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NFHS Field Hockey Weekly Rule Interpretations

Rule References: 10-3-3, 10-3 PENALTIES

Penalty Corners—Early Entry by Attackers

Purpose

The purpose of this interpretation is to make the penalty for early entry by the attacking team very clear. On a penalty corner, the attacking team must wait until the ball is inserted before players enter the circle. If an attacker enters too soon, the attacking team has gained an unfair advantage because the player has moved into scoring position before the play legally begins. In elementary terms, the attacking team cannot “jump the start.” Everyone must wait for the ball to be inserted. This interpretation explains that when any attacking player enters early, the penalty is applied to the inserter, even if the inserter was not the player who entered early.

Rule Language

At the moment of contact, all attackers, except the player taking the penalty corner shall be on the field with sticks, hands and feet not touching the ground inside the circle. (10-2-3)

For any reason that a penalty is restarted due to an early entry break into the circle of feint by the inserter, someone must go to the center line. For the attacking team, the player shall be the inserter. (10-3 PENALTY 5.)

When multiple players break into the circle prior to the insertion, one and only one player entered the circle first. The official must make a decision and send only one player. For the attacking team, the player shall be the inserter. (10-3 PENALTY 6)

Interpretation

The important teaching point is that the official does not need to determine which attacking player should be removed from the penalty corner. The rule gives a specific penalty: the inserter goes beyond the center line. This keeps the penalty simple, visible and consistent. Coaches should teach all attackers that their movement matters because any player’s early entry affects the entire attacking unit. Officials should watch the circle and the attacking players before the ball is inserted. If an attacker crosses into the circle early, the official should whistle the

violation, send the inserter beyond the center line and reset the penalty-corner.

Game Scenario

Team A is awarded a penalty corner. A1 is the inserter. The official administering the penalty corner blows their whistle to indicate to the inserter that play may be started. Before A1 inserts the ball, A3 steps into the circle. **RULING:** Early-entry violation by the attacking team. A1, the inserter, must go beyond the center line. **COMMENT:** Even though A3 was the player who entered early, the rule requires the inserter to go beyond the center line. This is the same penalty every time an attacking player enters early, which helps officials administer the play consistently and helps coaches teach the rule clearly.

Points of Emphasis for Officials and Coaches

Officials should identify the inserter, ensure proper placement of the ball and positioning of feet before sounding the whistle. Official administering Penalty Corner should watch for any player's feet, hands and sticks touching inside the circle and correct positioning prior to the blowing the whistle to start the Penalty Corner. Coaches should remind attackers that they must stay outside the circle until the ball is inserted. Players should understand that an early break into the circle is not a small technical mistake; it changes who may participate in the penalty corner. The simplest explanation for players is: wait until the ball is inserted before entering the circle. If an attacker goes early, the inserter serves the penalty