

Water Polo - Overview

Water Polo is a game of endurance and teamwork. The sport is played between two teams, each having six players and one goalkeeper. The sport is played in the water so the players must have swimming skills along with skills such as throwing, catching, and passing.

The objective of the sport is to score as much goal as possible in order to win the match. Players and goalies use caps of different colours to differentiate themselves from each other.



A Brief History of Water Polo

This sport, which demands the superiority of fitness and swimming skills can be dated back to 19th century when its origin took place in England and Scotland. Earlier days swimming and water racing competitions were dominating everywhere. Soon after getting popularity, it was introduced for the first time in Olympics in the year 1900.

William Wilson, from Great Britain is the maker of the rules of water polo. In Arlington bath club, he was the first bath master. Arlington is the place where first aquatic football competition was organised in the late 1800's. The balls used at that time were made up of Indian rubber.

In earlier days, water polo was known as **water rugby**. At that time, the players were allowed to use their physical strength upon their opponents to collect the ball and the goalie's position was outside the playing area. He had the right to exercise his power by jumping on anybody who tried to place the ball on the deck.

Participating Countries

The sport has its widespread popularity all over the world. Both women and men can play this game. However the number of participating nations for men dominates the women. Countries like US, Great Britain, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Soviet Union, and Yugoslavia are popular in men's category of championship whereas, countries like Australia, Greece, Italy are popular among women's category.

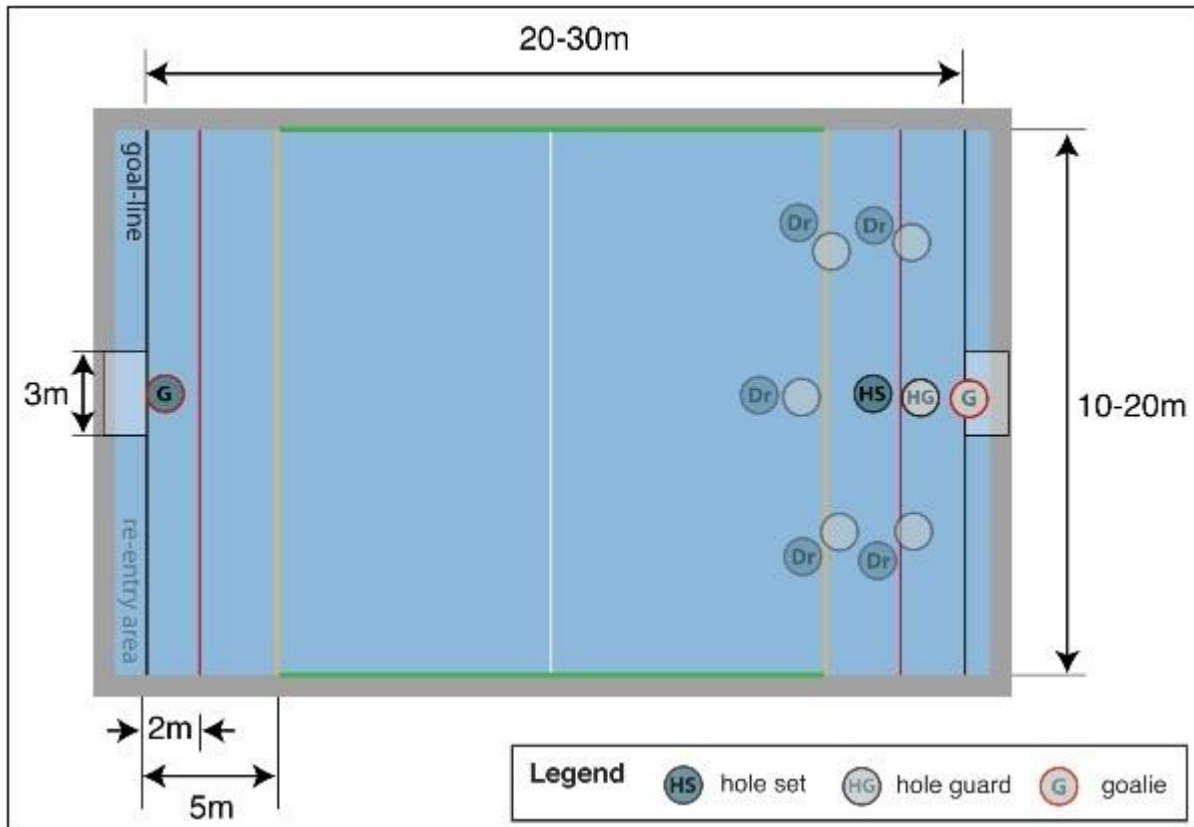
Water Polo is governed by International Swimming Federation. Since last two years, United States (US) and Serbia are winning the FINA water polo league in women category and men category respectively. Bergamo, Italy was the last to host the FINA water polo league.

Serbia topped the medal list in men's ranking category by bagging nine golds, one silver and one bronze and same is the medal status with United States in women category.

Water Polo - Playing Environment

A whole 25-yard, 6 or 8 lane pool is considered to be the field of play. Colored lines are used to mark the field of play in bigger pools. The markings can be done as follows -

- **White** - from goal line to the point of exclusion area.
- **Red** - These are the lines marked from 2-meter line to goal line.
- **Yellow** - Usually 5-meter line to 2-meter lines are marked in this color.



The following table explains the functions of the marked areas in a pool that is used for Water Polo –

Marked Area	Function
Goal Line	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ball crossing this line into the net is counted as a goal. If the reverse of the above happens then the ball is out of bounds.
2-meter line	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The players having balls are only allowed into this line. Offensive players other than the ball holder are not allowed.
5-meter line	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Defensive team committing foul inside this boundary is awarded with Penalty and opponent team is rewarded with Penalty Throw. Offensive player committing foul outside this line is given the chance of immediate shooting at the opponent's goal.
Mid-pool	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> After a team hits a goal the game is restarted from this line.

- Goalkeepers are not allowed to go near this line.

Water Polo - Equipment

Water polo is a sport played in water, so it is obvious that the instruments which are going to be used over here, are different than the similar kind of sport being played on the ground. Let's have a look at them.

Ball – The ball is made up of water proof material. Its cover is so designed and textured that it gives additional grip to the player. It floats on water and its size varies for men and women category of championships.



Cap – A cap is used for the protection purpose. The aim is to protect ear and head. It is also used to differentiate the teams. The team who is playing in their home ground wears white colored caps while the visiting team wears dark colored caps other than white. The goalkeepers wear red caps having ear protectors.



Goalpost – Goalposts are placed on both sides of the pool. They are made to float on water using floaters. They are usually made up of glass reinforced polyester resin. The supporting framework is made up of steel to give additional strength. Four stanchion sockets and one pair of backings are required for each pair of cages.



Mouth Guard – This is the most important instrument for the players. While diving under water, sometimes players face heavy impact. This will ensure player's protection from that. A good mouth guard is one that allows easy breathing and clear speaking while playing.



Swimsuit – Swim briefs or jammers (tight length trunks) are the swimsuit costume for male players. Female players wear one-piece swimsuit. Tight fitting swimsuits are important because suit grabbing fouls are common in this game. It should be made up of reinforced fabric and tougher stitching.



How to Play Water Polo?

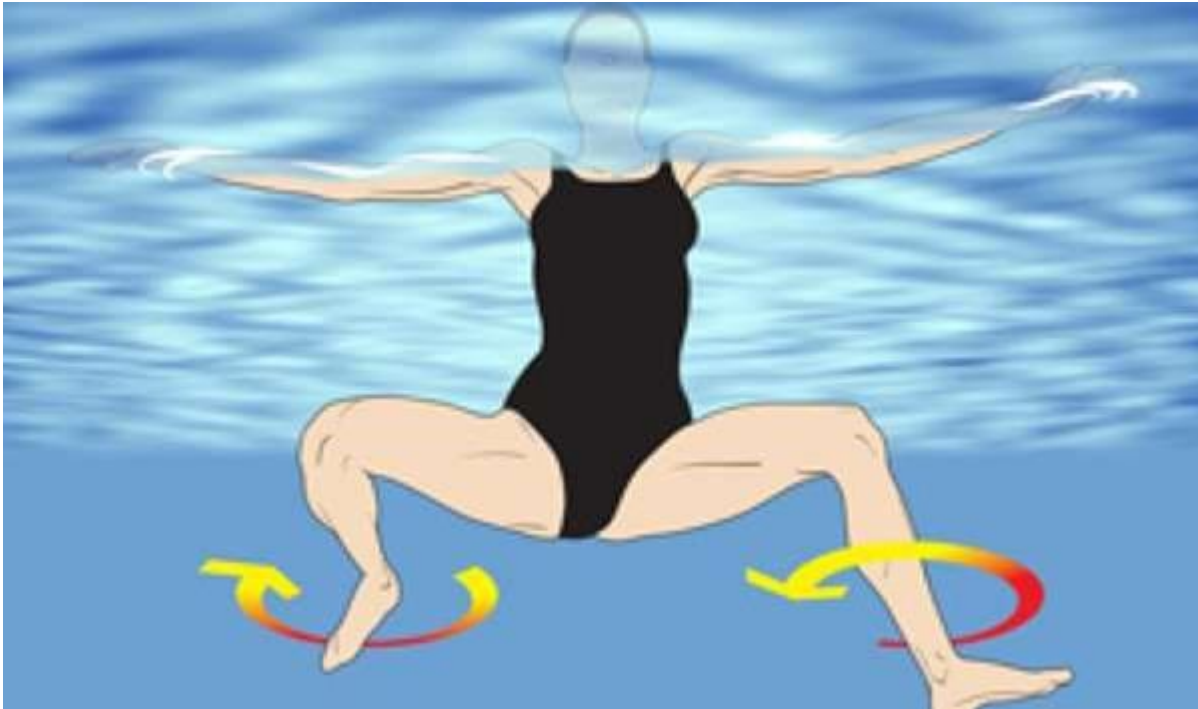
The game needs a mixture and balance of wrestling, swimming and defensive skills. Most of the time, the player has to keep his head out of the water. So the swimming skills used here are definitely different than that of the normal water swimming. **Front claw** stroke is more common and popular. To hit the ball, **arm stroke** is also used. Defending players use **backstroke** to advance the opponent team member whereas the goalie uses it to track the ball.

The Eggbeater Method

To trade in the water, one of the most common method used is the **eggbeater method**. In this method, the player moves his leg in a circular motion under water to keep himself stable. It is again of two types.

- Horizontal Eggbeater
- Vertical Eggbeater

Horizontal eggbeater is used to move forward towards the opponent and to block the ball, whereas vertical eggbeater is used by the player to keep himself at higher position than that of the opponent.



Defensive and attacking roles are assigned to six players known as **fielders**. One man is kept as the **goalkeeper**. The function of the fielders is to score goal against opponent team and prevent the same for their team. Goalkeeper stops the ball from entering into the goal post. Heavy force is needed to swim across the pool while simultaneously passing the ball and to score goal.

While passing and shooting the ball, the player should align his body in the direction of the motion of the ball. Using eggbeater, he has to keep his body floating constant for much duration of the time. Use the body momentum and keep in mind that one hand should only touch the ball. Let us now discuss some of the other basic skills relating to ball handling.

Picking up the Ball

To get a good grip while picking up a ball, the fingers and thumbs should get equally distributed over the mass of the ball. Player can pick the ball either under water or on the top of the water. The player often picks up the ball from the top of the water with a purpose of shooting. Picking the ball under water has the purpose of picking only.

Moving the Ball

The players can transfer the ball from one player to another but pushing the ball under water is not allowed as it may result in a **turnover**. In this case, the player has to transfer the ball to the opponent team.

Passing the Ball

There are two types of passing in water polo. They are–

- Dry passing
- Wet passing

If the player passes the ball without touching the water, then it is called as **dry passing**. With optimal speed the aim is to pass the ball from one hand to another without picking it up from the water. Through the use of **back spin**, the player makes it easy for his teammates to catch the ball.



On the other hand, the opponent team players use eggbeater to put them on higher position than others to catch the ball. The wet pass technique is used to deliberately land the ball on the water. For the teams having very strong hole set, this is a very strong offensive strategy.

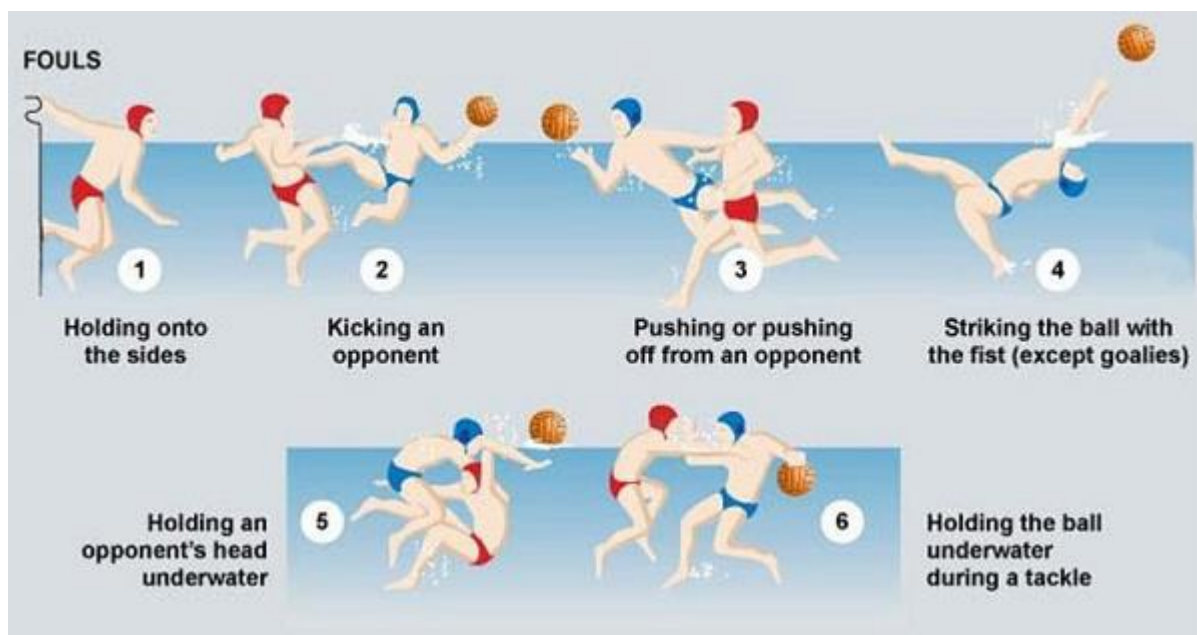
Shooting the Ball

Goals can be made with any part of the body except for a clenched fist. Beating a goal keeper from a long distance is very difficult. Hence the players always try to take a close shot as a gentle tap on the ball in the right direction to score a goal.

Players having good target shooting can opt for **power shot** techniques where they need to generate the power of the ball by propelling it with a speed to 60-90 Km per hour and then finally target it towards the goal. Some players use **bounce shot** in which the ball is shot in one direction but the bouncing redirects it towards the goal. The players can also use **lob shot** technique where they throw the ball in a long curve to the goal post.

Fouls in Water Polo

Till now we have discussed about the fouls which results due to minor mistakes due to which free throw is awarded to the other team. But there are some other fouls which result in **ejection or kick out**. These types of fouls are awarded only when the player becomes more aggressive physically. Three ejections are sufficient to restrict a player from playing the rest of the match.



Excess water travelling (around 3 km during 4 rounds) is needed in this game. Players punching under water can also get ejection foul. It is a common practice by the defender to make a foul to interrupt the movement of the opponent team but in most of the cases unless the foul is serious, the match continues uninterrupted.

Water Polo - Positions

As we know out of seven players in a team, six will be **fielders** while one will be the **goalkeeper**. Those six fielders also have different positions to occupy. Some important positions are –

- Centre forward
- Centre back
- Wing players
- Drivers

One player each is needed for centre-forward and backward position while two players each are needed as wing players and drivers. Players having the overall knowledge of offensive and defensive attacks on these all positions are called as **utility players**. Let's discuss about some positions in detail.

Water Polo – Offensive Positions

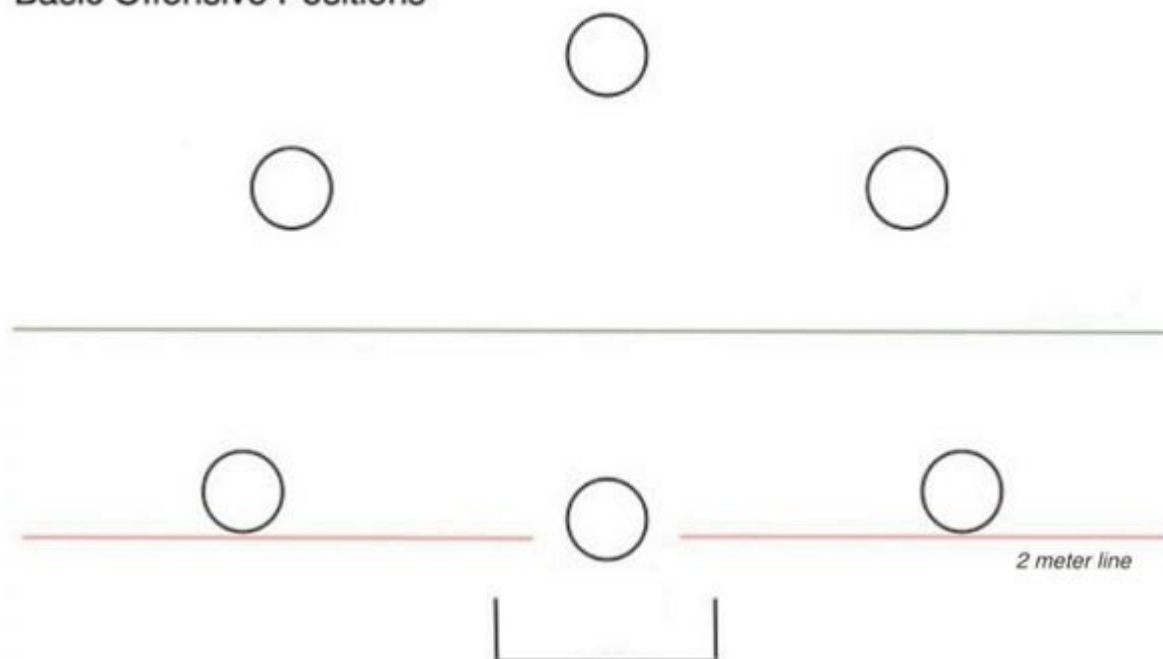
The offensive positions include

- Centre forward
- Wings/passers

- Point man

The **point** (player positioned just behind 5 meter) always directs the attack and it is the defending team who defends the forward attack. The combination of wing, drivers and point forms a **perimeter player** team. The 3-3 positional set up is used where there will be two lines in which three players will be there on either line.

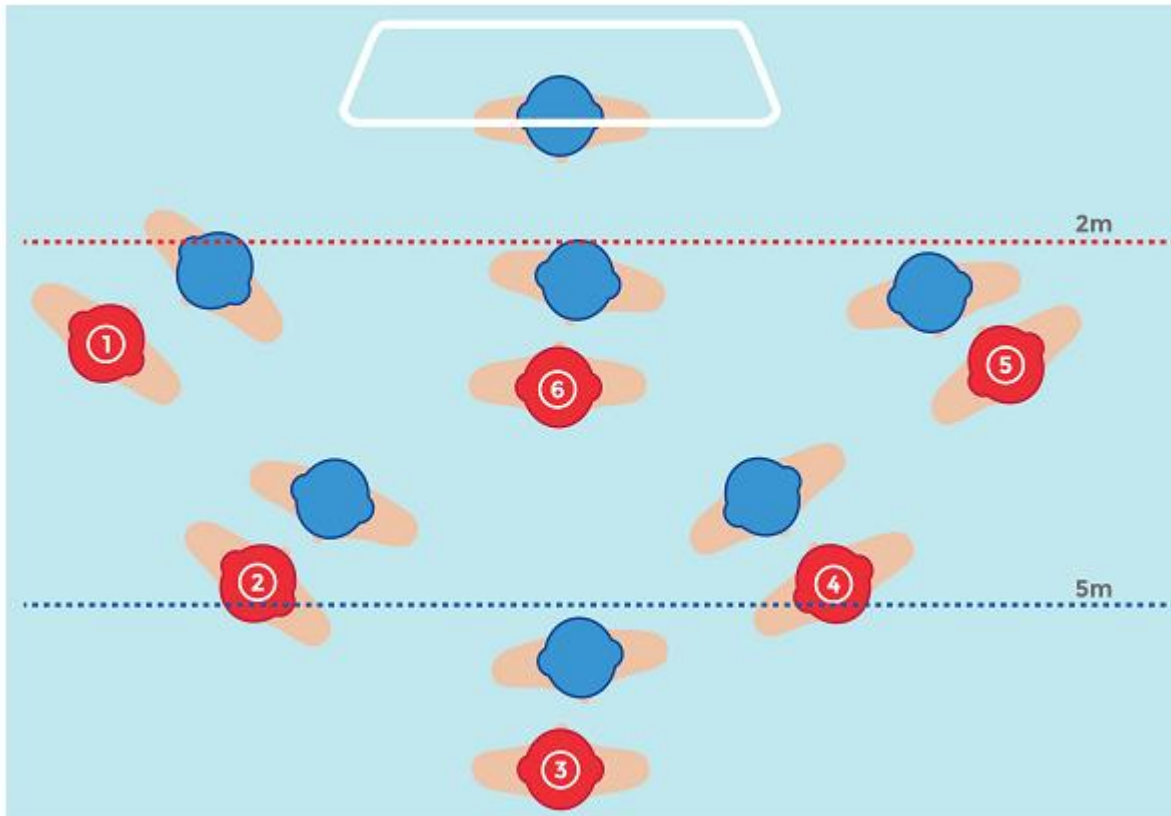
Basic Offensive Positions



The role of the centre-forward player is to stand nearby the goalie of the opponent team and score the goals. As this position is very important, a strong person is often chosen for this.

Water Polo – Defensive Positions

The switching version of offensive position is defensive position. In man-to-man position or in zones, the defensive players are placed. Opposing centre-forward is always a double team member who guards for front and back positions. It is very difficult to defend a backhand shot from the centre-forward position because the ball coming through these positions are explosive and all are directed towards the corner of the goals.



In the figure, the blue ones are showing the defensive positions against the red ones (offensive positions acquired by opponent team). Sometimes the pointer defender slights off his man into the zone to defend the centre position in a better way. This is known as **M drop**.

Goalkeeper in Water Polo

The goalkeeper serves the purpose of preventing the opponents to shoot a goal. Apart from blocking goals, another important duty of a goalkeeper is to inform his defenders about the gaps that they may not be able to identify during the match.

The goalkeeper always starts the offensive play hence he/she is called as **quarterback**. If he can position himself within the 5-meter area, then he can have the following privileges –

- The permission to touch the bottom of the pool.
- Can play the ball with the use of two hands.
- He can punch the ball using clenched fist.

During the course of a match, a goalkeeper also informs about the threats of the opponent team's moves.

Water Polo - Rules

Team size

Team size in this game varies for different levels. For senior level, the team size is seven, as decided by FINA. Here six players will be field players and one will be the goal keeper. In 2014, FINA reduced the number of players from 7 to 6 for the U20 and junior level tournaments. This implies that there will be 5 field players and one goalkeeper.

FINA has decided to extend the **six number of players rule** to all levels after the 2016 Olympic games. If a team commits any major foul, then the referee may direct the team to play with 6 players instead of 7 for 4 minutes. If the foul is much severe like striking a player, then he/she may be even disqualified from playing any future tournaments.

Players may be substituted in the following situations –

- Before and after the goals
- During the timeouts
- Before the starting of each quarter
- After injuries
- After ordinary fouls

Caps in Water Polo

The basic rule is that the players of both the teams must wear caps in contrast to each other. Their caps may be contrast with both or either of the goal keeper color or it can be same as that of the ball color. Goalies have to wear red caps.



Water Polo – Duration and Clock

Each game is divided into four periods. However, the periods of the game vary from tournament to tournament depending upon the level of the match. Following table shows the various tournaments and their corresponding timings.

Duration	Tournaments
8 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Olympics • FINA Water Polo World League • Serbia, Russia, Croatian, Italian Water Polo League • US College (Varsity Level)
7 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • US College (Club Level) • US High School(Varsity level)
6 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • US High School (Junior Varsity Level) • US High School (Freshman Level) • US Water Polo (Under 14 Team Level)
9 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senior Club Play

The clock can be stopped in the following cases –

- At the time of a foul and re-throw
- Between the goal scoring and restart

No team has the authority to hold the ball for more than 30 seconds. The 30 sec clock is reset if the team recaptures the ball after the throw.

Water Polo - Officials

As we are learning about the water polo playing tactics, we must know about the various officials and their roles on the field. The officials in this game can be divided into two categories –

- Game officials
- Table officials

Game officials are those who are responsible for the smooth running of the match whereas table officials are there to update the score and to report the management

board about the smooth operation of the match. The officials and their roles are as follows –

Referee

The referee has the ultimate decision making power over secretary, goal judges, and time keepers. He signals about fouls, goals, penalties, timeouts, starting, ending, and restarting of the match through hand and whistle. In lower level tournaments, one referee is enough whereas in higher tournaments two referees can be present virtually. A referee can also take the position of goal judges in case the goal judge is absent.



Goal Judge

The role of a goal judge is to signal a goal and corner throws. He also takes care of starting the game after the quarters and signals improper start of the game after each quarter.

Time Keeper

The role of the time keeper is to use 30 second clock and shot clock. Along with this, he updates the score on the electronic board and gives signal if one minute is left for the completion of the quarter or match.

Secretary

The secretary advises the water polo management on smooth running of the match. He also acts as a mediator between players and management. Along with this, he conducts meetings with the management as and when necessary.

Water Polo - Champions

Along with the other games like football and rugby, water polo was introduced as a first sport in Olympics in 1900. After the political protest from the Australian women's team, women water polo became a part of Olympics in the late 2000.

Here is a list of some important tournaments in Water Polo –

- NCAA Men's Water Polo Championship
- Olympic Games
- NCAA Women's Water Polo Championship
- USA Water Polo Hall of Fame
- Men's Champion League Euro Cup
- FINA Water Polo Tournaments

Let us now take a brief look at the careers of some of champions of Water Polo.

Dusan Aleksic



Dusan Aleksic is a water polo player of Canada. He started his career in 2000 and in 2007, he joined the junior team at the Youth Pan American Championships.

In 2010, he joined the senior national team and in 2011, he got a chance to play in FINA Championship and the team won a silver medal in Pan Am Games.

Dusan played an important role in helping his team to qualify for the 2013 and 2015 FINA World Championships.

Justin Boyd



Justin Boyd belongs to Canadian team and was the youngest player in 2008 Olympics. He started his career at the age of 12. In 2009, 2011, and 2013, he was a part of FINA Championship.

In 2009, Canada won silver medal and he was the part of the team. He also represented Canada in World Aquatic Championships in 2015.

In 2014, he was a member of the Canada Water Polo team that got sixth place in FINA Water Polo World League.

Tony Azevedo



Azevedo represented the Water Polo team of American. Currently, he is the captain of the US National Water Polo team.

He started his water polo career with Bissolati Cremona team of Italy and scored 63 goals with an average of 2.62 per game in 2006.

In 2007, he joined American team and played in Melbourne World Championships where America got silver medal. In 2012, Azevedo became the captain of United States men's national Water Polo team.

Nicolas Constantin Bicari



Nicolas Constantin Bicari is a water polo player for Canadian team. He started his career in 2010 Junior Pan American Championship where his team won a gold medal.

In 2009 FINA World Championships, he was a part of the senior team that got eighth place in the tournament.

In 2011 Pan American Games, he shot 10 goals and got sixth position while his team won silver medal in the tournament. Along with this, he also shot 16 goals in six games of FINA Championships held in 2014.

Peter Biros



Peter Biros is a water polo player in Hungarian team. He was a part of 2000, 2004, and 2008 Summer Olympics in which his team won gold medal. He was also a part of the 2012 Summer Olympics

He started his career in the national team in 1997 in an international tournament held in Spain.

After 2008 Olympics, he received the Fair Play award, as he has got cyst in his heart but played and helped his team to win gold medal.

Alexandra Asimaki



Alexandra Asimaki is a Greek water polo player and is a centre forward player. Her team won a gold medal in World Championship held in Shanghai in 2011.

As she gave extraordinary performance, she became best European and World Female Water Polo player for 2011.

In World League 2005 also, her team won a gold medal. In the European Championship of 2010 and 2012, her team won silver medal.

Alkisti Avramidou



Alkisti Avramidou is a Water Polo player from Greece who plays as a left wing for Olympiacos and Greek National team.

Avramidou was a part of the Water Polo team from Greece that won the gold medal in the 2011 World Aquatic Championships. In addition, she has won one silver medal in 2010 and one in 2012 in European Championship.

Avramidou has also won two bronze medals in FINA World League out of which one she won in 2010 and other in 2012.

Kami Craig



Kami Craig is an American Water Polo player. She was a part of the team when it won the silver medal in the 2008 Beijing Olympics. Her team also won a gold medal in 2012 Olympics held in London.

Kami was also a part of the American team for FINA World Championships in 2009. She also received the prestigious Peter J. Cutino award in 2009 and 2010.

Jessica Gaudreault



Jessica Gaudreault is a water polo player for Canada. She started her career as a swimmer but could not succeed, so she made a switch to Water Polo.

Gaudreault was a part of the junior international team that won gold medals in 2008 and 2010 in Pan American Championships.

In 2011 and 2013, her team got ninth rank in FINA World Junior Championships. In 2015 UANA Cup, Gaudreault was the goaltender and due to her performance, she qualified for FINA World Championships.

Natalie Golda



Natalie Golda plays for American team and is considered as the best water polo female champion. She was a part of the American Water Polo team in 2004 Athens Olympics in which the team won a bronze medal.

Her team also won a silver medal in 2008 Beijing Olympics. Her team was the winner of gold medal in the FINA World Championships in 2003.

She also received Peter J. Cutino award in 2005. Along with this, she was also elected as the USA Water Polo hall of fame.