

HPA DISCIPLINARY OFFICER'S REPORT 2021

This is a report for HPA Disciplinary Committee by the HPA Disciplinary Officer for the 2021 polo season up to 1st September 2021; the fifth such report by the Disciplinary Officer during his tenure of appointment. There has been one small change to the disciplinary rules for 2020 and that involves the number of matches for which a player should automatically be stood down for incurring a red flag; automatic 2-match ban, which could be increased subject to a review by the Disciplinary Review Board (DRP). If the match ban is increased by the DRP, the player in question has the right to appeal. We increased the DRP from 3 members to 5 when carrying out any review of a player's conduct, particularly over any red flag awarded.

For the 2021 season the umpires have continued to use the system of reporting yellow and red flags through the Pro Umpires What's App system for all Victor Ludorum (VL) and 22-goal matches, including down to 4-goal level. We have continued to give players a formal warning after incurring 3 yellow flags without consultation with members of the DRP. In addition, there has not been consultation with DRP when a player incurs a 4th yellow flag, just a formal e-mail, with the necessary form attached, from me, to state that that player will start his/her next 4 VL matches on a yellow flag until such time as he/she has completed 4 VL matches without incurring a further yellow flag and sent the required form to me confirming that. The player in question is also encouraged to read Rule 50c but some fail to do so. In a number of cases players starting on a yellow flag have failed to submit their form and have thus started more matches on a yellow flag that they need to have done. I recommend that the rules for the accumulation of yellow flags remain for 2022. I recommend an amendment to the form that should include 6 matches without a yellow flag (not the present 4) and that it need not be signed by the host club. Any form submission can be checked against match reports.

There have been 4 cases of red flags this season, two of which were reviewed by 5 members of the DRP and dealt with; one incurring a 2-match ban, and one a 3-match ban and starting 4 VL matches on a yellow flag, which was not appealed against. The system in place for these first 2 red flags worked well and quickly. There are two case of red flags which are, at the time of writing, subject to a Disciplinary Hearing as a result of an incident in the final league match of the Cowdray Gold Cup, when a player was given a 5th yellow flag, sin-binned and refused to return to the field of play after 2 minutes, and his team-mate (his father) left the field and refused to return.

The number of yellow flags has been compared with those awarded in 2019 over a 6-month, period as the 2020 season lasted only 4 months. The total number of yellow flags was lower than in 2019; 243 in 2021 and 267 in 2019. By category they were: Dangerous Play/Stick 124 (75, in 2019), Unsportsmanlike/Abuse 105 (141 in 2019), Misuse of the Whip 29 (54 in 2019) and Other Misdemeanours (unsuitable umpire ponies/getting off ponies outside the box etc) 5 (0 in 2019). Two players incurred 6 yellow flags (and started all further VL matches on a yellow flag until the end of the season) and five players incurred 5 yellow flags. These systems have worked well and require no change for 2022.

The umpires, overall, have been consistent, strict and fair throughout the season, particularly over unsportsmanlike and abusive behaviour, and bad language, all of which bring the game into disrepute. Overall, I commend the professional umpires for the way they have handled some awkward situations and for the care they have taken when undergoing their duties.

I recommend that there be no changes to the disciplinary rules for 2022, except an addition to the form submitted after a player, having incurred 4 yellow flags, has completed his matches without incurring a further yellow flag.