

## Field Hockey Basics

### **Object of the Game**

To get the ball through the opponent's goal posts from within the striking circle, to score points. The team with the most goals at the end of the game, wins.

### **Game length**

Field hockey games are divided into either four quarters or two halves. The total length of the game is between 60 minutes and 70 minutes depending on the level of play. If the score is tied at the end of the game, some leagues allow the game to end in a draw; other leagues use one of several overtime methods. Most commonly, teams conduct a shoot-out with 5 penalty shooters on each side.

### **Start of the game**

Alternating at the start of each half and following each goal, the two teams line up on their respective sides of the field, with the ball in one player's possession at the centre of the field. Defenders must be five yards away from the ball; when the whistle blows, the player can dribble or pass the ball to start play.

### **Offence & Defence**

Offence:

11 players on each team attempt to move the ball toward their opponent's goal to score. Players move the ball up the field and to teammates by passing and dribbling the ball. Passing can be done by pushing, flicking, scooping, hitting and sweeping the ball. Goals can only be scored when an offensive player hits the ball from within the striking circle. Many goals are scored during "fast breaks," when the attacking team can gain an advantage over the opponent in number of players as both teams approach the goal. Other scoring opportunities occur when players cross the ball, or hit it towards the centre of the field in front of the goal, in hopes that a teammate can deflect the ball or shoot it into the goal. A player may also take an outside shot from within the striking circle if an opponent is not guarding her closely.

Defence:

Defensive players mark opponents and attempt to tackle opponents to win the ball as the offence moves up the field. If the defence takes possession of the ball in front of its own goal, it will attempt to clear the ball, or move it up-field away from the goal. Defenders may not contact the offence; however, all players have an equal opportunity to pursue the ball, so an offensive player cannot turn her body or use her stick to block an opponent from the ball or he/she will be called for obstruction.

## **Scoring**

A ball that passes through the goal and has been touched by an attacker within the circle is worth one point.

## **Equipment**

The primary equipment in field hockey is a stick and a ball. The stick has a flat side and a rounded side. Players may only hit the ball with the flat side, or the “striking surface,” of the stick. Players also wear protective equipment, including mouth guards, shin guards, and optional face protection. Uniforms consist of a jersey, a skirt or shorts, and knee-length socks. Goalies wear a different color jersey than their teammates, as well as additional protective equipment, including goalie pads, chest protector, facemask, throat protector, and other optional padding.

## **Common Referee Signals**

Two umpires govern the game to ensure fair and safe play. The umpires signal action on the field, such as starting play and indicating goals. Umpires also enforce penalties, which include playing the ball with the body, tripping, dangerous balls, pushing, obstruction, and playing with the wrong side of the stick (players can only use the flat side). When a penalty is committed, umpires blow a whistle and signal the penalty. For most penalties, a free hit is awarded. The non-offending team is awarded the ball at the spot of the foul, and all opponents must stand at least five yards away from the ball. The attacker may dribble, hit or push the ball. Once the attacker has touched the ball, the defending team may attempt to win the ball.

Note: umpires sometimes use discretion and allow play to continue during a penalty because of the “advantage” rule, which states that a penalty is only called if the offending team gains an advantage by committing the violation or in cases of dangerous play. This rule greatly speeds up the pace of the game.

A penalty corner is awarded for fouls committed within the striking circle. The object of the penalty corner is to get one really good shot at the goal. All players must remain outside the striking circle until the ball is played. The ball is placed on the end line, 10 yards from the goal post. The player executing the penalty corner passes the ball to a teammate near the top of the striking circle, and the offense must control the ball before taking a shot (in college and international play, the ball must exit the striking circle before the shot). When a violation of the rules prevents a likely goal, a penalty stroke is awarded to the offense, and one offensive player receives a one-on-one shot against the goalkeeper from the penalty stroke line. For serious violations of the rules, players are called for misconduct and can receive a suspension.

In the event of a tied game during playoffs, a shootout decides the winner. 3 or 5 players from each team attempt to beat the goalie one on one. One by one, from alternating team’s attackers, the player starts at the attacking 25 yard line and attempts to score on the other team’s goalie in 8 seconds. Whichever team has the most goals wins.

## Glossary

**5 metres:** The distance that a defending player must be at the start of any free hit, including sideline hits. A defender attempting to play the ball within 5 metres of the play could be penalized with a yellow card. Also called '5'

**16-yard hit:** Free hit for the defence 16 yards from the goal after an offensive player hits the ball over the end line. Also called '16'

**25-yard line:** Intentional fouls between this line and the end line could result in a penalty corner. **Bully:** Used to restart play when possession is unclear when play was stopped (e.g. injury timeout). Two opposing players start with their sticks on the ground, the ball is placed between them, and they must tap sticks above the ball before they can play the ball.

**The Circle:** The semi-circle around the goal. The ball must be shot or touched by an attacker within the circle to be a goal. Also called 'The D'. Fouls within the circle result in penalty corner. The 5-yard mark is five yards outside of the circle and penalty corners end when the ball crosses this line.

**Clear:** Hitting the ball away from the goal on defence.

**Cross:** Passing the ball in front of the opponent's goal to create a scoring opportunity.

**Dangerous play:** Play that could likely result in injury, such as pushing, tripping, or raising the ball at a player who is less than five yards away.

**Dribble:** Moving with the ball on the stick, often from left to right with the stick alternative between the forehand and backhand. Used to elude defenders, and to carry the ball up the field.

**End line:** Boundary along the width of the field. Balls that cross the end line result in a long hit, a penalty corner or a 16-yard hit. The goal-line is the part of the end line between the goal posts.

**Flick:** Pass or shot using the wrists to put force behind the ball to raise it off the ground.

**Free hit:** Awarded after most penalties. Defenders must stand five yards from the ball until it is played.

**Hit:** Any contact with the ball using a swinging motion of the stick.

**Leading:** Creating a sudden change of pace and/or direction to free yourself of a defender marking you.

**Long corner:** Free hit for offence from the attacking 16-yard line, following an unintentional hit over the end line by the defence. The ball is taken in line with where it went off the end line.

**Marking:** A defence tactic in which a player guards an opponent by following their movements and staying with them during their spell of attack.

**Misconduct:** Penalty for unsportsmanlike conduct, including dangerous play, using obscene language, or taunting. Results in a green card (warning), yellow card (5-minute suspension), or red card (player disqualification). When players are suspended or disqualified, their team must play with fewer members.

**Obstruction:** Penalty for using the body or stick to prevent opponents from pursuing the ball. “Third party obstruction” is called for blocking an opponent so a teammate can play the ball.  
**Pass-back:** Pass from midfield used to start each half and following all goals. “Free hit” rules apply.

**Penalty corner:** Offensive free hit from the end line, 10 yards from the goal, usually following a foul inside the striking circle. Offensive players must be outside the striking circle until the ball is hit, and the offence must control the ball before it can shoot. The defence is allowed five players behind the end line; all other defenders must be behind the centre line. A penalty corner ends when the defence takes possession of the ball, the ball crosses over the 5-yard mark outside the striking circle, or the ball exits the striking circle twice. Also called “short corner.”

**Penalty stroke:** Free one-on-one shot from the penalty stroke line awarded when a foul prevents a likely goal. The goalie must remain behind the goal line until the ball is hit.

**Push:** Method of moving or passing the ball in which the stick is in contact with the ball and the ground as the player pushes the ball up the field.

**Raised ball:** Flicking, scooping, and chipping the ball into the air are legal as long as no player is in the way. High balls that create danger are penalties.

**Scoop:** Method of passing or shooting the ball by leveraging the stick underneath the ball to pick it up and fling it through the air.

**Sideline:** Boundary along the length of the field. Balls that cross the sideline result in a free hit.

**Striker:** The player who is the highest attacker - closer to the goal they are shooting at.

**Substitution area:** Substitutions may take place during the game through this area only. The player must exit the field before her replacement enters the field.

**Sweep:** Method of moving or passing the ball in which the stick sweeps along the ground in a semi circle, making for a flat, hard and accurate pass.

**Tackle:** Defensive effort to take the ball away from an opponent.