

QUICK FACTS OF WATER POLO

Number of players per team:

7 (1 goalie and 6 field players)

Length of game:

about 45 minutes

four 7-minute quarters that actually last around 12 minutes or so depending on how many fouls are called by the referee.

2 minutes rest between quarters

Scoring: 1 point per goal (like soccer). Scores are in the range of 6-15 goals per game. With a decent goalie, shooting percentages are 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 all deep pool if available. We use 25-yard half-deep pools. Players are not supposed to touch the bottom so lots of treading is required.

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. Instead of using feet, 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 a player 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 - 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, there is a somewhat physical aspect to the game and water polo 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?

The level of contact in water polo is much like basketball where strong leaning and pushing is expected around the center (or “hole”). Outside of the hole, lighter contact occurs but unnecessary grabbing, pushing, or hitting of any kind is 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 was recently ranked the number one club team in the United States, and is likely to become a full varsity sport soon.

Ordinary Fouls:

Ordinary fouls are committed rather frequently 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: three seconds to put the ball in play without interference from the defender. (The ball normally can't be shot at the goal until it has been passed to another player. An exception to this is when the foul is committed outside the 5-meter line, 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 it a whistle is blown almost every 15 seconds. Refs will call lots of fouls but will try to keep the game flowing and the ball is usually back in play within three seconds of the foul. Sometimes refs will choose to ignore minor fouls committed away from the ball so as not to stop more important action, such as an opportunity to score for example.

Ordinary fouls include:

- Grabbing
- Reaching over anyone's head or shoulder
- Pushing off of an opposing player with hands or feet
- Kicking
- Splashing water in the face
- Touching the ball with two hands (except goalie)
- Pushing the ball under water when under attack

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.

- Any ordinary foul committed by a defender when the opposing player is in a scoring position (like fouling a "driver" or the hole man if they have inside water) is considered a major foul.
- Blatant, unnecessary fouls committed away from the action are also considered major fouls worthy of a kickout. (For example, grabbing an ankle when someone is trying to swim away).
- Disrespect to the referee including foul language, contesting a call, or even scowling (this is at the referees 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).