

Reasons to eliminate the drag flick and penalty corner.

The penalty corner has evolved from a set piece involving a shot at goal to a specialized set piece with a highly trained drag flicker. Teams which have a highly trained drag flicker have a significant advantage over other teams. Certain countries have mastered the art of drag flicking. The drag flick is a skill that only a few specially trained players on the field have mastered. The drag flick determines the outcome of games. The focus of forwards is to generate infractions in the circle to be awarded penalty corners. The focus of forwards is not scoring goals in open play. Is this the desired outcome of the penalty corner. Forwards are unable to execute forehand this on goal. Intricate passing inside of the 25 yard line to create space for a forward to shoot on goal should be emphasized in place of plays designed to wrong foot the defender or to push the ball with force at a player's foot in order to put the ball on the defender's foot and gain a penalty corner. Is it really desirable to place too much emphasis on putting a ball on a player's foot inside of the circle? Moreover, the penalty corner drag flicker has created a huge gap between the top teams and the lower ranked teams which do not have access to water based turf, penalty corner coaches, and do not observe drag flickers in their leagues. Does any other sport in the world suffer from such an inequality in a fundamental skill between nations?

The original intent of the penalty corner has been hijacked. The intent was to award a shot at goal by players with strong and accurate forehand hits who could disguise the direction of the shot. Their hitting skills were also used not the field to make long, accurate passes which changed the flow of the game and resulted in counter attacks. Instead gaining goals through infractions and the penalty corner has become the center piece of the game. Gone are the long game breaking passes out of the back or across the field. The long forehand hit has been replaced by the slow to setup forehand sweep hit. The FIH should think very seriously about eliminating the penalty corner.

### **Protective gear**

Special protective gear has to be worn to protect the defenders from serious injury. The first runner is still injured quite often when hit by a rising drag flick. It takes too much time to put on the protective gear and is a serious interruption to the ebb and flow of the game. What other sport has the kind of circus that the penalty corner has become where players stop and put on special protective gear for a set piece.

### **Field requirements: Water based pitches**

Training for the drag flick requires the use of a water based pitch. Not all clubs or countries have water based pitches available. In particular some countries only have a few water based pitches which do are not accessible to a large number of players.

### **Equipment requirements**

Special drag flicking sticks are required. The player using a drag flicking stick can only execute a forehand hit with the curved drag flicking stick with great difficulty, if at all.

### **Know how**

There are a few countries which have a significant number of drag flickers. The skill was originally developed in Holland. The Dutch required payments of up to \$5,000 for three months of specialized training in order for national players from other nations to learn the drag flicking skill. A few other nations are mastering drag flicking after playing years of catch up.

### **The women's game**

There are only a few international teams/players who can execute the drag flick. Does the FIH understand that there is a significant problem when only a few players on a few teams can perform an important game deciding skill?

### **Youth players and the drag flick**

Youth players are unable to perform the drag flick because they do not have the physical strength to do so. But youth players are fascinated by the drag flick. As a consequence youth players are less focused on other more fundamental skills. Young players who do perform the skill get serious back and hamstring injuries that they carry with them for the rest of their careers.

### **Delay of game at the international level**

In the past the penalty corner was awarded and taken within 15-20 seconds if the umpire insisted. The umpire would look for unnecessary delays. However, today the penalty corner results in delays of up to 1 minute. Video referrals in the circle to determine the validity of an infraction resulting in a short corner interrupt the flow of the game. Momentum is lost. Referrals are used to slow the game down. Aerobic conditioning is neutralized to a certain extent when players have 1 minute to recover during a referral. During a penalty corner the defensive team has to put on the masks and gloves. The offensive team huddles. These delays take 30 seconds out of the run of play. This makes the games less interesting for the spectators. Does the FIH want to increase spectator interest? Then get rid of the delay of game, meaning get rid of the penalty corner.

### **Injuries due to drag flick training**

Drag flickers are prone to serious injuries of their leg, left hip and lower backs. The drag flick is not a natural motion and puts a tremendous strain on players' bodies.

### **Impact on team training**

The paramount importance of the drag flick takes time away from learning other skills, patterns of play, and tactics.

### **Imbalance due to one player**

One good drag flicker can tip the balance in games and tournaments. The drag flick lasts for a few seconds. In reality these players often are marginal players and do not have the skills that other players have. The players with skills are often overshadowed by the drag flickers. This gives the impression to youngsters that they should buy a drag flicking stick and learn how to drag flick rather than learn the skills that are necessary in open field play which what the game should be all about.

Delays, focus on a very specialized skill performed by a few players on the pitch, the loss of forehand hitting skills, the deemphasis on generating shooting opportunities (except by the AUS men under Charlesworth, who may have counted circle penetrations/shots by other teams when watching games during tournaments because he knows that is the key to winning), the deemphasis on passing patterns inside of the 25 to generate shots, the few women who can perform the drag flick, the physical impossibility of youth players performing the drag flick, injuries, and the wrong impression about the game on juniors are all reasons to eliminate the penalty corner.

