

Contextualization

Henry Kessler

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Field Hockey: The Rules and Perceptions

Field hockey is a sport best described as a mixture of ice hockey and soccer in terms of how the game is played, and a bit like tennis in how it is perceived. While the comparisons to ice hockey and soccer are accurate according to sophomore goalkeeper Lauren Hausheer of the Virginia Cavaliers Varsity Field Hockey team, it is not very similar to tennis in terms of politeness and etiquette, at least not today it isn't.

The game of field hockey that is played today started in England in the early to mid 1800s. The first match was played in latter stages of the century, and the first international competition in 1895. "The sport was different back then," coach Michele Madison, Hausheer's head coach at the University of Virginia told her. "A lot can change from the time a sport is first established to a time when there is different equipment, fields, and players. The perception changes." Although there may be disagreements about the perception of the sport, one thing that isn't up for debate is how few people understand the rules of field hockey. So first, the rules.

The basics:

Each team has eleven players. The game is played on a 91.4 meters by 55 meters rectangular turf field that is meant to be more like a carpet with very short turf than regular longer “field” turf. This is so that the ball, which is a hard plastic sphere, can move faster along the ground when one of the players hits it with his or her stick.

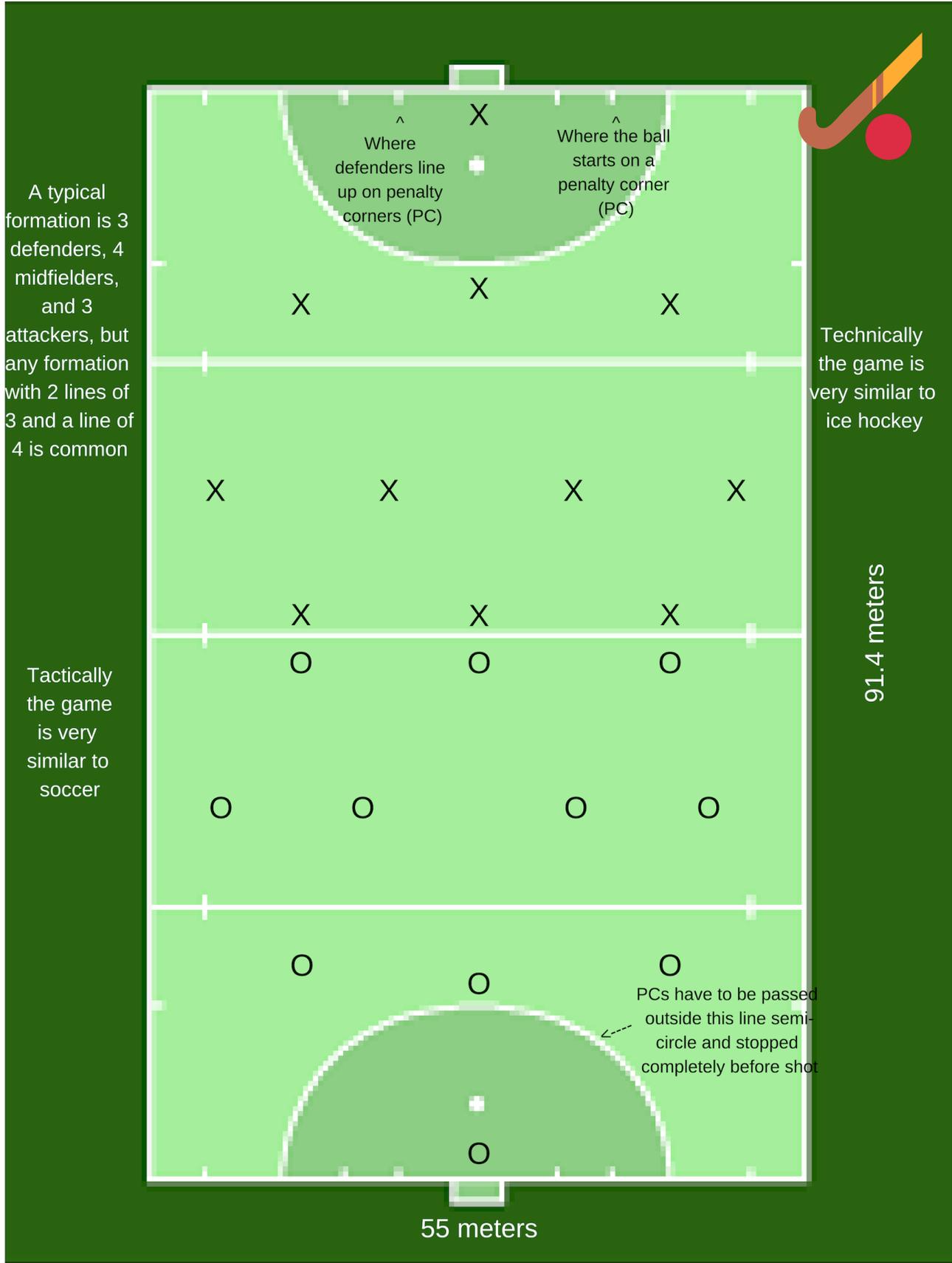
The objective of the game is to hit the ball with ones stick in the net, which is more like a cage, more times than the other team does. The premise is very similar to many games, but the way it is done can only be compared to ice hockey. For majority of the game, the ball is on the floor, and players have to use their sticks to hit the ball. Only the flat side of a players’ stick can be used however. The other side is rounded and if used will result in a penalty. No feet nor hands are allowed, unless you are the goal keeper who may use any part of his/her body to touch the ball. Whoever scores the most goals by the end of the game wins. If it is still tied at the end of the two 35 minute halves, in NCAA field hockey there are two ten minute over time periods of seven versus seven. The overtime periods are golden goal meaning that if a team scores, that team wins and the game is over. If the game remains tied after the overtime periods, then there is a penalty shootout.

Scoring:

One of the more unconventional yet vital parts of the game is a penalty corner. One of these is given by the referee if he/she spots an offense by a defender in their own circle (the semi-circle around the net. There is one that surrounds each goal). This can be anything from hitting someone with ones stick accidentally, hitting someone with ones stick intentionally, and clearly the ball over the end line on purpose, to the ball hitting a defenders foot which is the most

common. There are other offenses that would also lead to a penalty corner but they are more obscure, like the ball getting caught in the defenders clothing.

During the penalty corner, 4 defenders set up slightly outside either side of the goal and the goalie is in net. The attacking team has one player pass the ball in from the base line also slightly to one side of the net. This player passes it to one of her teammates who are waiting outside the semi circle. Once the ball is passed, it has to be stopped by one of the attacking players. At the same time, the defenders from the end line rush out to try to prevent the attacking from getting a shot off. These are great scoring opportunities. Junior defender Anzel Viljoen elaborated on just how valuable penalty corners are. “Well you just have much more of an advantage when you get one because it’s 8 attackers against 4 defenders. Compared to field goals where you would need to get more numbers up if that makes sense. A field goal is harder because the defense can get lots of numbers back.” The rest of the players from the defending team have to stay at the half way line until the ball is passed, and then they can go back and defend along with their five other teammates.



As stated by Viljoen, penalty corners are excellent opportunities to score, and much better than open play as there are initially less defenders to deal with. She claims that a very good team scores a whopping 90 percent of their goals from penalty corners, because they draw more of them and finish most of the ones they get. The Cavaliers percentage was not quite that high but still about two thirds to three quarters of their goals came from penalty corners.

Discipline:

Depending on how bad an offense is, a player can be given either a green card, a warning with a two minute suspension, a yellow card, a warning with a suspension of five to ten minutes, or a red card which is an ejection from the game. The similarities to ice hockey continue. Just like a power play, the opposite team is a man up while the penalized player is off the field.

More:

Some other basics about field hockey that are worth mentioning are out of bounds. If the ball goes out of bounds, whoever hit the ball last, the other team will have possession. When a foul is called, the team that can fouled can dribble the ball in. The attacking team does not have to pass it in.

Tactically, the game is very similar to soccer. It is low scoring. There are spells of possession for either team. The game is less transitional than ice hockey. If a team is winning, they win defend more and attack less. The losing team does have the option to pull their goalie to get an extra attacker.

Subbing can not be made on the fly like ice hockey. There are five subs allowed in a match. Similar to soccer which allows three.

To get a better understanding of why the mass perception of field hockey differs from the one Hausheer offered, one has to look at the history of the sport. The earliest signs of field hockey date back to 510 B.C. in Ancient Greece when the players would use horns to knock around a ball. Later Northern Europe played games with sticks and balls on the floor, but the origination of contemporary field hockey happened where seemingly all sports are created: England.

The first club was founded in Southeast London in the 19th century, and the sport was mostly played by students in public school. But do not be deceived. Public schools back then, otherwise known as independent schools, were private schools that were funded by the English government. Considering the fact that the sport did have wealthy origins, this may be the reason for the privileged stigma towards the sport.

Coach Madison assured Hausheer otherwise. While in the start the sport may have been played by only the middle and upper class, coach Madison says the sport became more accessible and was quickly played by many more.

I did not take coach Madison's word for it. I do not think anyone thinks of something they are involved in as pretentious. Having said this, she was right. Both men and women in countries like Pakistan and Indian where the players were not wealthy played the sport a lot. Field hockey became an olympic sport in 1908. It was dropped in 1924 but then reinstated in the next summer olympics in 1928. Since then, Pakistan has actually been one of the dominant countries in the field. Especially after the 1970s they have done very well at the olympic games.

It is difficult to imagine that field hockey is an elitist sport if a large number of people from a third world country played the sport, and played it well nonetheless.

Other than the origins of the sport, the only other thing that coach Madison, and myself at this point, could think of that led to this mind set that field hockey is a posh sport is that in America, only girls play field hockey. Around the world today, field hockey is played by both genders. Here in America however, we play sports in universities. It is because of this collegiate sports system that field hockey has become a female only sport in the United States. Title IX is a National College Athletics Association (NCAA) rule. It states that both men and women athletes need to be cared for equally in every respect, including scholarships. So with American football being a dominant player for male scholarships with 85 alone, there need to be scholarships made up because there is no equivalent. Women's football does not exist. So one of the results of this system is that certain sports have become one gendered, like field hockey, like volleyball. Another result is that some schools do not even have many other mens sports. If the school has a big football program then it most likely does not have a men's soccer team. Such is just the nature of title XI and the reasoning behind field hockey being a women's only sport in the US.

Professional field hockey:

There is not a professional field hockey league in the United States. This is also due mostly to Title IX as well. In America the collegiate system filters directly into professional sports, majority of these sports being dominated popularity wise by the male athletes. So in the case of field hockey where it is only a female sport in the United States, there is no professional rank.

There are however still international competitions, and the format for these games has changed very recently in 2017. The International Hockey Federation, FIH, has founded the FIH Pro League. This competition will replace the FIH Hockey World League and will serve multiple purposes. 1) This new league will cover the league aspect that the previous Hockey World League did, and 2) it will also include qualification games for the Hockey World Cup and the Olympic Games. With field hockey being an international sport at the pro level, this new system allows for there to still be the league dynamic so every game matters, but also adds the dynamic of having increased meaning and pressure for the qualification games.

Field hockey may have started as a pretty, polite, delicate, and self-regarding type sport, but Hausheer did not understand how it could be viewed as such just from the injuries the cavaliers have had this year. Senior midfielder Greta Ell suffered a broken finger in which most of the flesh was peeled off her left ring finger after the ball came in contact with it. She needed several hours in the emergency room to ensure that she would get to keep her finger. Senior defender Nikki Freeman had to exit a match with a busted open lip after the ball hit her face. She needed several stitches to reconnect the two parts of her lip. “With injuries like that,” Hausheer said, “I don’t understand how people can think field hockey is a soft sport. Like what!?” So while the perception may not have changed since the sport originated, it seems that field hockey *has* become a more competitive, accessible, and a tougher sport than what it once was.