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Water Polo Basics

Water Polo Rules

Water polo combines the rules of basketball, soccer and hockey with wrestling and swimming. The sport is played all over the world and was in fact the first Olympic team sport. As popular as it is in certain parts of the world, it can be a little confusing. Here are water polo basics which will help you better understand the sport:

1. Players can only use one hand to hold the ball.
2. Teams consist of 6 field players and 1 goalie as well as substitutes.
3. The object of the game is to score in the opposite team's goal like in soccer.
4. Only the goalie can use two hands when he is within 5 meters of his own goal.
5. Players advance the ball by passing to teammates or swimming with the ball in front of them.
6. There are personal fouls like in basketball.
7. There are man advantages like in hockey.
8. Like in basketball, teams have a shot clocks that vary by age groups.

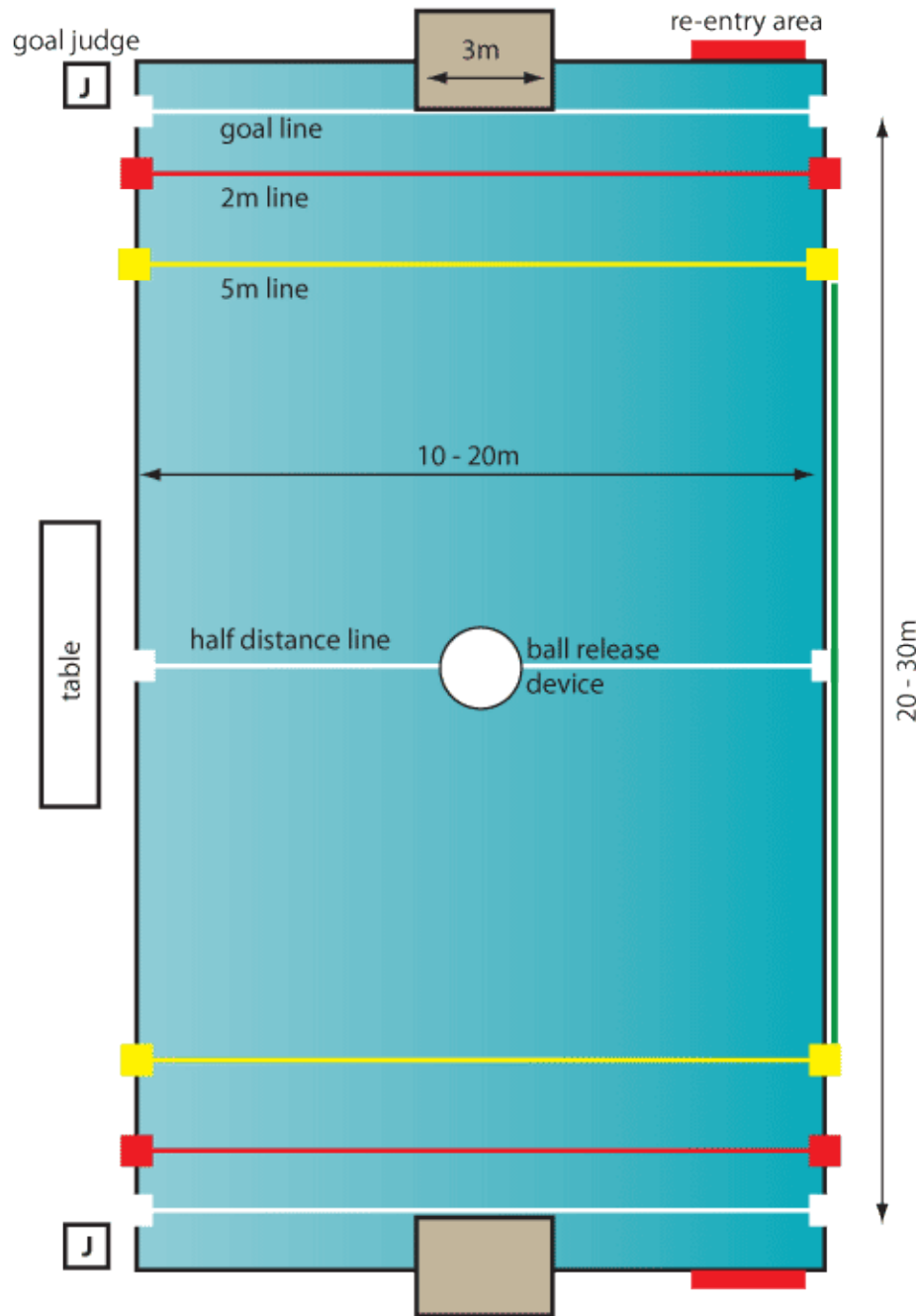
Physical contact is the rule rather than the exception as players maneuver for position in front of the goal. The referee indicates fouls by blowing a whistle. There are ordinary fouls, which give the fouled player a free throw and major fouls which lead to the fouling player being ejected for 20 seconds.

Each quarter starts with teams lined up on opposite goal lines. On the whistle, the teams sprint toward center pool for the ball. The player arriving first at the ball gains possession for his team. The team gaining possession advance the ball by swimming or passing the ball. Goals are scored when the ball completely passes between the front of the goal posts. It need not slam into the back of the net, although water polo shots can exceed 50km's per hour. Following a goal, the ball is put into play as soon as all players are back in their respective halves of the pool.

The offense is similar to basketball, with the center forward positioning himself 2-meters in front of the opposition's goal. The rest of his team form a semi circle (perimeter) around him similar to how basketball is setup. Much of the action in front of the goal consists of the offensive team passing the ball to the center forward. The center forward's object is to either score or draw exclusion fouls that will give the offensive team a man-up advantage. The perimeter players score by taking outside shots.

A "fast break" occurs when a team receives the ball and sprints down the pool before the defenders can set up a defense.

POOL LAYOUT



The standard pool is 30 x 20 meters. The pool should be all deep, with championship games played in a minimum depth of 2 meters. Goals (0.9m high by 3m wide) are positioned at each end of the course.

The 2-meter line (Red), visible on each side of the pool, delineates the distance from the goal. The offensive team may not pass to a teammate inside 2m, an offensive player can only swim the ball inside 2m.

The 5-meter line (Yellow), visible on each side of the pool, is used for penalty shots and fouled shots on goal. Should an offensive player with the ball be fouled 5m or further from the goal, his free throw can be either a pass or shot on goal. Being fouled inside 5m, the offensive player's free throw can only be a pass. Penalty shots are also taken from the 5-meter line. The offensive player faces the goalkeeper across 5 meters of water. When the whistle sounds, the player takes a direct shot at the goal.

POSITIONS

Drivers/Flats

Drivers are field players who specialize in swimming, getting around their defender and outside shooting techniques. To score, drivers must be extremely fast swimmers and be good shooters.

2-meter Man/Hole Set/Center Forward

The center forward is the offensive player who takes position directly in front of the opponent's goal on 2-meters. Center forwards typically have above average size, great leg strength, excellent passing abilities and are skilled shooters. They are similar to centers in basketball, in that they "post up" looking for a pass that enables them to get a close shot at the goal. The center forwards are always closely guarded.

2-meter Defender/Set Guard

The 2-meter defender's primary job is to guard the 2-meter man. This player usually guards the biggest player on the other team. The position requires agility to constantly readjust the guarding position in order to guard the 2-meter man from different passes coming from the perimeter. The play at the two meter position is usually the most physical in the pool, and 90% of the exclusion fouls occur as the 2-meter defender desperately tries to stop the 2-meter man from scoring.

Utility player

Utility players can play all positions in the pool. Like a halfback in soccer, the utility players will switch positions when they see an opportunity to score. Utility players are most effective when they drive in and play hole set and quickly score against a defender who is inexperienced guarding that position.

Goalkeepers/Goalie

The goalkeeper is the only player permitted to take the ball in both hands. They patrol the goal and are called upon to make "saves" to prevent an opponent from scoring. They are allowed to shoot at the opponent's goal, as long as they do so from their half of the pool.

GAME CLOCKS

As in basketball, two clocks are used to time a water polo game. One indicates the time remaining in the quarter. The other, called the shot clock or 30 second clock, indicates how much time remains for the offensive team to shoot the ball. Failure to shoot within the allotted time results in the offensive team losing possession of the ball. The shot clock resets whenever the opposing (defensive) teams gains clear possession of the ball. The shot clock also resets on all exclusion fouls (kickouts) and penalty (5 meter) shots. The shot clock does not reset on ordinary fouls.

A water polo game consists of 4 quarters, each quarter being 8 minutes in length with 2-minute intervals between quarters. Substitutions are permitted after a goal is scored, between periods and on the fly, similar to hockey. The offensive team has 30 seconds of time to take a shot at the goal or else it loses possession of the ball. Shot clocks indicate the number of seconds remaining before a team will lose possession.

Each team is allowed two or three time-outs during regulation time. Only one time-out for overtime is allowed regardless of how many time-outs were called during regulation play.

ORDINARY FOULS

There are 2 kinds of water polo fouls: ordinary and major. Ordinary fouls account for approximately 90 percent, while exclusions and penalties (known as major fouls) make up the rest.

Ordinary fouls include:

- ~ grabbing the ball with two hands
- ~ taking the ball under water when tackled
- ~ impeding an opponent who is not holding the ball
- ~ holding or pushing a player underwater when they do not have the ball
- ~ pushing off of an opponent
- ~ stalling (failing to shoot or advance the ball within 30 seconds)
- ~ splashing

After an ordinary foul, play does not stop and only the clocks (shot and game) stop momentarily until the offended player takes his free throw. Most ordinary fouls are similar to basketball with one exception. If a player has possession of the ball, the defending player can wrestle away possession of the ball. A smart offensive player will actually drop the ball to draw the foul.

When the referee calls an ordinary foul, the offended team is awarded a free throw at the point of the foul. The offended team must put the ball in play without delay by passing it, swimming with it or shooting it (if outside of 5m). The player taking the free throw has approximately 3 seconds to put the ball into play. If the ball is not put in play within this amount of time, the team may be charged with delaying the game and the opposing team is awarded the ball.

MAJOR FOULS

Major fouls include:

- ~ kicking or striking a player
- ~ deliberate splashing in the face
- ~ an ordinary foul committed by the defense during dead time
- ~ interfering with a free throw
- ~ misconduct or disrespecting the referee
- ~ aggressively holding, sinking or pulling back an opponent not holding the ball
- ~ impeding or pushing off an opponent before a free throw, goal throw, corner throw or penalty throw is taken
- ~ committing an act of misconduct by using foul language or violent or persistent foul play

Major fouls are also called exclusions. They mainly occur when fouls are flagrant, brutal or when a defender impedes an offensive player without the ball. These are easy to spot since the referee whistles a few times and points at the guilty player who must swim to a penalty corner (much like a penalty box in hockey). An exclusion foul is punished by the award of a free throw to the opposing team and the exclusion of the player who committed the foul. The excluded player must swim to the re-entry area, nearest to the player's own goal line, without leaving the pool or interfering with play. The excluded player, or a substitution, shall be permitted to return after 20 seconds or either after a goal has been scored or after a change of possession. After a player commits 3 major fouls, they are fouled out of the game.

If the major foul is considered brutal in nature, which includes kicking or striking with malicious intent. The offending player is removed from the game without substitution, leaving the team man down for the remainder of the game

PENALTIES

A penalty is awarded when a goal scoring opportunity is denied by the defensive player fouling. A penalty foul is recorded against the player committing the foul. The player taking the penalty throw has a direct shot at the goal from the 5 meter line, with only the goalie to score past.

The award of a penalty most commonly occurs in the following situations:

- ~ when the goalkeeper or any player pulls down or pushes away the goal
- ~ when any player, except the goalkeeper, blocks the ball with both hands or with a clenched fist
- ~ when the goalkeeper takes the ball underwater
- ~ when an offensive player in control of the ball, is fouled from behind while moving towards the goal
- ~ when a defending player commits an act of brutality
- ~ when an excluded player intentionally interferes with play
- ~ when an excluded player or a substitute re-enters the pool early or illegally
- ~ when the coach of the team not in possession of the ball requests a time out