

Statement from the Board of England Hockey on the new goalkeeping rules.

The International Hockey Federation (FIH) introduced an amendment to the rules of hockey on 1st January 2007 for the years 2007/08 which allows teams the option of playing with 11 outfield players. Previously teams had to play with a goalkeeper in full goalkeeping kit or use a "kicking back". The main rules concerning this change are 2.2, 4.4, 10.1, 13.3 f, and 13.5 f.

Concern about the safety of players using the new rules has been brought to the attention of England Hockey and we have therefore sought independent legal advice on the issues raised. We have sought similar advice in the past on safety issues to ensure that England Hockey and its membership are protected.

We have also sought clarification from the FIH on the new rule change and contacted Hockey Association's in other countries to get the fullest possible picture of the rule changes.

The following clarification has been provided by Roger Webb, Secretary of the FIH rules board:

"The rules about goalkeepers were changed for three reasons:

- to enable a match to be played when no goalkeeper with equipment is present – which can happen especially at lower levels but which was contrary to the Rules of Hockey;*
- to clarify the rules applying to what have historically been known as "kicking backs" – which have been permitted within the rules but about which there was some uncertainty;*
- to provide teams with clear tactical options among three possibilities – which will enhance the variations in and thereby the attractiveness of the game.*

*With regard to a match in which only field players are deployed, we stress that no player is expected to take on the role of a goalkeeper. If any risks arise, **any** player on the field is therefore subject to that risk. It is not possible to identify an "eleventh player" who may be subject to a different level of risk. Indeed, when the sort of issue to which you refer has arisen elsewhere, we have asked to which player this special and new concern about "duty of care" applies? Given the preceding comments, no individual player can be picked out for concern of this sort.*

The fact that no player takes on the role of a goalkeeper, that they are all comparable field players, is therefore crucial to the understanding of and appropriate approach to this matter.

This leads to the conclusion that the rules need not be varied even if young people are playing either with adults or in junior only games. As far as I am aware, no other national association has identified the need to do this."



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ENGLAND HOCKEY

The National Hockey Stadium, Silbury Boulevard, Milton Keynes, MK9 1HA
T. 01908 544644 F. 01908 241106 E. info@englandhockey.org

The legal advice provided by our lawyers in London is also very clear. England Hockey should adopt the FIH's new rules. Our research has also indicated that the new rules are being adopted by every other country in Europe.

The legal advice is based on the following:

1. The new rule is not unreasonable - by merely introducing an option to play without a goalkeeper it does not so significantly increase the risk of injury within the wider context of the game that it is unreasonable.
2. There is no obligation to play without a goalkeeper. It is one of 3 options and England Hockey strongly recommends that a fully equipped goalkeeper is used at all times.
3. England Hockey has a constitutional obligation to adopt FIH rules.

We are aware that some Regional Association's and Leagues are considering adopting local rules thus deviating from the Rules of Hockey. This raises several issues:

1. Hockey could be faced with the untenable situation of having the game played to several different sets of rules around the country. As a national sport this will create confusion and inconsistency.
2. If local rules are adopted, what should they be? We understand that some Regions are considering varying the rule for junior competitions only (U18 and below) but this would not address the issue of danger to U18's playing in adult hockey.
3. Thirdly and perhaps most importantly we believe that Associations and Leagues might be exposing themselves to potential liability by adopting the role of the rules setting body. At present our legal advice leads us to believe it is unlikely that any Association or Leagues would be held liable for the rules if they are adopting the FIH's rules but once they start picking and choosing which rules to adopt they may be held responsible. We therefore strongly suggest that Associations and Leagues seek independent legal advice before changing the FIH rules.

England Hockey will therefore continue to adopt the FIH rules for all of its competitions and would urge members to carefully consider the risks before implementing any local variations.

The rules of "mini hockey", the small sided game for young people, are set by England Hockey and therefore different issues arise. It will continue to be a requirement of the rules of "mini hockey" that a goalkeeper in full goalkeeping kit is used at all times.

The Board of England Hockey
January 30th 2007