

Summary Water Polo Rules Revised 2023

Playing Area

The pool is marked out from each end to the centre line as follows:

- Goal line, all players start each period on the goal line
- 2m line and penalty area (2m from goalline and 2m from each post) which is used for offside, you cannot be in this zone or receive the ball in this area if the ball is passed forward
- 5m line used to take penalties
- 6m line inside which penalties are awarded for major fouls and certain minor fouls. Outside this 6m line if awarded a free throw then a direct shot at goal is allowed.
- Centre line, this is where the ball is placed at the swim off at the start of each period, and after a goal is scored the game is restarted from the centre. The goalie is now allowed past the centre line in open play.

Opposite the referee or opposite the table if there are two referees there is an area 2m from the corner where you must leave and re-enter the pool if sent out for a foul or substituted. In the latest rules an additional substitution re-entry area will be at any place between the goal line and the centre field line for flying substitutions. You must not jump in or push off the pool side if you are returning after 20 seconds or change in possession. After a goal substitutes, can enter and leave the pool at the nearest convenient point prior to the re-start.

The Team

Each team consists of seven players, six out field players and one goalie. Up to six substitutes can be named and used during the game as long as there is no more than seven in the water at any one time. Mixed teams are allowed up to the age of sixteen. If a major foul is committed then a player is sent out for 20 seconds, a goal is scored or until possession is reversed. This is referred to as man up or man down. If one player is sent out from each team, then they continue to play with six players each.

If a player receives three major fouls in a game then they are excluded for the rest of the game, but can be substituted. In some serious cases of Violent Play then the team plays man down for four minutes of actual play

The Game

Normally consists of four periods of eight minutes' actual play, but sometimes for tournaments and by agreement this can be reduced to two periods of "all-in play" if time is limited. Unless the water is deep all over the teams will normally change ends at the end of each period. The aim is to score more goals than the opposition. A goal is scored by the whole ball crossing the line between the posts and below the cross bar. The goals are different heights to take account of whether the goalie can stand in the shallow end.

To play the game it combines swimming speed, strength, agility and ball skills. You need to swim with the ball (dribbling) and without the ball and develop the ability to kick so you can change direction quickly or keep the shoulders above the water level whilst holding or passing the ball with one hand or intercepting a pass between your opponents.

Possession Time

Each team normally has thirty seconds from gaining possession to scoring a goal. At thirty seconds if no goal has been scored then possession changes to the other side. However, the possession time is reset to 20 seconds after a) a corner throw awarded; b) a rebound after a shot which does not cause change of possession and c) after an exclusion only if there is less than 20 seconds left

Basic Skills

Outfield players can only use one hand at a time to catch and throw the ball. You must not use a fist to punch the ball. You are not allowed to stand or touch the bottom while playing the ball- this is a minor foul unless you jump of the bottom inside 6m to stop a shot in which case it is a major foul and a penalty throw is awarded. When you are tackled, you are not allowed to push the ball under water- this is a minor foul. If you are holding the ball and an opponent pushes your hand and ball under the water, then it a minor foul against the original person holding the ball. If tackled then you must pass or release the ball onto the water and protect it with your arms and body without giving away possession,

Goalies can catch and pass the ball with two hands and can stand or push of the bottom if the water is shallow enough. Goals are measured from the bottom of the pool to the cross bar until a certain depth (deep water) and then all deep-water goals should be measured from the water line. Goalies are not allowed to hang onto the goals or move them, nor are they allowed to hang onto the wall or bar in the deep end. Goalies are allowed to use a fist to save a shot or punch the ball away as long as it is not dangerous to other players.

Free Throws

Free throws Free throw shall be taken from the location of the ball when picked up by the team with the free throw (except if the foul is committed inside the 2m penalty area). A goal may be scored from a free throw awarded outside 6 meters from a direct shot or after fake or dribble or putting the ball on the water. Referees shall use signals if the foul happened outside the 6m line. Inside the 6m line then free throws must be put in play and passed to another player before a shot is allowed. A player can put the ball in play by passing to another player or by clearly throwing it up in the air or placing it on the water. Failure to put the ball in play quickly will result in a free throw to the opposition.

Penalties- are taken from the 5m line. The goalie must be on the goal line and all other players must be at least 3m away from the penalty taker. With the ball on the water or in the hand then on the whistle the shot must be taken immediately and a continuous movement. You are not allowed to feint or dummy the keeper.

Corner throws and goal throws- corners are awarded only if the goalie deflects a shot or it is deliberately thrown out by a defensive player. All other instances it is a goal throw. Corners are taken from the same side it went out of play and from the 2m line. All other attacking players must be outside 2m penalty area when the corner throw is taken. A player taking a corner throw may shoot directly or swim and shoot without passing or pass to another player. Goalies or the nearest defensive player can take goal throws from the nearest position in the 2m area- for the goalie it is

prudent to take these from between the posts in case there is a quick change of possession.

Neutral throws- these are awarded when two fouls are committed simultaneously or the referee stopped the game for some other reason such as an injury. The ball is dropped on the water in front of two opposing players to restart the game. If two major fouls are committed simultaneously then the attacking teams retains possession with a free throw.

Minor fouls

These can occur for a number of reasons and result in a free throw to the opposition. The main ones are listed below:

- By not being on the goal line at the start of play or at the beginning of a new period.
- Standing or jumping while playing the ball (not goalies)
- Holding the ball with two hands at once (not goalies)
- Pushing of the side or holding onto the rails other than at the start of play.
- Not playing the free throw quickly after a free throw is awarded.
- To take or hold the entire ball under the water when tackled or in open play.
- To strike the ball with a clenched fist (not goalies)
- To impede or prevent the free movement of a player **not holding the ball**.
- To push or push off from an opponent who is **not holding the ball**.
- To be inside the opponents 2m penalty area unless you have swum there and are behind the ball.
- For the ball to be thrown out of play or bouncing of the wall above water level.
- For a team retaining possession for 30 seconds.
- For wasting time.

Major fouls

These are for more serious offences and result in a free throw and player being sent out for up to 20 seconds. The offending player must swim to the substitution area as quickly as possible and without interfering with play. The main reasons for a major foul are listed below:

- To interfere with the taking of a free throw before the ball is in play. This includes splashing.
- To attempt to play or block a shot with two hands outside the 5m area.
- To hold sink or pull back player who is **not holding the ball**. Holding is lifting, carrying or touching the ball, but not dribbling.
- To kick or intentionally strike an opponent.
- To be guilty of misconduct such as foul language, violent or persistent foul play, showing disrespect to the referee and leaving the water for substitution in the wrong place. **Misconduct means you are excluded for the rest of the game**
- For re-entering the water after an exclusion illegally e.g. jumping in or pushing off the side or before the signal to re-enter has been given by the referee or the table.

Penalties

These are awarded for major fouls inside the 6m line and for other fouls that would probably prevent a goal being scored. Inside the 6m area, when a player is swimming with and/or holding the ball and is impeded (attacked) from behind during an attempt to shoot, a penalty foul must be awarded (unless only the ball is touched by the defender). In addition, penalties are awarded for moving or pulling down the

goal, playing the ball with two hands (not goalie) and using a clenched fist (not goalie) to block a shot, or taking the ball under water by the goalie or defender when tackled inside the 6m zone. A goalie who dives and saves a shot can take the ball under water as long as when he surfaces he is not tackled whilst still holding the ball under water. It is a penalty if you re enter the water illegally after a substitution or major foul when you are defending.