

Umpires in Polocrosse – Information for Administrators and Players

Introduction

All sports need a cadre of Umpires to facilitate and manage their sport. In Australian Polocrosse the game largely relies on players volunteering to Umpire games at carnivals in which they are competing. The PAA recognises the need to continue to encourage and support more players to become Umpires, and become better Umpires. The PAA also recognises that Umpiring any sport can be a daunting task, and polocrosse must promote a culture that appreciates and respects Umpires. The following information is provided in support of officials involved in Umpiring and training and or mentoring Umpires in our sport. They are not firm policies, but are provided as guidelines and as a resource for use where considered appropriate. The PAA would welcome feedback on the materials provided and offers of upgrading and or enhancing the materials would be welcomed¹.

What is the Polocrosse Umpire System?

There is an Australian National Umpire Director, each State has a State Umpire and Each Zone has a Zone Umpire Director. Umpires can gain accreditation at National, State, A Grade, B Grade and Probationary level. The Zone level is where the majority of Umpires gain accreditation and where the majority of games are played. This section therefore focuses on the Zone level in the first instance.

Each Zone elects a Zone Umpire Director, and a Deputy Umpire Director. Some Zones may elect several Deputies, which will constitute the Zone Umpire Committee.

Zones and individual clubs are also now being encouraged to identify an Umpire Coach or Mentor.

Role of the Zone Umpire Director (and or their Deputies)

The Zone Umpire Director is required to adjudicate and / or be the referee in charge of any tournament being conducted in their relevant Zone, or nominate one of their Deputies if they are not able to attend a tournament.

The Zone Umpire is to ensure that all games played are safe, fair and enjoyable for all participants.

A Zone Umpire should be consulted at a tournament when:

- Substituting a player
 - Vetting a horse out
 - There is a dispute over a ruling
 - Any player shows disrespect to an Umpire or player during or after a game
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- Where a horse that has been sidelined for vice,(ie kicking, biting , rearing, out of control) is intending to return to playing. The Zone Umpire should be advised by the relevant Club, in writing.

At the commencement of each playing season, the Zone Umpire should call an Umpires meeting. This meeting should be held before the start of play at the first carnival in the Zone to ensure all umpires on the draw have:

- completed an Umpire test,
- agreed to the Umpires Code of Conduct,
- are aware of their legal responsibilities as an Umpire, and
- advise all umpires of any rule changes since the last season.

Additional Roles for Zone Umpires:

- Approve an individual to become a probationary or student Umpire, being upgraded to B Grade.
- Recommending to the State Umpire that a B Grade Umpire be upgraded to A, or identifying an A Grade Umpire that could be considered for State accreditation.
- Advise the relevant State Umpire of new and upgraded Umpires to be placed on the database.
- Approval of Umpires for all games at a carnival in the Zone.
- Participate as a member of the Zone Judiciary as required.
- Be available to provide advice and support to Umpires in the Zone.

Role of Zone Umpire Coach or Mentor

The PAA has identified the need for probationary and less experienced Umpires to be given an increased level of support, coaching and mentoring. As noted from the list of responsibilities above, Zone Umpires have a significant role during a carnival which can be quite time consuming. Many Zone Umpires are also players and the time they have available to coach new umpires can therefore be limited. Each Zone should therefore consider nominating a dedicated Umpire Coach or Mentor to:

- Provide support, advice and encouragement to probationary and less experienced umpires during tournaments.
- Advise the Zone Umpires of any issues arising from umpires and players approach to umpires in the Zone.
- Provide support and facilitate Umpire Training and Accreditation.

Ideally an Umpire Coach would have experience as a trainer (in any discipline), the game of polocrosse and umpiring polocrosse.

How Do I Become a Polocrosse Umpire?

Attend a Course and take an Exam

You will first need to undertake an Umpire course conducted in your Zone.

At the completion of the face-to-face training program candidates are required to sit an exam to assess your knowledge of roles of the umpire and officials, rules of the game and safety issues. An 80 % pass mark is required. Examples of Exams for B Grade Level Umpires are on the PAA Website. The exam can be done as a written test, or arrangements can be made for it to be taken orally.

The tests are usually a short multiple choice / short answer exam, comprising approximately 30 questions. The PAA publish a Booklet on “Polocrosse Rules and Information on the Game”. You can obtain a rule book through your local club, Zone or they can be downloaded from: www.polocrosse.org.au. Candidates are not permitted to access course materials or rule books during the exam. Candidates may re-take the exam as many times as necessary to achieve the pass mark.

Once you have participated in a course and passed the Umpire Exam you will be required to sign an Umpires Code of Conduct and be registered as a Probationary Umpire on the National PAA database. Note – Zone Umpires need to advise the relevant State Umpire who then update the database.

Practical Assessment

The Probationary Umpire will then be assessed for practical demonstration of their ability to officiate (umpire) effectively. The Probationary Umpire must be accompanied by a senior Umpire. Competency will be assessed by the accompanying senior umpire and / or Zone Umpire over a minimum of 3 games of at least 32 minutes duration. The Probationary Umpire is then eligible to be confirmed as a B Grade Umpire. The minimum age for a Student Umpire is 15.

To become a Probationary Umpire you must:

1. Attend a recognised Umpire Course in your Zone.
2. Undertake and pass (minimum 80%) an exam.

To be confirmed as a B Grade Umpire you must:

1. Undertake several practical assessments. These assessment tasks are completed after the umpire-course and exam.

Minimum Competency Standards for a B Grade Umpire:

- a. Understand & apply the roles & responsibilities of a B Grade Umpire.
- b. Interpret the rules & communicate rules to players.
- c. Communicate & understand the principles of umpiring polocrosse.
- d. Be aware of the legal responsibilities.
- e. Basic knowledge of the sport
- f. Apply good interpersonal & communication skills.
- g. Effectively umpire at B Grade Level
- h. Behave ethically, in line with the Umpire Code of Conduct guidelines
- i. Identify potential safety problems (risk management)
- k. Resolve disputes

As a B Grade Umpire, once you have achieved a level of experience and competency you will be eligible to apply for A Grade accreditation. You should approach your Zone Umpire, attend a further refresher course and undertake an A Grade Exam. Examples of A Grade Exams are provided on the PAA Website.

You will undergo a practical assessment of your ability to officiate at A Grade level, over a minimum of 3 A Grade games. Dependent upon satisfactory performance the Zone Umpire may make a recommendation to the State Umpire to consider if you should be upgraded to A Grade status.

A Grade Umpires need to demonstrate a high level of judgement and interpersonal communication skills. Preventive umpiring and proactive attention to safety aspects of the game are essential.

Umpire Training Course – issues to consider

Content

Umpire Courses have traditionally focused on going through the rule book and discussing interpretation of the rules. Similarly the focus of the Umpire accreditation Test is on knowing and being able to interpret the rules correctly.

While knowing the rules is fundamental, in more recent times it has been recognised that many umpires need coaching on managing the game and its environment, not just providing accurate adjudication on the rules. Issues such as the role of the umpire – fair, safe and enjoyable, managing and resolving conflict, preventing conflicts, good communication skills, positioning on the field, managing the game environment, etc, are all issues that should be considered in polocrosse umpire training courses.

Some examples of course agendas, including issues to discuss and possible approaches are provided on the PAA Website. These are provided for guidance, and any feedback on these agendas and any additional training materials that officials are able and willing to share via this web site are welcomed. Again please contact neo@polocrosse.org.au to comment on, edit or provide any additional materials.

Facilitators and resource people

The Zone Umpire Director, Deputy Zone Umpires and Umpire Coach / Mentor, should attend all Umpire Training Courses undertake in their Zone. The Zone Umpires can conduct the training and or act as resource people at the course. Participatory approaches are considered most effective, rather than simple rote learning of the rules.

It is recognised that running any training program requires quite specific skills to be fully effective. An effective Zone Umpire may or may not be an effective trainer. Therefore each Zone should consider what individuals they have in their Zone that could assist them or facilitate Umpire Training Courses. Consideration should be given to past and current players, parents, and social members or associates. For example if your Zone polocrosse community includes a trained trainer, they could facilitate an effective training course. They do not necessarily need to be an experienced umpire or A grade player. An experienced

trainer or workshop facilitator can complement the knowledge and experience of Zone Umpires and or other experienced Umpires in the Zone.

It can be useful to have a mix of people attending a course, people with experience as well as new Umpires. However the facilitator's role is to encourage input from all participants, if the timing and venue allows group work ensures all get involved. A simple opening exercise of asking participants to write on a sticky note what they see as the biggest challenge to Umpiring will give you an idea of what the groups concerns are and hence where to focus. Always seek feedback from participants after any training course is conducted.

Venue and timing

You should allow at least 2-3 hours to allow a robust exchange and discussion of the issues an Umpire will face, and some coping mechanisms, discussion of rules that may be difficult to interpret or that are known to cause difficulties, and then time to sit the Test, with marking and feedback.

One way to mark the test is to get participants to exchange their Tests with the other participants and then go through the answers to the test together.

Examples of B and A Grade Tests are available on the PAA Website. Again feedback welcome.

When considering where to conduct a test, consider how you can get more people to first come, and then stay focused. Can the course be combined with another event such as a coaching weekend ? Think about comfort and facilities – chairs and room temperature, lighting, access to a white board, tea / coffee facilities, size of venue that encourages discussion (not too large for size of the group) or provides options for break out groups.

State Level Accreditation

Once you have experience as an A grade Umpire you may wish to seek State Accreditation. The PAA conducts an ongoing program to develop and extend umpiring skills leading to State and National Accredited Umpires. A copy of the full State and National Umpire Accreditation and Training Syllabus is available at www.polocrosse.org.au.

You should indicate to your Zone Umpire your interest in State accreditation. Alternatively your Zone Umpire may approach you to seek your interest in accreditation.

Each State conducts a regular State Level accreditation with the National Officiating Accreditation Scheme. To be eligible a candidate must

- a) Be at least 18 years of age
- b) Have attained an A grade umpire rating
- c) Be approved by the State Chief Umpire and / or the State Association Executive
- d) have registration with Polocrosse Association of Australian Incorporated through their respective State Association
- e) Be an Australian Citizen or a permanent Australian resident
- f) Have a thorough understanding of the rules of polocrosse

Note: to attend State level accreditation will usually require payment of course fees

A State level Umpire is accredited for a period of 4 years. To retain State Level Accreditation a State Level Umpire must do 75 hours of updating activities during the four years accreditation period of which 40 hours will be practical umpiring, at a minimum of 10 hours per year. The balance can be obtained through activities detailed below:

- Presenting
- Assessing
- Mentoring
- Generic Personal Development
- Sport-specific work shops/seminars
- Contribution to publication of technical articles

Accreditation activities must be recorded in a PAA Log Book and submitted to the relevant State Umpire for verification.

Competency statement - The State Level Umpire will be able to:

- a. Understand & effectively apply the roles & responsibilities of a State Umpire.
- b. Interpret the rules & clearly communicate rules
- c. Effectively communicate & understand the principles of umpiring polocrosse.
- d. Understand the legal responsibilities.
- e. Underpinning knowledge of the sport
- f. Use effective interpersonal & communication skills.
- g. Effectively umpire at State Level Championships
- h. Identify & relate to roles of umpiring
- i. Implement values & ethical behaviour
- j. Identify potential safety problems (risk management)
- k. Resolve disputes
- l. Manage human & technical resources

National Level Accreditation

To be eligible for National Level Accreditation a candidate must:

- a. Have State Level accreditation with the National Officiating Accreditation Scheme and be at least 21 years of age
- b. Be approved by the Australian Chief Umpire and/or the Australian National Umpiring Committee
- c. Have registration with Polocrosse Association of Australian Incorporated through their respective State Association
- d. They must be an Australian Citizen or an Australian permanent resident
- f. Two years umpiring experience at State Accreditation level

Note that a candidate may be required to pay required Accreditation course fees

The National Umpire Accreditation Syllabus can be located at www.polocrosse.org.au.

A National Level Umpire must do 100 hours of updating activities during the four year accreditation period of which 50 hours will be practical umpiring at a minimum of 10 hours

per year. These accreditation activities need to be recorded in a PAA Log Book and provided to the National Umpire Committee for verification.

Competency statements - The National Level Umpire will be able to:

- a. Understand and effectively apply the role and responsibility of a National Umpire.
- b. Interpret the rules and clearly communicate rulings.
- c. Implementing the planning of and evaluate umpiring training programs.
- d. Identify legal responsibilities and manage/ minimise the risk of injury and provide a safe environment.
- e. Apply mental preparation techniques.
- f. Implement game management strategies.
- g. Conduct themselves as an Ambassador for Australian Polocrosse.
- h. Knowledge to be able to identify drugs used in polocrosse for both the player & the polocrosse horse.
- i. Knowledge to ensure that players are aware of their responsibility in relation to drugs in polocrosse.

In addition to attending a national Accreditation Course, and undertaking an exam, to gain National level accreditation a candidate must undergo practical assessment aimed at assessing the candidates practical ability to officiate effectively. A practical demonstration of officiating skills is required on 3 games of at least 32 minutes duration. The games must be at a State Championship and be either the “A” Grade round Final or “Championship” round Final. An assessment checklist is used to outline the skills/competencies that the official must demonstrate.

Additional assessment for National level accreditation include:

Assessment of Participation in Group Discussion: This assessment task is to evaluate the participation in discussions and demonstrations in the practical sessions.

Match Report: The aim of this assessment task is for umpires to demonstrate that they can complete a post-match report for use in future activities. Candidates are permitted to consult with advisors/ mentors to complete the match report. Candidates may re-submit the match report as many times as necessary to achieve competence.