



October 21, 2026

NFHS Field Hockey Weekly Rule Interpretations

Unnecessary Delay of the Game

RULE REFERENCES: Rule 8.1.v

PURPOSE: To clarify what may constitute unnecessary delay of the game and explain how officials should address delays during free hits and penalty corners. This guidance helps officials distinguish between normal preparation for a restart and conduct that unreasonably slows play or creates an unfair advantage. It also identifies the appropriate response based on whether the delay results from an individual player's actions or from the actions of a team. **RULE 8.1.v:** Fouls include unnecessary delay of the game.

SITUATION 1: After the official awards Team A a free hit, a Team B player deliberately hits the ball away from the location of the restart to prevent Team A from taking the free hit promptly. What is the ruling?

RULING: The official may reset the free hit or issue a card to the offending player, as appropriate.

COMMENT: Deliberately moving the ball away after the whistle interferes with a timely restart and may constitute unnecessary delay. Officials should consider the circumstances and whether the action warrants a reset or a card.

SITUATION 2: Team A is awarded a free hit. A Team B player remains within five yards of the ball or deliberately places her stick in front of the ball to prevent Team A from taking the free hit. What is the ruling? **RULING:** The official may reset the free hit or issue a card to the offending player, as appropriate.

COMMENT: Players must not interfere with an opponent's ability to take a free hit promptly. Officials should manage players who fail to move the required distance or deliberately obstruct the restart. Repeated or intentional actions to delay play may warrant a card.

SITUATION 3: Team A is awarded a free hit. As a Team B defender retreats to a defensive position, she runs directly in front of the ball and interferes with Team A's ability to take the free hit. What is the ruling? **RULING:** The official should initially withhold the whistle. If the defending team gains an advantage from the action, the official should reset the free hit or issue a card to the offending player, as appropriate. **COMMENT:** Officials should distinguish between a player legitimately recovering to a defensive position and a player whose movement interferes with the restart. If the defender's actions delay play or provide a defensive advantage, the conduct must be addressed.

SITUATION 4: Team A is awarded a penalty corner. Team B is ready, but Team A continues to huddle and delays taking its positions. In another instance, Team A is ready, but Team B delays by failing to put on required protective masks or by leaving defensive players or the goalkeeper improperly positioned. What is the ruling? **RULING:** If the official determines that either team is unreasonably delaying the penalty corner, the official must call a timeout to stop the clock and issue a card to the head coach of the offending team. **COMMENT:** Penalty corners should be administered at a consistent pace throughout the game. Officials must manage both teams to ensure they are ready to proceed without unreasonable delay. This is a team delay; the playing captain or the inserter is not carded for this team delay.

SITUATION 5: Team A is awarded a penalty corner. Both teams have taken their positions, and the defense is set. Team A then changes the side from which the ball will be inserted, delaying the restart while players reposition. What is the ruling? **RULING:** If the official determines that Team A is unnecessarily delaying the penalty corner, the official must call a timeout to stop the clock and issue a card to Team A's head coach. **COMMENT:** Once both teams are set, officials should address unnecessary changes that delay the restart. The official must determine whether the delay is unreasonable based on the circumstances. For this team delay, the head coach—not the playing captain or inserter—is carded.

OFFICIALS' VIEW: Officials should manage the pace of play throughout the game and distinguish between individual player misconduct and team delay. When managing possible unnecessary delay, officials should:

- Monitor whether teams maintain a consistent pace when taking free hits and penalty corners.
- Address actions that interfere with a timely restart, including hitting the ball away, failing to move five yards or placing a stick in front of the ball.
- Withhold the whistle when appropriate if a defender runs in front of the ball while recovering to a defensive position, then address any advantage gained.
- Determine whether a delay during a penalty corner is unreasonable based on the circumstances.

For an unreasonable team delay during a penalty corner, call a timeout to stop the clock and card the head coach.

Officials should apply the rules consistently and should not allow a team to gain an advantage by deliberately delaying play. The appropriate response depends on whether the delay is an individual player's action during a free hit or an unreasonable team delay during a penalty corner.

KEY POINT: Unnecessary delay must be managed consistently throughout the game.

For free hits, officials should address individual actions that interfere with a timely restart through a reset or a card, as appropriate. For an unreasonable team delay during a penalty corner, the official must stop the clock with a timeout and card the head coach.