both changes above were introduced as “mandatory experimental rules” so they apply at all levels of hockey but will be monitored closely.
- Now that the ball can be lifted directly from a free hit, the Rule requiring two separate actions when taking the free hit and requiring the ball to move at least one metre before a teammate can play the ball were deleted.

- Other clarifications included: reviewing umpiring decisions after the completion of time; not taking a bully within five metres of the circle.
- Revised stick specification which incorporates a new way of measuring the stick bow/rake.

## 2014

- The mandatory experimental “own goal” rule introduced in 2013 is removed and the requirements for scoring a goal are once again as they were prior to 2013, that is, a goal can again only be scored after the ball is played in the circle by an attacker and doesn’t leave the circle before entering the goal.