



# WATER POLO 101

As a spectator, have you ever wondered, “What does that whistle mean?” Or, “What do those cones represent?” Or, “What does that signal the referee just give?”

The following information will help you achieve water polo spectator “**GOLD METAL**” status.

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## WHAT WILL I SEE AND HEAR AT A WATER POLO GAME?

- Lots of fast action, swimming, treading water or eggbeater, physical contact between players, a really cool yellow ball, coaches directing the action, referees blowing their whistles a lot, and both teams trying to outscore each other.

## TELL ME ABOUT PLAYERS AND THE POOL MARKINGS

- 6 field players and one goalie per team in the water at the same time. A 2 meter line, a 5 meter line, and a half court line.
- Substitute players and coaches sit on a team bench on the deck.
- The exclusion area is located in the water in front of the player bench.

## TABLE WORKERS

- These folks operate the game clock, the 30 second shot clock, keep a recorded summary of the game, and there is an exclusion secretary.
- These are usually volunteers.
- **FUN TIP:** Work the table sometime because it will help you understand more about the game of water polo.

## TELL ME ABOUT THE REFEREES

- They are really cool humans! They have taken a rules test and gone to clinics to improve their skills.
- Referees are calling the game to protect players against injury and to maintain the integrity of the game.
- They use their whistles to communicate to players and also use hand signals pointing the direction the ball is going.
- There are 2 referees on each game.
- If possible they stand on opposite sides of the pool.
- During play, one is the front court referee and one watches the back court.
- Referees strive to be consistent in their calls for the entire game and tournament.
- Referees are evaluated by the head ref.

## WHISTLE WORK

- One whistle means the team who has the ball now gets a free pass. NO DEFENSE on this free pass!
- Two whistles means the defense now gets the ball (turnover).
- Many whistles means something big just happened, usually a defensive player has been excluded for 20 seconds.

## FOULS? LIKE THE NBA?

- No, actually in water polo a whistle means GO! Who is going? Everyone! Offense tries to score right after a foul especially at the center forward position.
- So, you will see a lot of movement by players who are trying to create because of the whistle that was blown.
- **Three Categories of Fouls:**
  - **Ordinary:** or minor fouls like reaching for the ball over an opponent who is not holding the ball and who is facing away from the goal.
  - **Exclusion:** a defensive player who holds, sinks, or pulls back an offensive player who has offensive advantage. This happens a lot at the 2 meter defensive position.
  - **Penalty:** any foul that prevents a probable goal.
- **Why Didn't the Ref Call the Foul I Saw?**
  - The magical word is ADVANTAGE.
  - The referee should not declare an ordinary foul if there still is a possibility to play the ball. If the foul will reward the defense, that foul should NOT be called.
  - Advantage also applies to potential passes and possible shooters.
  - Referees are looking at position, possession and probable goal.

*Now, does anyone want to referee this game?*

*Boy these referees sure do have a lot to evaluate....hmmmm.*

## BALL UNDER?

- The ball CAN go underwater!
- Here is the rule: to take the whole ball underwater when tackled.
- A player can be forced to take the ball under or they can take it under water on their own and if a defender touches the arm that is holding the ball.....
- The referee will blow the whistle and the ball is awarded to the defense. (Turnover).

## SCORING IN WATER POLO

- The ENTIRE ball must pass over the goal line in order for a goal to be scored.
- The referee in the "front court" will usually be standing on or near the goal line as the shot is taken to make sure the entire ball has passed over the goal line.
- In big games, sometimes there are goal judges to help with this call.

## FREE THROWS

- A player has time to get balanced and look for a player to pass to when awarded a free throw.
- Any defense on the free throw results in an exclusion of the defensive player.
- A free throw awarded outside of 5 meters can be shot on goal.

### GOALIES

- They wear a different color cap than field players.
- They have special privileges:
- They can touch the ball with two hands.
- They cannot advance beyond the half line.

### WHAT DOES GETTING ROLLED MEAN?

- A player has been removed for the rest of the game.
- What can a player get rolled for?
  - **Misconduct:** use of obscene language or gestures. Refuse obedience or show disrespect for a referee.
  - **Overaggressive fouling.** Brutality and fighting. You will see the referee add to the exclusion motion rolling of the fists over each other letting the player, coach and table know it is a game exclusion.

### CAN I ASK THE REF A QUESTION?

- Yes, please do!
- After the game is over and the referee has signed the score sheet, they are ready to answer any questions.
- It is best to talk with them in the "office" and use a conversational tone.

### WHAT ELSE CAN I DO TO GET INVOLVED?

- Cheer for your kid and team!
- Attend clinics and ask questions.
- Have fun.
- Work the table!
- Thank a referee at the end of a game.
- Thank the table workers.



**Congratulations!**  
**You have achieved  
gold medal status!**