What is water polo?

Water Polo is a game of strength, quickness and endurance. Ball handling skills and exceptional swimming ability are especially important with the mobile, fast paced style of game played.

The Game

- The playing area is 25 X 20 yards, with a minimum of 7 feet depth.
- Each team is allowed 14 players, with seven (a goalkeeper and six field players) participating at any one time. Players tread water the entire game and cannot touch the bottom or sides of the pool, and except for the goalkeeper, may handle the ball with only one hand.
- The game is played in four quarters, each quarter being six minutes in length with two-minute intervals between quarters (28 minutes of stopped time.) Substitutions are permitted only after a goal is scored, between periods, at time-out (3 per team per game), or for an ejected player. A tie leads to two, 3 minute overtimes, and if still tied, then sudden-death.
- Physical contact is the rule rather than the exception, as the players maneuver for position in front of the goal. The referee indicates fouls by blowing a whistle and pointing with his arm in the direction of advance for the offended team. Unlike most sports that stop on a whistle, the whistle initiates action in water polo.
- A goal (1 point) is scored when the ball is thrown or pushed completely past the face of the cage.

Time Clocks

As in basketball, two clocks are used to time a water polo game. One indicates the time remaining in the quarter, and the other, called the shot clock or 30 second clock, indicates how much time remains for the offensive team to shoot the ball (the offense is allowed thirty seconds to generate a shot).

Starting

Each quarter is started with the teams lined up on the opposite goal lines. On a signal (whistle blast) from the referee, the teams sprint toward center pool for the ball. The team gaining possession of the ball advances it toward its offensive end of the pool by swimming, dribbling, or passing the ball.
Fouls
There are two types of fouls in water polo. Ordinary fouls account for approximately 90% of the whistles during the games, and personal faults (or major fouls) the remaining 10%. Major fouls include exclusion and penalty fouls.

Ordinary fouls include:
- touching the ball with two hands;
- taking the ball under the water when tackled;
- impeding an opponent who is not holding the ball;
- pushing off of an opponent, and,
- stalling (failing to shoot or advanced the ball within 35 seconds.)

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 or swimming with it.

Exclusion Fouls include:
- kicking or striking;
- deliberately splashing in the face;
- an ordinary foul committed by the defense during dead ball;
- interfering with a free throw;
- misconduct or disrespect to the referee;
- holding, sinking, or pulling back a player not holding the ball.

Exclusion fouls may result in a player being ejected for 20 seconds. The ejected player (or his substitute) may not return until the 20 second exclusion time expires, a goal is scored, or a change of possession takes place, whichever time frame is shortest. A player receiving 3 major fouls is removed from the game with substitution.

5-meter Shot:
Penalty fouls are committed within the five-meter area where a goal probably would have resulted. When an offensive player is fouled while in control of the ball and facing the goal while inside the five-meter line is awarded a “penalty throw”. A penalty foul is recorded against the player committing the foul. The player taking the penalty throw has a free shot at the goal from the five-meter line, with only the goalie defending.

The award of a penalty throw most commonly occurs in the following situations within the five-meter area:
- any player, including the goalkeeper, pulling down or pushing away the goal cage;
- any player, except the goalkeeper, playing the ball with two hands or a clenched fist;
- the goalkeeper, or any defensive player, taking the ball under water;
- Holding, sinking, or pulling back fouls when an offensive player is in control of the ball, and facing the goal.

Watch the ball, ignore the whistles, and enjoy the game!

“Welcome to State!”