

# THE BASIC RULES OF WATER POLO

By Don Cameron

Water polo is like a combination of SOCCER, BASKETBALL, ICE HOCKEY, AND RUGBY, played in a deep pool 30x20 metres for men and 25x20 metres for women.

Similar to **RUGBY** because:

In the 1800's Water Polo was called "Water Rugby" so although the goals are the same shape as (soccer) football, it has a tackling rule which is very similar to rugby.

## TACKLING

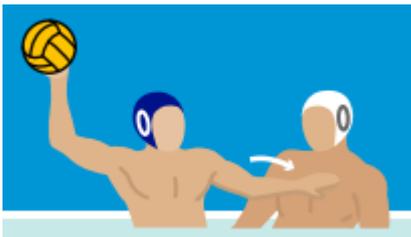
Like rugby, **a player can be tackled** if they are **holding the ball**. But if a defender continues to tackle a player who is **"not holding the ball"** or **have not yet picked up the ball**, that defender has committed a foul and mostly the the defender is sent out for the earlier of 20 seconds, a change of possession if a goal is scored. (An 'exclusion foul').



- This is a fair tackle – **the attacker is holding the ball.**

However, if an attacker has the ball in their hand and they deliberately release it when tackled and the defender is a little slow letting go of the attacker, the referee may call a **free throw for impeding** (which is basically leaning on someone).

Exclusions are supposed to be called on defenders who try to impede or hold an attacker trying to move/swim into another position (**like tackling off the ball in rugby**).



**Note:** Attackers are not allowed 'fend' like in rugby so a **push off** by an attacker is also an ordinary foul.



Finally, attackers who are holding the ball are penalised for **NOT RELEASING THE BALL WHEN TACKLED** if they **TAKE THE BALL UNDER WATER**. It doesn't matter if the defender pushes the attacker's hand under water – that is considered good defence

Similar to **ICE HOCKEY** because:

PLAYERS ARE SIN BINNED IF THEY ARE CAUGHT COMMITTING AN EXCLUSION FOUL (a player generally stays in the water if they commit a penalty throw foul).

**For exclusions**, players are sin binned for 20 seconds, until a goal is scored or the defending team regains possession.

Similar to **SOCCER FOOTBALL**, because:

PLAYERS SCORE THROUGH RECTANGULAR GOALS DEFENDED BY A GOAL KEEPER AT EACH END.

THERE ARE THREE TYPES OF FREE THROWS (kicks in soccer);

- a. **INDIRECT FREES**: No shot at goal is allowed from an exclusion foul or ordinary foul called **inside** the the penalty (6 metre) area.
- b. **DIRECT FREES**: players may shoot directly at goal after an exclusion or ordinary foul is called outside the penalty (6 metre) area.
- c. **PENALTY or 5 METRE THROWS**: for any foul inside the penalty area that stops a goal being scored. The shot at goal is taken with only the goal keeper to beat.

THERE IS OFF-SIDE.

HOWEVER, in water polo, the offside rule only applies when **attacking** players swim within **two meters** of the goal they are attacking (indicated by a **RED** marker). Attackers are **off-side** if they are **in front of the line of the ball** when they are 'inside the 2 metres'. Of course an attacker cannot be offside if **he** or **she** has the ball.

THERE ARE CORNER THROWS

If the goalie tips the ball over the base line outside the goals, the attacking team takes a corner throw from the side of the pool a metre from the **RED** two metre marking.

Similar to **BASKETBALL** because,:

THERE IS A SHOT CLOCK (except in some junior games). You have to shoot within **30seconds** after you get the ball or **20seconds** if you get the ball back after a shot.

THERE ARE TWO TYPES OF FOULS ;

- a. **Ordinary** fouls which are like **Violations** in basketball, and punish minor breaches of the rule  
and
- b. **Exclusion or Penalty** fouls which are like **Personal** fouls in basketball, and punish actions which are considered bad for the flow of the game.

If players get **3 Personal fouls** awarded against them, they must be replaced, and cannot re-enter the game (in basketball it is 5 fouls).

## Summary

So water polo is a CONTACT sport. However, excessive or aggressive play is discouraged and in some cases can result in players being excluded for the rest of the game. Enjoy!

For more information on the rules click here: [FINA Water Polo Rules](#)