



Water Polo Canada 2021 Domestic Programs Update

Introduction

(March 8, 2021 – Ottawa, ON) – In October 2020, Water Polo Canada (WPC) announced that as a result of the ongoing COVID-19 Pandemic, a series of Open National Championships would be held in 2021 in lieu of the traditional National Championship League (NCL) format. The proposed dates for these Open National Championships were between May and June 2021. As the competition window approaches, WPC would like to provide an update on these events, as well as on the overall domestic program calendar.

The feasibility of hosting these events on their targeted dates is dependent on the degree to which the COVID-19 pandemic is under control. The past weeks and months have presented both positives and negatives as it relates to the pandemic. The development and ongoing distribution of a COVID-19 vaccine represents a huge step forward; however, the case level in Canada is significantly higher than of this past summer and fall. It is not clear when the situation will improve to a point where it is realistic to attempt to responsibly hold national sport competitions.

WPC remains committed to hosting competitions for its athletes in 2021, with the caveat that it must be possible to hold these events safely and responsibly. Unfortunately, at this time it is not possible to forecast if and when events will be able to be held due to the uncertainties inherent to the COVID-19 pandemic. Understanding this constraint, WPC has developed a domestic programs plan for 2021 that is based on flexibility. The general principle is to maintain several different windows that domestic events can be played in. If the COVID-19 pandemic necessitates that events cannot be held during a certain time frame, the events will be pushed to the next window in the calendar.

Regional Programming

During this process, WPC will prioritize club-level events over interprovincial or age-group national teams (AGNT). Ideally, the 2021 calendar will include each of these event types, but the realities of the situation may not allow this to occur. Focusing on the clubs is crucial to maintaining the integrity of our sport across Canada. Supporting club-level participation and providing platforms that encourage registration are key to driving the fiscal stimulus necessary for the clubs to return to normal operations.

WPC recognizes that it is highly likely that regional events will be able to occur before any national events and that both WPC and the PSOs need to utilize local programming to support the clubs while national events remain unfeasible. WPC is encouraging and supporting the PSOs as they strive to implement a regional competition framework that operates within their respective restrictions. WPC is also committed to leveraging the Regional Development Centres (RDCs) to provide programming while national events are not possible for our high performance athletes.



National Programming

WPC has developed the following chart to lay out several different possibilities for the 2021 calendar, depending on how the pandemic progresses. It's important to note that chart represents a rough example of how the domestic programming program could proceed. The exact determinations of which events might be held during which windows will be dependent on how exactly the COVID-19 situation evolves in the coming months. For example, scenario 2 in the chart does not list any Provincial or AGNT programs as occurring, but depending on how the situation develops, it may still be possible to hold some of those types of events in scenario 2. While WPC is prioritizing club-level events, it is also understood that if the situation progresses to a point where national level events are possible, it bodes well for trying to incorporate other events into the calendar.

	Scenario 1	Scenario 2	Scenario 3	Scenario 4
May – Jul	NCL Open National Championships (15U, 17U, 19U, Senior)*	No events due to pandemic	No events due to pandemic	No events due to pandemic
Jul-Sep	AGNT National Programs & Provincial Competition	NCL Open National Championships (15U, 17U, 19U, Senior)*	No events due to pandemic	No events due to pandemic
Oct - Dec	2021-2022 NCL Season Start	2021-2022 NCL Season Start	NCL Open National Championships (15U, 17U, 19U, Senior)*	No events due to pandemic
Jan 2022	2021-2022 NCL (Continued)	2021-2022 NCL (Continued)	2021-2022 NCL Season Start	NCL Open National Championships (15U, 17U, 19U, Senior)*

*Note – The format for any Open National Championship events will be dependent on a number of factors. For example, it is possible that Eastern & Western Championship may be held in lieu of (or in concert with) a countrywide National Championship due to pandemic restrictions and/or number of teams wishing to participate.



Decision Process

The decision deadline for each scenario is approximately 8-10 weeks in advance of the events. This timeline is based on both the time required for WPC to complete the logistical requirements for hosting the events, and the general consensus from the clubs that there should be a 6-8-week gap from athletes getting back in the pool to competing at a national competition. Given that timeline, it must be noted that it is extremely unlikely that Scenario 1 will be implemented. The decision deadline is rapidly approaching for this scenario and the national environment is not where it needs to be for these events to go ahead during the scenario 1 timeframe.

International Competitions and AGNT

As noted above, WPC is prioritizing club competitions over all else at this time. AGNT and International events have their own additional challenges and vulnerabilities linked to the pandemic that must be considered, especially related to the health and safety of our athletes. Our priority for the summer of 2021 is maintaining the integrity of the sport throughout Canada and focusing on building regional competition and infrastructure that will benefit the water polo community after the pandemic. WPC will revise and revisit the AGNT plan to continually look for opportunities. If for the foreseeable future, national and international programming remains unfeasible, WPC will look to utilize the RDC programs to create a domestic high-performance competition in place of AGNT programs.

Conclusion

WPC will continue to provide updates on the domestic programming calendar as the situation develops over the coming months. The above document was prepared by Neil Trousdale, League and Events Manager, and Andrew Muir, Pathway Manager through consultation with the PSO representatives sitting on the High Performance Development Working Group and review by High Performance Director Justin Oliveira and WPC Executive Director Martin Goulet.