

BASIC RULES OF WATER POLO

Number of players per team:

7 (1 goalie and 6 field players)

Length of game:

about 45 minutes

4 x 7-minute quarters with a 35 second shot clock

(quarters usually last about 12 minutes per quarter if a stop-clock is used)

Many games will use a format of 7 to 9 minute running time per quarter.

2 minutes rest between quarters

Scoring:

1 point per goal. Scores are in the range of 6-15 goals per game. A good goalie keeps shooting percentages in the 30% range so there are usually lots of shots and blocks to keep things exciting. A good goalie is the most important part of the team and is the only player allowed to touch the ball with two hands. Field players can only use one hand to touch the ball.

Field of Play:

30 meter x 20m all deep pool (FINA rules). 25m x 20m all deep (High school rules)

25-yard half-deep pools are commonly used, however players are supposed to avoid touching the bottom so lots of treading is required.

Goal size: 10ft x 3ft

Basic Strategy of the Game:

Water polo is a team sport that mixes the best aspects of soccer, basketball, and hockey. Like soccer, goalies defend a large netted goal. Water polo players are allowed to use only one hand at a time to pass or shoot the yellow, soccer-sized ball. Like basketball, there are fast breaks and a set offense that uses a center-like “hole man” or “2-meter man” that can either make powerful offensive shots or dish passes off to players driving towards the goal. Driving, setting picks, and working to get inside lanes (inside water) is very reminiscent of basketball. “Hole men” tend to be big because they need to plant themselves in front of the goal without being pushed out. Guard-like “drivers” tend to be smaller, quicker, and good ball handlers, and outside shooters (like 3-point shooters in basketball) have good arms to peg the high corners of the goal with accuracy whenever a defender sloughs off to cover a driver breaking towards the goal. Like hockey, water polo is a physical game and players can be temporarily ejected in a “penalty box” for short periods of time (20 seconds) if the referee deems it necessary. Occasionally, if possession is contested there can be a “face off” between two players to decide who regains possession of the ball.

Is this game too rough for kids?

Water polo is a contact sport on par with basketball with a dose of wrestling thrown in. Like basketball, contact is most intense in the center (or “hole”) where strong leaning, pushing and holding is used to stay in position. Only one person at a time is in the center, so it’s easy for kids to avoid heavy contact if they don’t like it. Most shots are scored from outside the center where contact drops off dramatically. All games are refereed and excessive grabbing, pushing, or hitting of any kind is considered a foul. Like basketball or soccer, accidental hand or elbow contact can happen, but water is much more forgiving than a hardwood floor or a dirt field and the potential for injury in a spirited soccer game is much greater than in water polo. You should feel as comfortable with your kids playing water polo as you would if they played soccer or basketball.

Is water polo OK for girls?

If your daughter swims, or plays soccer or basketball, then why not try water polo? Girls and women's water polo is rapidly gaining popularity at all levels including youth, high school, college, and international competition. Roosevelt High School, Shorewood, Bellevue, and Mercer Island are among some of the local girls high school teams. The University of Washington women's water polo club is often a top contender in national club championships, and is working towards becoming a full varsity sport.

Ordinary Fouls:

Water polo fouls are far more common than in any other sport and are part of the fabric of the game. Ordinary fouls are frequently committed and the referee will blow the whistle and award the ball to the opposing team. After a foul is whistled, the team with the ball is allowed a "free throw". Any offensive player can pick up the ball and has three seconds to put the ball in play without interference from the defender (the ball must be outside the point of the foul before it can be put back in play). After a foul, the ball normally can't be shot at the goal until it has been passed to another player. An exception to this is if a foul is committed outside the 5-meter line (yellow cone), then a quick shot is allowed. Good referees call fouls immediately whenever there is unreasonable contact of any kind and are usually so eager to keep the game "clean" that a whistle is blown almost every 15 seconds. Refs do their best to keep the game flowing and will often choose to ignore fouls committed away from the action so as not to prevent scoring opportunities. Ordinary fouls include:

- Grabbing, sinking or reaching over the shoulder or upper body of a player that is not holding the ball
 - **If the offensive player lifts the ball or has a hand on top of the ball, reaching over & sinking are not fouls!**
- Kicking, splashing water in the face, pushing off a player with hands or feet
- Touching the ball with two hands (except goalie), pushing off the bottom of pool
- Ball pushed under water when under attack (pick up ball underneath to avoid!)

Major Fouls:

Major fouls result in a temporary 20-second ejection (also called a "kickout") in the penalty box. If a player gets three major fouls, they are ejected from the entire game.

- Reaching aggressively over the head (especially defending the hole)
- Any ordinary foul committed by a defender when the opposing player is in a scoring position inside 5 meters (like fouling a "driver" or the hole man if they have inside water).
- Blatant, aggressive fouls committed away from the action (for example, grabbing an ankle when someone is trying to swim away).
- Interfering with a free throw (defender must allow at least three feet of space)
- Field player blocking with two hands (ejection if outside 5m, penalty shot inside 5m)
- Illegal substitution (player must fully exit field of play before new player can get in)
- Disrespect to the referee including foul language, contesting a call, or even scowling (this is at the referee's discretion and most are extremely strict!).

Penalty Shots:

Penalty shots are taken from 5 meters directly in front of the goal. The referee will award a penalty if a major foul is committed when someone is in strong, imminent, scoring position in front of the goal (for example: if the hole man or a driver has the ball and also controls "inside water" within 5 meters of the goal, and the defender comes over their back). Also, if a goalie sinks the ball while under attack, or a field player blocks with two hands a penalty shot will be awarded.