

WATER POLO BASICS

To help you understand the game and make you a better player/observer.

Figure 1. A diagram of the pool set-up for a game. The goal lines are either lane lines or gutters. If there are lane lines, you will see an area at the corner near the team bench that is RED. It is the exclusion area and the substitute area. The 2-meter, 5-meter and half-pool lines do NOT go across the pool. There are usually cones on either side of the pool to mark each distance. 2M is RED, 5M is YELLOW and 1/2 Court is White.

2 Meter Area. Figure 1. There are NO physical lines to designate this area – only a red cone or mark on the side of the pool. Usually the offensive 2M player will set up right outside of 2M and the umbrella will form around her. On OFFENSE, you are NOT allowed to go into the 2M area without the ball. If you do, it is a turnover – that means the ball goes to the other team. If you have the ball, you can go inside 2 meters. If you have the ball you can swim it right into the goal! Also, if a teammate with the ball is inside 2 meters, you can go inside 2M also. BUT if the ball goes back outside of 2 meters, you need to get back outside also as soon as possible. KNOW WHERE YOU ARE IN THE POOL!

5 Meter Area. Figure 1. The 5-meter “line” is marked with a YELLOW cone/mark on the side of the pool. This line is used to mark (1) where a player can shoot immediately after being fouled or (2) where a player goes to take a penalty throw.

- **Immediate Shot.** If an offensive player with the ball is fouled outside of 5 meters, she can take an immediate shot on goal. It must be done in one fluid motion. If the player bobs the ball, switches hands, drops the ball and then picks it up again, etc. she canNOT take the direct shot. NOTE: Sometimes you will get fouled outside the 5M, but the ball drifts inside. The ref will indicate to move the ball back out. Move it and shoot it! CAREFUL: If you bobble it, do NOT shoot it. The other team will get the ball.
- **Penalty Shot (5Meter).** The ref calls a 5M when a defensive player egregiously fouls the offensive player from behind when she is in a position to shoot and score. Usually called when the offensive player is directly in front of the cage and would have scored had the defender not committed the foul. The ref will signal this with a single whistle and hold up 5 fingers on one hand.

Half Pool/Tank. Figure 1. Another imaginary line. (1) The ball is dropped here at the start of each quarter. A player from each team sprints to and tries to get control of the ball. You’ll also see a “trailer”, whose job is to get the ball when the sprinter passes it back after winning possession. (2) After a goal is scored, the two teams line up here to resume play. (3) The goalie is not allowed to go beyond or touch the ball beyond half-tank.

Re-Entry/Kickout/Substitute Area. Figure 1. If a player is called for an exclusion (kicked out), she must immediately swim to the area designated for her team. The player canNOT leave that area until one of the following things happen: (1) 20 seconds have elapsed AND the ref/desk flags you in; (2) a goal is scored or (3) your team gets possession of the ball and the ref waves you in. (The coach can make a substitution during this time). Even if you have not gotten to the re-entry area when something happens that allows you to go back in, you are still required to exit the pool into this area before you can go back out to play (exception if goal is scored). You must get to this area immediately after getting kicked out so you can get back in.

- This is also the substitute area. During game play, a substitute cannot enter the water until the player for whom they are substituting has come to the surface of the water inside this area (unless there is a goal or timeout).
- Do NOT ask to be subbed during play because our team becomes short one player. Wait for the time-out or goal.
- Do NOT push off the wall or the bottom when re-entering the pool during the game. It is another kickout.

Figure 2, the Umbrella. This shows the most typical set-up for offense. Coaches/Players refer to it as the umbrella. The #1 position is always to the goalie's right. #5 is always to the goalie's left. The middle position in front of the goal is referred to as 2-Meter, Hole, Hole Set, Set. The #3 position is sometimes referred to as Point. On Defense, the numbering is the same; however, the middle position in front of the goal is called Hole D or 2MD.

Fouls. Water Polo is an extremely physical game and fouls are a big part of it. The idea is to control your opponent and not let them control you. If you are on DEFENSE when you hear the whistles, LOOK AT THE REF to find out what is happening. (If you're on offense – keep moving!) There are 3 types of fouls:

(1) Ordinary Fouls – If the player has the ball, you are allowed to try to take it from her, but when she lets go of the ball, you have to stop touching her. If you don't, it's an ordinary foul. The ref will blow ONE whistle. You need to back away about 3 feet from the player. Do NOT touch the ball or the player or you will get kicked out. Don't even give the ball to the opposing player. Whenever your team is called for a defensive foul, do NOT touch the ball. Let the opposing team get the ball while you get back to guarding a player! You can press your opponent again after (i) waiting at least 3 seconds or (ii) if she puts the ball in play by tossing it up in the air, bouncing it in the water, switching hands, passing or swimming with it!

(2) Offensive Fouls – The ref blows the whistle TWICE. The ball is immediately turned over to the other team. If you hear two whistles when you are on defense, look up at the ref and see where s/he's pointing. You may be able to take off and counter! Offensive fouls include (i) Ball under, (ii) two hands on the ball or (iii) pushing off of a player.

(3) Exclusion Fouls – Indicated by THREE whistles. Look at the ref. S/he will indicate the cap number of the player being kicked out. That player must go immediately to the exclusion area. Exclusion fouls include (i) Holding onto the person/impeding their forward motion, (ii) pushing a person under water, (iii) going over the top of them or (iv) pulling them/their arm away from the ball. You can also be kicked out for intentionally splashing an opponent, blocking the ball with two hands (unless you're the goalie) or striking, kicking, punching, elbowing another player (you'll also be kicked off the team if you do this intentionally). If you are kicked out three times, you are out of the game.

It bears repeating → Water Polo is a physical game; however, we do NOT play dirty, we do NOT retaliate. The ref never sees the first incident. They only see the retaliation, so don't do it. If an opposing player is playing dirty/mean, let me know.

Corner Throw. When a goalie blocks the ball and it goes outside of the field of play, the ref will blow a whistle, hold up 2 fingers and point to the 2M line. An offensive player must swim out to the edge of the 2M line in order to make the ball live.

Miscellany.

- **Shot Clocks.** Figure 1 shows where shot clocks are set up. Each team has 30 seconds to take a shot on goal. The clock stops every time there is a whistle. It starts when the balls goes back into play (or 3 seconds). If you shoot and miss, you get a new clock (30 more seconds). If the goalie hits it out, you get a new clock. If a defensive player gets kicked out, you get a new clock. However, if you hear a BUZZER, it means your team has run out of time and the other team gets the ball. If you hear the buzzer, do NOT throw the ball. Let go of it and go on defense.
- **Live Ball.** You canNOT shoot the ball unless it is “live.” If you draw a foul (if you get fouled), you MUST let a teammate touch the ball before you shoot (UNLESS you are outside of 5 meters). If you shoot and you are not live, the other team gets the ball.

Basic Vocabulary

Counter. If you are on defense and steal the ball, your team counters (goes the other way) as fast as they can to set up on offense trying to take advantage of a fast break. If you are on offense and the ball gets stolen you must counter/get back quickly to defend your goal.

Crash. Defensive move → When you make a sudden movement to the hole to help defend or steal the ball.

Drop. Defensive move → After you commit the foul, you move away from the person you fouled to help guard the hole set. There is also an “M-Drop” or “Gap Defense” that uses the drop.

Drive. Offensive move → An offensive player who swims through the umbrella toward the goal in order to get open for a shot or make something happen.

Post-Up. Offensive move → Similar to the drive; however, you stop and set up at the Post, becoming a second hole set.

Press. Defensive move → Guarding your opponent hard so she can't pass the ball, drive or shoot.

6-on-5. When the offensive team has an advantage because a defensive player has been excluded from play. (Also known as man-down for defensive players and Man-Up for offensive players). “We’re up!”

Set It. Means the hole set (2M) is ready to receive the ball so get it to her with a WET (on-the-water) pass.