

# WATER POLO

Water polo is a team water sport, which can be best described as a combination of swimming, football (soccer), basketball, ice hockey, rugby and wrestling. A team consists of six field players and one goalkeeper. The goal of the game resembles that of football (soccer): to score as many goals as possible, each goal being worth one point. A perfect water polo athlete can be best described as having the over-arm accuracy of a baseball pitcher, the vertical leap of a volleyball player, the toughness of a rugby player, the endurance of a cross-country runner and the strategy of a chess player.

## Basic skills

- **Swimming:** Water polo is a team water sport, so swimming is a necessary skill. Field players must swim end to end of a 30 meter pool non-stop many times during a game. The freestyle stroke used in water polo differs from the usual swimming style in that water polo players swim with the head out of water at all times to observe the field. Backstroke is used by defending field players to track advancing attackers and by the goalkeeper to track the ball after passing. Water polo backstroke differs from swimming backstroke; the player sits almost upright in the water, using eggbeater leg motions with short arm strokes to the side instead of long straight arm strokes. This allows the player to see the play and quickly switch positions.
- **Ball handling skills:** As all field players are only allowed to touch the ball with one hand at a time, they must develop the ability to catch and throw the ball with either hand and also the ability to catch a ball from any direction, including across the body using the momentum of the incoming ball. Experienced water polo players can catch and release a pass or shot with a single motion.
- **Treading water:** The most common form of water treading is generally referred to as the "egg-beater", named because the circular movement of the legs resembles the motion of an egg-beater. Egg beater is used for most of the match as the players cannot touch the bottom of the pool. The advantage of egg-beater is that it allows the player to maintain a constant position to the water level, and uses less energy than other forms of treading water such as the scissor kick, which result in the player bobbing up and down. It can be used vertically or horizontally. Horizontal egg-beater is used to resist forward motion of an attacking player. Vertical eggbeater is used to maintain a position higher than the opponent. By kicking faster for a brief period the player can get high out of the water (as high as their suit—below their waistline) for a block, pass, or shot. Eggbeater is also used in a water polo stroke style called 'spider' where an attacking or defending player can legally ward off opposing players with quick, sharp strokes of the arms, elbows high and wide and egg-beater legs as wide as possible, creating an area that the opposing players cannot enter.
- **Reflexes and Awareness:** At higher levels of the sport the pace of play rapidly increases, so that anticipation and mental preparation is important. "Field sense" (i.e. staying aware of the surroundings) is a major advantage in scoring, even if a player lacks the speed of an opponent. Dr. Richard Hunkler, national water polo coach of the year in 1993 and 1994, has compared this aspect of the game to chess.

Seven players from each team (six field players and a goalkeeper) are allowed in the playing area of the pool during game play. Visiting team field players wear numbered white caps, and home team field players wear dark caps; both goalies wear quartered red caps, numbered "1".

Both teams may substitute players. During game play, players enter and exit in front of their team bench; when play is stopped, they may enter or exit anywhere.

The game clock is stopped when the ball is not 'in play' e.g. between a foul being committed and the free throw being taken and between a goal being scored and the restart. This causes the average quarter to last around 12 minutes 'real time'. A team may not have possession of the ball for longer than 30 seconds without shooting for the goal or an opponent being ejected. After this time, possession passes to the other team. However, if a team shoots the ball within the allotted 30 seconds, and regains control of the ball, the shot clock is reset to 30 seconds. Each team may call two one minute timeouts in the four periods of regulation play, and one timeout if the game goes into overtime. During game play, only the team in possession of the ball may call a timeout.

Dimensions of the water polo pool are not fixed and can vary between 20 x 10 and 30 x 20 meters. Minimum water depth must be least 1.8 meters (6 feet), but this is often waived for age group or high school games if such a facility is unavailable. The goals are 3 meters wide and 90 centimetres high. Water polo balls are generally yellow and of varying size and weight for juniors, women and men. The middle of the pool (analogous to the 50 yard line in football) is designated by a white line. In the past, the pool was divided by 7 and 4 meter lines (distance out from the goal line). This has been merged into one 5 meter line since the 2005-2006 season. Along the side of the pool, the center area between the 5 meter lines is marked by a green line. The "five meters" line is where penalties are shot and it is designated by a yellow line. The "two meters" line is designated with a red line and no player of the attacking team can be inside this line without the ball.

One player on each team is designated the goalkeeper, assigned to deflect or catch any shots at goal. The goalkeeper is the only player who can touch the ball with both hands at any time, and, in a shallow pool, the only player allowed to stand on the bottom.

Players can move the ball by throwing it to a teammate or swimming while pushing the ball in front of them. Players are not permitted to push the ball underwater when being tackled, or push or hold an opposition player unless that player is holding the ball. Fouls are very common, and result in a free throw during which the player cannot shoot at the goal unless beyond the "5 meter" line. Water polo players need remarkable stamina due to the considerable amount of holding and pushing that occurs during the game, some allowed, some unseen or ignored by the referees (usually underwater). Water polo is one of the most physically demanding of all sports; action is continuous, and players commonly swim 3 kilometers or more during four periods of play.

Water polo is a game requiring excellent eye-hand coordination. The ability to handle and pass the ball flawlessly separates the good teams from the great teams. A pass thrown to a field position player is preferably a "dry pass" (meaning the ball does not touch the water) and allows for optimal speed when passing from player to player with fluid motion between catching and throwing. A "wet pass" is a deliberate pass into the water, just out of reach of the offensive player nearest the goal (the "hole set") and his defender. The hole-set can then lunge towards the ball and out of the water to make a shot or pass. A goal may be scored by any part of the body except a clenched fist.

Scoring in water polo can be quite unique compared to other sports. For example, a "skip" shot is fired intentionally at the water with considerable force so it will bounce back up. The

ball usually hits the water within a metre of the net, where the goalie cannot anticipate and block the shot. Another shot, called a "lob" is thrown with a large vertical arc. Often these shots are more difficult to stop than a faster shot, as they are usually thrown across a net at such an angle the goalie must not only shift position from one side of the net to the other quickly, but also at the same time propel out of the water more than for other shots. Pump faking is effective when using any kind of shot. The player gets in the position to shoot but stops halfway through his motion, causing the defending goalkeeper to commit too early to block the subsequent shot.

The referee's whistle for a foul is heard much more in water polo than in other sports. A defender will often foul the player with the ball as a tactic to disrupt the opponent's ball movement. Play continues uninterrupted in most cases, but the attacker must now pass the ball instead of advancing or taking a shot. (An exception allows players to quickly pick up the ball and shoot if fouled outside of the five meter mark.) However, as in ice hockey, a player caught committing a major foul, is sent out of the playing area with his team a man-down for 20 seconds, but may return sooner if a goal is scored or his team regains possession. If the foul is an unsportsmanlike act, however, the player is ejected for the remainder of the game with substitution by another teammate. A player, coach or spectator can also be ejected for arguing with the referees. During a man up situation resulting from an ejection foul, the attacking team can expect to score by passing around to move the goalkeeper out of position. A player that has been ejected three times must sit out the whole match with substitution.

goalkeeper:	a player whose job is to stop the ball from going into his or her own team's goal (n.)
resemble:	to look like or be similar to another person or thing (v.)
vertical:	going straight up or down from a level surface or from top to bottom in a picture, etc. (adj.)
vertical:	a vertical line or position (n.)
endurance:	the ability to continue doing sth painful or difficult for a long period of time without complaining (n.)
skill	skill (in / at sth)   skill (in / at doing sth) the ability to do sth well (n.)
non-stop	without any pauses or stops (adj.)
<a href="#">freestyle</a>	a swimming race in which people taking part can use any stroke they want (usually crawl) (n.)
<a href="#">freestyle</a>	to rap, play music, dance, etc. by inventing it as you do it, rather than by planning it in advance or following fixed patterns (v.)
stroke	any of a series of repeated movements in swimming or rowing (n.)
stroke	to move sth somewhere with a gentle movement (v.)
observe	to see or notice sb/sth (v.)
backstroke	a style of swimming in which you lie on your back (n.)
momentum	the ability to keep increasing or developing (n.)
maintain	to make sth continue at the same level, standard, etc. (v.)
<a href="#">scissor kick</a>	a strong kick with the legs moving in opposite directions (n.)
ward off	to protect or defend yourself against danger, illness, attack, etc. (ph.v.)
anticipation	the fact of seeing that sth might happen in the future and perhaps doing sth about it now (n.)
substitute	a player who replaces another player in a sports game (n.)
substitute	to take the place of sb/sth else; to use sb/sth instead of sb/sth else (v.)
bench	the seats where players sit when they are not playing in the game (n.)
allot	to give time, money, tasks, etc. to sb/sth as a share of what is available (v.)
timeout	a short period of rest during a sports game (n.)
facility	buildings, services, equipment, etc. that are provided for a particular purpose (n.)
divided	(of a group or an organization) split by disagreements or different opinions (adj.)
divide	to separate or make sth separate into parts (v.)
divide	a difference between two groups of people that separates them from each other (n.)
merge	to combine or make two or more things combine to form a single thing (v.)
penalty	a disadvantage given to a player or a team when they break a rule (n.)
tackle	to try and take the ball from an opponent (v.)
tackle	an act of trying to take the ball from an opponent (n.)
stamina	the physical or mental strength that enables you to do sth difficult for long periods of time (n.)
coordination	the act of making parts of sth, groups of people, etc. work together in an efficient and organized way (n.)
flawlessly	(adv.)
clench	when you clench your hands, teeth, etc., or when they clench, you press or squeeze them together tightly, usually showing that you are angry, determined or upset (v.)
anticipate	to expect sth (v.)
propel	to move, drive or push sth forward or in a particular direction (v.)
disrupt	to make it difficult for sth to continue in the normal way (v.)
unsportsmanlike	not behaving in a fair, generous and polite way, especially when playing a sport or game (adj.)