

# HOW TO WATCH WATER POLO

**THE OBJECTIVE:** The objective of water polo is to have your team put the yellow ball into the large goal, while keeping the opposing team from doing the same in yours. A goal is scored when the entire ball crosses the goal line (the front vertical plane of the goal).

**THE GAME:** A water polo game is broken up into four (4) quarters each lasting eight (8) minutes of game time. Due to fouls, whistle and goals, quarters can last upwards of 15 minutes. Each quarter begins with a sprint for the ball. The referee will blow the whistle to start the period and one player from each team will race to get the ball that is floating at mid-pool. The team to recover the ball will advance down the pool to set up their offense and attempt to score. The offense has a 35-second shot clock to attempt to score. During that time, referees will call "ordinary fouls" and "exclusion fouls" against the players in the water for rule violations. The game continues in motion until a goal is scored. After a goal is scored, both teams return to their defending sides of the pool and the team that gets scored on takes control of the ball from center pool at the referees whistled command.

**THE TEAMS:** Two teams compete in a game. One team will wear dark colored caps (traditionally blue) while the other will wear light colored caps (traditionally white). The goalie for each team wears a red cap to designate them as such. Each team can only have seven (7) players in the water at one time (six field players and one goalie).

**THE PLAYERS:** As with any team game, players have certain positions they take in the field of play. They are:

- **Goalie:** defends his team's goals against shots and is the only player on her team allowed to use two hands when handling the ball.
- **Perimeter:** typically, five players align themselves in an offensive pattern, their primary purposes are to move the ball around the offense, drive to the net to get a high percentage shot, shoot from the perimeter and pass the ball into the hole. Most ordinary fouls are called at the perimeter.
- **Hole Set:** one player that positions herself in between the goal posts and around the 2-meter line. This player positions herself to take high percentage shots and is typically "wrestling" with a defender to achieve this position. Most exclusion fouls are called at the hole set.

**THE REFEREE:** There are two referees in a water polo game. Standard uniform is an all white wardrobe with a whistle dangling from their neck.

**COMMON "ORDINARY FOULS":** Ordinary fouls are a common occurrence in a water polo game and account for a majority of the whistles heard during a game. **Play does NOT stop for ordinary fouls.** If a defender commits an ordinary foul against the offense, the offense is given a "free pass" at the location of the foul or further away from the goal they are attacking should the ball move in that direction. The offensive player can either pass the ball to another player in the water or put the ball in play by making an obvious drop of the ball in the water. The defender, after committing the foul, cannot interfere with the play until the ball is put back in play. None of the defensive players can interfere with the offensive player when given a "free pass." Here is what "Ordinary Fouls" include:

- **Two Hands:** players cannot handle the ball with two hands (the goalie is the only exception to this rule)
- **Ball Under:** when "tackled", a player cannot take the ball under water
- **Impeding:** when one player prevents the free movement of an opposing player who is not holding the ball
- **Pushing Off:** when one player pushes off an opposing player who is not holding the ball
- **Inside 2 Meters:** when an offensive player is inside the 2-meter line of the goal she is attacking without the ball being inside the 2-meter area. The player then cannot go any closer to the goal inside 2-meters than where the ball is
- **Shot Clock Violation:** when a team uses up their entire 35 second shot clock without attempting a shot
- **Wasting Time:** the offensive team must advance the ball in an attempt to score. If they do not, it is considered wasting time and a foul is called

**COMMON "EXCLUSION FOULS":** Exclusion fouls or "kick-outs" have become a more common call. When a player commits an exclusion foul, they are ejected from play and must swim to their team's penalty box without interfering with game play. The offensive team is awarded a new shot clock and a one-player advantage for 20 seconds. Exclusions include:

- **Interfering:** when a player interferes with the taking of a free throw
- **Splashing:** intentionally splashing water in the face of an opponent
- **Pulling Back:** when a player holds, sinks or pulls back an opposing player who is not holding the ball or preventing said player from making a play for the ball
- **Kicking and Striking**
- **Unsportsmanlike/Brutality:** striking with the intent to injure

