

The Early Rules of Hockey

In 1876, a set of Rules was actually drawn up by several clubs in London in the January following the establishment of the first, but short lived, Hockey Association (of England) the year before. (The second, and final, Hockey Association was formed in 1886.) Prior to that date the captains had agreed the Rules under which each game was played, including the number of players per team which varied from eight to eleven.

1. Offside was specified as requiring three opponents to be nearer their own goal-line and applies throughout the pitch except when the ball is hit from the goal-line; if the ball goes out of play over the side-line (described in these rules as being “in touch”) play was restarted by rolling the ball back into the field at right angles to the line;
2. Players were not permitted to raise their stick above their shoulder;
3. The “D” was not always marked on the pitch but the rules did say that “no goals shall be allowed if the ball be hit from a distance of more than 15 yards from the nearest goalpost”; If a rule was infringed “the ball should be brought back to where it occurred and a bully shall take place”;
4. The goal posts would be 7 feet tall with a tape stretched across the top of the posts.
5. Sticks were curved wooden ones, approved by the Association.
6. The ball was an ordinary sized cricket ball.
7. Some typical hockey actions were referred to in the early rules but not defined; for example, a bully starts the game but there is no specification of how a bully is conducted;
8. Another example was that the flat playing side of the stick is not defined but the rules do say that “the ball shall be played from right to left”.

In 1886 the Hockey Association introduced a number of rules in an attempt to standard the game: -

1. The goal posts would be 7 feet apart with a cross bar.
2. Sticks were wooden with a leather handle, but the stick must pass through a two-inch measurement ring; sticks could have a four-inch external diameter India rubber ring above the splice to prevent finger injuries.
3. The ball was an ordinary sized leather cricket ball painted white.
4. Offside still required three opponents to be nearer their own goal line applicable from the half way line
5. All non-involved players had to be 5 yards from the ball at free hits, rolls-in and bullies; rolls-in by hand were used to put the ball into play after it had gone over the side-line;
6. Teams comprised eleven players – five forwards, three half-backs, two full-backs and one goalkeeper; no substitutes were allowed even for injury;

7. The game was controlled either by two umpires or one umpire (referee) assisted by two linesmen;
8. The ball was played with one side of the stick (the left-hand side) only; the ball could not be played above the shoulder or with the rounded side (back) of the stick;
9. It was not permitted to kick, trip, shove, or obstruct an opponent;
10. Hands and feet could be used to stop the ball but then had to be moved out of the way;
11. Feet and legs could not to be used behind the ball to resist opponents;
12. Goalkeepers could kick the ball but only within their own circles;
13. Hooking of sticks was allowed but only within striking distance of the ball;
14. A bully was taken in the circle for an offence by a defender; free hits were given for other fouls.
15. There was no mention of goalkeeper's equipment;

A few new rules were added every few years

- 1894: Reverse stick play was permitted as were shots at goal without first stopping the ball.
- 1900: The 23rd April the International Rules Board, later the Hockey Rules Board was formed. Advantage was recognised; not every offence was to be penalised immediately.
- 1904: Intentional undercutting and raising the ball from a hit was to be penalised. The scoop stroke was permitted.
- 1905: Each umpire was to take half of the pitch for the whole game without changing ends and to take decisions on rolls-in for the whole of their side-line, but not for corners. Umpires were also empowered to warn and/or suspend players from the game. A weight limit of 28 ounces was laid down for sticks.
- 1907: Umpires were allowed to apply the Rules without waiting for an appeal. Prior to this time appeals had to be made by players before an umpire could give a decision.
- 1908: The penalty corner was introduced for offences by defenders in the circle. At a penalty corner, the Rules required the ball to be stopped before a shot at goal but this was not umpired rigorously. All defenders were behind the goal-line with attacking players outside the circle. The bully was replaced by a penalty bully for deliberately stopping a certain goal.
- 1909: The width of the pitch reverted to 55 to 60 yards.
- 1910: Goalposts were specified as 2 inches deep and not more than 3 inches wide.

The above rule remained in force with the Hockey Rules Board until 1927

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