

The rules of hockey

For the uninitiated (and some of the initiated), the main rules of hockey are:

- A full game of hockey is played in two halves, each of 35 minutes. Junior games are often much shorter to ensure that young players are not waiting around to play.
 - The game starts with the umpire's whistle and a pass from the halfway line.
 - The ball can only be hit with the flat side of the stick.
 - The left hand should always be above the right when carrying, passing or shooting.
 - There are no left-handed sticks. Left-handers need not worry; being left-handed can be an advantage.
 - The ball is pushed or flicked with the hands apart and the knees bent. The ball is hit with both hands placed together. 'Pushing', rather than 'hitting' is encouraged because pushing is more accurate.
 - The ball cannot be played with either the feet or hands. This rule is applied judiciously at U8 and more rigorously at U10, U12 levels.
 - The ball may be carried (dribbled) by running with the ball on the end of the stick ("straight carry") or by rotating the stick over the ball ("Indian carry").
 - Sticks should be always kept below the shoulder height, including when hitting.
 - Body checking and stick checking ('stick tackle') are not permitted.
 - The ball may not be raised or lifted into another player. Balls raised in the D will usually be considered as 'dangerous' and penalised.
 - U8s and U10s play with a mini or light ball. U12s and above with a match ball.
 - There is no offside rule.
 - An attacking player can only score from inside the D.
 - The goalkeeper is protected by pads and a helmet. The goalkeeper must not fall on to or hold the ball.
 - A player may not obstruct another when stationary, no matter which way they are facing; and the obstructed player must be trying to play the ball. Turning away is allowed when the ball is held in front and the player is moving away from the tackler.
 - When the ball passes over the back line: if the last touch was from an attacker, the defenders restart the game from the 16-yard line (level with the top of the D). If the ball was last touched by a defender a long corner will be given; this is taken from the halfway line. If the ball is deliberately knocked over the backline by a defender, a penalty corner will be awarded.
 - When free hits are awarded within 5-yards of the D, everyone must be at least 5-yards away, other than the player taking the free hit.
 - When a penalty corner is awarded, five defenders must stand behind the goal line. The attacking team inject the ball from the back line. The ball must pass out of the D, before being taken back in for a shot on goal. The shot must not rise higher than the backboard (18").
 - A penalty stroke is awarded for an infraction in the D which prevented a 'certain' goal. When taken, all players stand behind the 25-yard line. When the player and goalkeeper are still and ready, the umpire will blow their whistle. The ball must be pushed or flicked. If the attacker misses or the goalkeeper saves, a 16-yard hit is awarded to the defending team.
- And finally: never, ever argue with the umpire.