



Watching Water Polo

Water polo can best be described as contact soccer in a pool, in which athletes use their arms, not their legs, to throw the ball through the opponent's goal. Each team has seven players in the pool at one time, including a goalie, who has the same duties as his soccer and hockey counterparts. He is the only player who may touch the bottom of the pool in defending the four-meter goal area. Goalies are also the only players who may touch the ball with both hands.

Play begins with both teams lined up at opposite ends of the pool and the ball held in a ring at the center of the pool. Teams sprint to the center in an attempt to gain the first possession.

Players may move the ball by passing it through the air or across the water's surface to a teammate, carrying the ball while swimming, or dribbling. This is similar to dribbling in basketball, except the ball bounces off the water's surface, not the floor. Also, like basketball, there is a shot clock. Each team has 35 seconds to shoot the ball at the goal; if no shot is taken, a free throw is awarded to the opposing team. In addition, a game clock keeps track of the time left in each quarter of the contest.

Play is extremely physical, and the top players are among the world's best-conditioned athletes, swimming constantly throughout each of the (4) four - (7) seven-minute periods, all the while battling the opponent for possession of the ball. Most players are tall with a long reach, making it easier to receive and intercept passes, and many players begin their careers as competitive swimmers. Players stay afloat by using an eggbeater kick, which allows them to tread water and also rise up well above the surface to throw the ball or to defend an opponent.

Fouls are very common in water polo, and the referee indicates a foul by blowing a whistle while holding up a hand in the direction of the possession. Penalties range from a free throw given to the other team, to a penalty throw, to exclusion, in which a player is excluded from play. Exclusions last for 20 seconds of game time or until the offender's team regains possession, or until a goal is scored -- whichever comes first.

Because of the physical nature of water polo, players wear not one swimsuit, but two, lest one be accidentally ripped off during play. Players also wear caps, which serve two purposes. They allow for player identification as each player's number is displayed on the cap. In addition, the ear guards of the cap prevent injuries to the head and eardrums.

Scoring

Goals count one point, and typical scores run in the tens in this fast-paced game. If the score is tied at the end of the match, a tie is recorded in the standings for preliminary play.

In a semifinal or final round match, a winner must be declared. If there is a tie at the end of regulation, teams play (2) two / (3) three-minute overtime periods. If the score is still tied after overtime, "sudden death" play occurs, in which the first team to score is declared the winner.

Position by Position

Driver

Drivers are field players who specialize in driving skills and quick shooting techniques. Drivers must be extremely fast swimmers and have above average hand-eye coordination. They also focus considerable attention to defensive play.

Hole Set (Two-meter man)

The two-meter man is the offensive player who takes position directly in front of the opponent's goal, between the 2m and 5m lines. The best hole players have above average size, great leg strength, excellent passing abilities and are skilled in specialized goal scoring. They are similar to centers in basketball, in that, in a sense, they "post up," looking for a pass that enables them to get a close-in shot at the goal. The two-meter players are always closely guarded.

Fouls

Major fouls are serious infringements of the rules for which the offender is charged with a personal fault, which results in exclusion for 20 seconds or a penalty throw. Fouls usually are called only when the offended player doesn't have the ball; players with the ball are fair game, except in blatant acts of brutality or if the player is within the 4m area and the referee believes a probable goal would have been scored.

A player with three major fouls is excluded from the rest of the game with substitution, except in cases of brutality (see below), in which no substitute is allowed.

Examples of major fouls include:

- **Brutality** - a major foul which includes deliberately attacking, striking, or kicking an opponent or making disproportionate movements with that intent to cause harm or to endanger another player in any way. The offending player is excluded from the remainder of the game with no substitution allowed.
- **Splashing** - to deliberately splash water in an opponent's face.
- **Overly-aggressive fouling** - any foul to the head, neck or face or any foul intended to cause bodily harm.
- **Stopped time foul** - any defensive foul committed during stopped time. A defensive player committing a foul is excluded for 20 seconds.
- **Minor Act of Disrespect - MAD** – taunting, foul language, disrespect (verbal or physical), cap removal during the game while in the team area
- **Hold, Sink, Pull back or Impeding** - pushing, pushing off from, or retarding the free limb movement of an opponent who has not gained an offensive advantage and who is not holding the ball.
- **Playing the player and not the ball** – Playing the player without regard to the ball or its location. Repeated times this verges upon disrespect or Brutality calls.
- **Any Hand on the head or face of your opponent** – Due to the safety issues involved within this aggressive sport, no tolerance is allowed whether intentional or not.
- **Language or gestures** – No foul language or gestures will be tolerated.

Ordinary fouls: 90% of all fouls called and result in a free throw awarded to the opposing team.

These fouls include:

- **Taking the "ball under."**
- **Hitting the ball with a clenched fist.**
- **Touching the ball with both hands.**
- **Two-meter violation** - a player inside two meters of opponent's goal line without the ball.
- **Touching the side or Standing on the bottom** – While in possession of the ball any player except the goalie taking an active part in the game while standing on the bottom of the pool.
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