HISTORY

Water polo is a combination of swimming, wrestling, basketball, soccer and baseball. It requires three basic fundamental skills: swimming, treading (egg-beater) and passing (ball skills).  
The game is [thought to have originated](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_water_polo) in Scotland in the late 19th century as a sort of "water rugby".  Water polo was first played in the United States in 1888. It featured the old rugby style of play which looked like American football in the water. “American style” water polo became very popular and by the late 1890’s was played in such places as Madison Square Garden and Boston’s Mechanics Hall, attracting 14,000 spectators to the big national championship games.

NAMING THE GAME

In the early days, the players rode on floating barrels that resembled mock horses, and swung at the ball with mallet-like sticks. This made it similar to equestrian polo, hence its name. In the United States it was termed softball water polo due to the use of an unfilled bladder as a ball.

Positions and Game play

Water polo is a competitive team sport played in the water between two teams. The game consists of four quarters, usually of eight minutes, in which the two teams attempt to score goals and throw the ball into their opponent's goal. The team with the most goals at the end of the game wins the match.

Each team made up of six field players and one goalkeeper. Except for the goalkeeper, players participate in both offensive and defensive roles. Unlike most common team sports, there is little positional play; field players will often fill several positions throughout the game as situations demand. These positions usually consist of a center forward, a center back, the two wing players and the two drivers. Players who are skilled in all positions of offense or defense are called utility players. Water polo is typically played in an all-deep pool seven feet deep.

FOULS

Fouls are critical to the strategy and flow of a water polo game.  They occur frequently during offensive possessions.  Unlike most sports, defensive fouls are not always bad.  Sometimes they are part of the defense strategy.  Offensive players will sometimes attempt to “draw” a foul in order earn a free pass.  It is not uncommon for *more* offensive motion immediately after a foul has been called.

* One whistle: minor/ordinary foul (offense keeps the ball)
* Two whistles: offensive foul (defense gets the ball)
* Three whistles: major/personal foul (offense keeps the ball while defender sits in penalty box for 20 seconds)

Examples of types of Fouls

* Two hands (touching the ball with two hands)
* Ball under (taking the ball under water when pressured)
* Offensive foul (pushing off or head-butting a defender when holding the ball)
* Off the bottom (standing on the bottom of the pool)
* Delay of game (delaying too long before taking a free throw)

EQUIPMENT NEEDED

**Ball**: A [water polo ball](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Water_polo_ball) is constructed of waterproof material to allow it to float on the water. The cover is textured to give players additional grip. The size of the ball is different for men's, women's and junior games.

**Caps**: A [water polo cap](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Water_polo_cap) is used to protect the players' heads and ears, and to make them identifiable from afar. Home team field players wear numbered dark-colored caps; visiting team field players wear numbered white caps. Both starting goalkeepers wear red caps.

**Goals**: Two goals are needed in order to play water polo. These can either be put on the side of the pool, or in the pool using floaters.

**Mouth guard**: A [mouth guard](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mouthguard) is not mandatory in most tournaments, but is recommended.

[**Swimwear**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Competitive_swimwear): Male water polo players wear either [swim briefs](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swim_briefs) or jammers (thigh-length trunks). Female players must wear a [one-piece swimsuit](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/One-piece_swimsuit). Suit-grabbing fouls are common, so players often wear tight-fitting suits, and may layer on several suits at a time for additional security.

OLYMPIC HISTORY

Water polo made its Olympic debut at the Paris Games in 1900 – but was not included until 1904. Women were not allowed to compete at the Olympics until the 2000 Games in Sydney, where Australia won the gold medal, the United States took the silver, and the bronze went to Russia. The first Water Polo World Cup for women was held by FINA (the sport’s governing body) in 1979, and the first World Championships took place in 1986.  
Twenty teams (twelve for men and eight for women) competed in the 2016 Olympic games. Games that ended in ties in elimination rounds were decided by shootouts, as overtime has been abolished since 2013. For the men, Serbia won the gold medal by defeating Croatia in the final. Bronze was won by Italy after beating Montenegro. For the women, The United States won the gold medal by defeating Italy in the final. Russian captured bronze after a win against Hungary.  
  
Fun Facts  
Musician Sean Paul is a former member of Jamaica’s national water polo team.  
  
Prince William of England was the captain of his collegiate water polo team at St Andrew’s University, Scotland.

In a 1972 Olympic water polo match between Hungary and Italy, eight Hungarian players were suspended in 38 seconds.

The Goal Keeper is the only player in the team of 7 who can hold the ball with both hands when he is within the five-meter area in front of the goal post.

A Water Polo ball can speed up to 60 miles per hour.

Water polo players swim up to one and a half miles during the course of a water polo game.

In 2016 Ashleigh Johnson was the first black woman to play on the U.S. Olympic water polo team. She plays goalie and is 6-foot-1. She led her high school to three straight Florida state championships, and also excelled on the swim team, winning the 50-meter freestyle state championship her sophomore year.