

SOME TIPS ON TEACHING NEW SHINTY PLAYERS

We have had some experience teaching new players how to play Shinty, and we would like to share some key points from what we have learned. These are just a few ideas, there are many more that could be mentioned, but we feel these will give you a good starting point. Please feel free to contact us with questions or comments via info@uscamanachd.org.

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1 June 2006*

KEY POINTS

1. Shinty has a high level of institutionalized sportsmanship. While in Scotland we were continually impressed by just how they really walk the talk when it comes to this. Shinty is certainly a potentially dangerous game, however they wear relatively little by way of protection and wish to keep the game safe by their conduct not by an escalation of padding and protective equipment as has occurred in some other sports. Taking “cheap shots” is no joking matter.
2. The basic rule of Shinty is that a player must play the ball and not the other player, and the referee has the discretionary room to call a foul if they feel you are not playing the ball even if the player has not violated the letter of the law. This is an important, but perhaps fine point, as shielding the ball and shoulder-to-shoulder contact is permitted. Always play the ball and things will take care of themselves.
3. Following on from point two, you may need to impress upon new players that even though Shinty is similar to ice hockey IT IS NOT ICE HOCKEY! As such body checking, elbowing and other similar moves are illegal and not tolerated. Incidental body contact while playing the ball is fine, and shoulder to shoulder challenges (like soccer) are allowed, but intentionally making contact with an opponent without attempting to play ball is a foul, and in the worst circumstances could result in the offender being sent off. Any tendency towards unnecessarily physical challenges needs to be nipped in the bud. It is better to lose a player who insists on doing this because in the long run you will lose far more players if you tolerate it. In addition there is a huge potential liability issue in tolerating such play.
4. Since we have not grown up playing/seeing Shinty working on stick safety is very important. There are several exercises in the Camanachd Association Coaching Manual (see Resources section for a downloadable version) which will help, especially having one player swing repeated while other players walk around them and watch carefully where the stick is and is not. The potential for stick injuries will always be present in Shinty, but good coaching can do a lot to mitigate the potential danger.
5. We can also say that stick safety becomes important all over again as your game becomes more aerial. When players are swinging at the ball in the air the stick moves in new and potentially unexpected ways. One important point, when trying to hit a ball overhead, the swing is only allowed to go from 10 to 2, full backswings and follow-throughs are not permitted in this instance. This rule change was implemented to try to prevent head injuries.
6. Swinging a caman with one hand while another player is within striking distance is considered hazardous play and is illegal. In Shinty the caman is usually considered to have right away, but not in this instance. You may block the ball, block a swing, cleek an opponent's caman, or dribble single-handed, but you may not take a full swing with only one hand on the caman.
7. Double swings (swinging one way and immediately swinging back the other way, usually because the first swing missed the ball, like the swinging of a pendulum) are illegal and unsafe and will result in a foul being called. If you swing and miss the ball you may continue the swing in the same loop to strike the ball, or reset and swing again.

8. Charging directly into the forward or backward vertical plane of a swing is illegal, not to mention plain stupid, and will result in a foul. This is different from a tackle (approaching caman first to block the swing, see CA Coaching Manual), a cleek (approaching from behind to cleek or click the player's stick before contact with the ball, see CA Coaching Manual), or approaching head-on perpendicular to the plain of the swing – all legal maneuvers. We have often suggested staying out of the stick's arc and attempting to block the ball with your body as opposed to risking a stick injury. Over time players will learn proper tackling and cleeking techniques, but approaching a player who is swinging at the ball must be done with confidence or not at all.
9. Stopping the ball with one foot, though legal if the foot is flat on the ground, will often be called a kick by the referee. Single-foot stops are to be discouraged for several reasons: (1) for safety, it is easy to be hit on the foot or ankle with a stick while attempting to stop the ball; and (2) there is a tendency for the ball to simply roll over the foot in a single foot block. In most respects the double-footed stop is superior and should be learned by all players.
10. When taking a shie or hit-in the caman must pass directly over the head and not to one side or other – and definitely not over the shoulder or from the side! The rule about this is very strict and we have seen Premier League players called for the slightest of infractions. Been sure to learn this skill correctly, as with anything else it is easier to learn right the first time rather than having to unlearn bad habits.
11. When contesting the ball you may not reach in between another player's legs from behind with your caman. Such actions will result in a foul.