



## A Beginners Guide To *WATER POLO*



A helpful manual to guide spectators through  
the oldest team sport in the Olympics and the  
most *EXCITING* game on the Planet

2005 Premier League Finals

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*Content Based on the FINA Playing Rules for Water Polo*

**THE OBJECTIVE:** The objective of water polo is to have your team put the round 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 4 quarters each lasting 7 minutes of game time. Due to fouls, whistles, 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 1 player from each team will race to get the ball which is floating at mid pool. The winner of the sprint will control the ball to his team, which becomes the offense, who then go on to set up their offense in an 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 command.

**THE TEAMS:** Two teams compete in a match. One team will wear a dark colored cap (normally blue) while the other will wear a light colored cap (normally white). Each team can only have 7 players in the water at one time (6 field players and a 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 goal against shots and is the only player on his team allowed to use two hands.

**Perimeter Players:** Typically, 5 players align themselves in an offensive set whose 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:** 1 player that positions themselves in between the goal posts and around the 2M line. Most exclusion fouls are called at the hole set. The Hole Set player positions him or herself to take high percentage shots and is typically "wrestling" with a defender to achieve this position.

**THE REFEREE:** There are 2 Referees in a water polo match. Their all white wardrobe and whistle dangling from their neck helps set them apart from everyone else on the deck

**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 an Ordinary Foul.** If a defender commits an ordinary foul against a player on offense, the offensive player 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 into play. Furthermore, none of the defensive players can interfere with the offensive player when given a "free pass." "Ordinary Fouls" include:

**"Two-Hands":** Players cannot handle the ball with two hands. The goalie is the only exception.

**"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 of an opposing player who is not holding the ball.

**"Inside 2 Meter":** When an offensive player is inside the 2 meter (2M) line of the goal he is attacking, without the ball being inside the 2M. The player then cannot go any closer to the goal inside 2M 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 an ordinary foul is called.

**Common "Exclusion Fouls":** Exclusion Fouls (EF), or "kick-outs," have become a more common call. When a player commits an EF, they are to swim to their team's penalty box (located at the corner of the pool, out of the field of play, and directly in front of the team bench) without interfering with game play. The offensive team is awarded a new shot clock and a one-man advantage for 20 seconds. Common EF's include:

**"Interfering":** when a player interferes with the taking a free throw.

**"Splashing":** Intentionally splashing water in the face of an opposing player.

**"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 Conduct and Brutality":** Not being a good sport and striking with intent to injure.

**Offensive Set Ups:** There are two common offensive set ups used during a water polo game. There may be different offenses used, however, these two are the most common.

**The Umbrella:** The objective of this offense is to move the ball around the perimeter looking for an open shot on net or a clear pass into the Hole. When the ball reaches the hole, perimeter players typically drive toward the goal from the perimeter in an attempt to create a scoring chance and score a goal. The Hole player may also take shots on net or attempt to draw an EF from his defender. See Figure 1 below.

**The 4-2 Offense:** The objective is to move the ball around the perimeter players to wear down the defense and look for open shots. The "low post" players are primarily for rebound goals from perimeter shots. See Figure 2

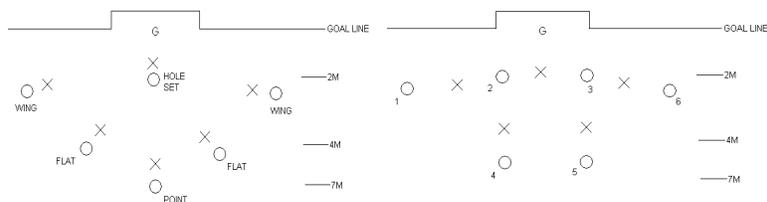


Figure 1: The Umbrella

Figure 2: The 4-2

**Other Notable Points of Interest:**

"The Direct Shot": If the foul is committed outside the seven meter (7M) line, the offensive player has the opportunity to take an immediate and direct shot on goal if they please. The shot has to be in taken with one continuous motion.

"The Advantage Rule": Rule WP7.3 reads "The referees shall refrain from declaring a foul if, in their opinion, such declaration would be an advantage to the offending player's team." Simply put, a foul won't be called (likely away from the play on the ball) if it takes a chance at a probable goal away from the offense.

"Penalty Shot": A Penalty Shot is awarded to a player when the shooter is fouled in order to prevent a probable goal. The Penalty Shot is taken from the 4M line and is a direct shot on goal, with only the goalie to defend. The defender who fouled is then issued a EF against them.

"3 Kick-outs": A player is only allowed 3 EF's in a game before they have fouled out of the game, not to return.