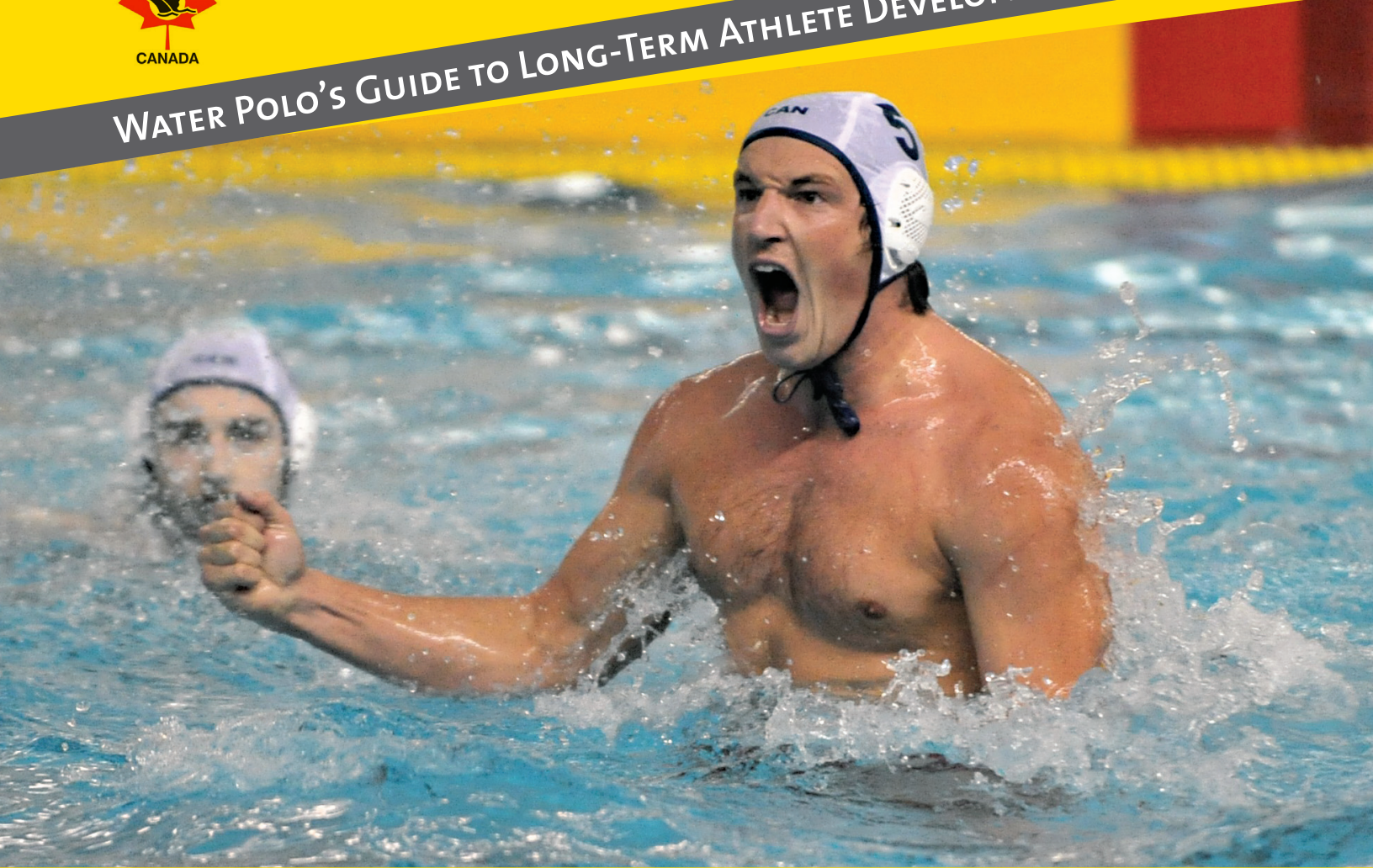


THE PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE AND AN ACTIVE LIFESTYLE



WATER POLO'S GUIDE TO LONG-TERM ATHLETE DEVELOPMENT



YELLOW
Physical
Literacy

RED
Active
for Life

ORANGE
Competitive
for Life

BLUE
Excellence

FUNdamentals



Approximate age
M 6-9 | **F** 6-8

I Love
Water Polo
mixed gender

The ILWP
Instructor

N/A

Technical Foundations



Approximate age
M 9-12 | **F** 8-11

Seasonal-based
regional
competitions
and festivals
Gender specific
recommended

The Community
Club Coach

Regional Referee

Early Competitive Foundations



Approximate age
M 12-14 | **F** 11-13
M 14-16 | **F** 13-15

Regional/
Provincial
club water
polo
gender
specific

The
Competitive
Coach

Regional
Referee

Provincial
Referee

Train to Compete



Approximate age
M 16-19~ | **F** 15-18~

National Club
Championships;
Age Group
National Team
Programs

The
Professional
Coach

Provincial,
National &
UANA Referee

Train to Perform



Approximate age
M 19-25~ | **F** 18-23~

Semi-Pro Canadian
League; European
Professional
Leagues;
Varsity programs;
Youth/Junior
National Team

Competition -
Development
Advanced;
NCI Diplomas

National,
UANA &
FINA Referee

Living to Win



Approximate age
M 25+ | **F** 23+

Senior National
Team; World
Championships
& Olympic Games

Competition -
High Performance;
NCI Diplomas

FINA Referee

Competitive/ Active for Life



Enter at any age

Competitive
(gender specific):
Club; University club
programs; Masters
Active (mixed or
gender specific) : Club,
High School, Masters

The Competitive
Coach

Community
Sport Ongoing
Participation

Provincial Referee
Regional Referee

COMPETITIONS

Long-Term Athlete
Development

COACHES



OFFICIALS



Water Polo for everyone

Very few sports combine teamwork and strategy with the level of skill, speed and endurance high performance water polo players have to display in the pool. However, water polo is also a fun and accessible activity that can be enjoyed by a wide variety of people, regardless of their fitness and skill level.

Not all water polo participants can become National Team athletes and coaches or FINA level referees. Moreover, not all participants want to invest the significant hours and funds it takes to achieve this status. Our water polo system allows athletes multiple programming opportunities to seek their individual goals, whether it is a National Team career, competitive water polo or simply using water polo as a fun and healthy activity.

What is Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD)?

LTAD combines sports science with the art of coaching to propose a progression where water polo players can develop skills and enjoy the sport through training and competition that are well adapted to their personal goals and to the different stages in development (physical, emotional, mental and cognitive maturation) rather than chronological age. The philosophies and ideologies behind LTAD are athlete-centered, coach-driven, and administration, sport science and sponsor-supported¹.

Using the principles of LTAD to improve Water Polo in Canada

For water polo in Canada to grow and thrive, the training and competition structure, coaching, officiating, system alignment, cooperation and succession planning must be highly effective and extremely efficient. A sustainable domestic infrastructure (grassroots and high performance) will foster success at the World Championships and Olympic Games while reaching the objectives of a healthier Canada. LTAD is the mechanism that drives change to move water polo in Canada into the 21st century and beyond.

¹-Adapted from Balyi I, Cardinal C, Higgs C, Norris S and Way R, *Long-Term Athlete Development, Canadian Sport for Life, 2005, p.7. Complete document can be found at www.ltad.ca*



Benefits of LTAD approach

FOR PARENTS AND PLAYERS

- Creates understanding of what is an appropriate water polo program based on developmental rather than chronological age
- Facilitates skill acquisition and fun through adapted training and competition formats
- Ensures access to more knowledgeable coaches and officials
- Presents clear pathway to high performance

FOR COACHES AND CLUBS

- Provides up-to date information and education regarding safe and effective coaching methods
- Offers detailed guidelines regarding the running of games, competition level and frequency, etc.
- Suggests individualized training plans based on athletes' developmental age
- Delivers coach-driven programs that can provide the best opportunities for all

FOR OFFICIALS

- Clarifies the purpose of competition(s)
- Ensures their support to the competitive experience
- Proposes age-appropriate rule application

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Stage by Stage Recommendations²

The following pages presents some of the key recommendations provided by Water Polo Canada through its Competition Review Working Group and based on the WPC LTAD overview document. Both reports are available online in their full versions along with several other tools and resources.

For additional information and resources regarding each stage of development, please visit the LTAD homepage on WWW.WATERPOLO.CA

²- These recommendations highlights are adapted from Water Polo Canada's LTAD Competition Review document available at www.waterpolo.ca



Stage by Stage Recommendations

FUNDAMENTALS (6-9 BOYS; 6-8 GIRLS)

AGE GROUP: 8 AND UNDER, MIXED OR GENDER-SPECIFIC

PRIMARY OBJECTIVE: LEARN ALL FUNDAMENTAL MOVEMENT SKILLS AND BUILD OVERALL MOTOR SKILLS

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR TRAINING AND COMPETITION:

- FUN unstructured games
- Modified sport
- Equal playing time
- All positions and All inclusive
- Adults: setup and step back
- Seasonal programming

INFORMAL AND UNSTRUCTURED GAME:

POOL SIZES						
GAME FORMAT	TEAM SIZE	GAME DURATION	BALL SIZE (MIKASA OR EQUIVALENT)	LENGTH	WIDTH	³ GOAL SIZES
3 on 3 + goalie	Min 5; Max 8	42 x 10 min	Mikasa Size 1	10-12m	8-10m	L: 2m H: 0.9m from water
4 on 4 + goalie	Min 6; Max 10			13-15m	10-12m	

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TRAINING AND COMPETITION CONSIDERATIONS:

- Refer to modified rules table on page 14.
- Clubs should offer distinct seasons (fall, winter, spring and summer) allowing for participants to register for only those they would like to.
- Athletes at this stage of development should focus on FUN and unstructured play in shallow water.
- No official sanctioned competitions should be offered. Modified games should be played during each practice. Practices should last no longer than 60 minutes in length.
- Programs should have 2-3 practices per week allowing for participation in other physical activities, which is to be encouraged on a daily basis.

3- Goals can be made up of any material. They can be floating in the water or on the side of the pool. Please see the NCCP Community Club Coach Toolbox for guidelines.

4- Two halves of 10 minutes of running time.

Stage by Stage Recommendations



TECHNICAL FOUNDATIONS (9-12 BOYS; 8-11 GIRLS)

AGE GROUP: 10 AND UNDER AND 12 AND UNDER, GENDER-SPECIFIC

PRIMARY OBJECTIVE: LEARN OVERALL SPORTS SKILLS

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR TRAINING AND COMPETITION:

- More fun
- Golden years of skill learning
- Modified sport
- Equal playing time
- Adults: setup and step back
- Skill competitions
- Train more than compete
- Promote local competition

GAME STRUCTURE:

GAME FORMAT	TEAM SIZE	GAME DURATION	BALL SIZE (MIKASA OR EQUIVALENT)	POOL SIZES		⁵ GOAL SIZES
				LENGTH	WIDTH	
3 on 3 + goalie	Min 5; Max 8	⁶ 4 x 6 min	Mikasa Size 2	10-12m	8-10m	L: 2m H: 0.9m from water
4 on 4 + goalie	Min 6; Max 10			13-15m	10-12m	
5 on 5 + goalie	Min 7; Max 12			16-20m	13-15m	

TRAINING AND COMPETITION CONSIDERATIONS:

- Refer to modified rules table on page 14.
- Clubs and provincial sports organizations should offer four distinct seasons and structured league play.
- Athletes at this stage of development should focus on FUN, skill development and the introduction of structured competition.
- Clubs should offer practices 3 times per week ranging from 60-90 minutes in length plus 30 minutes of dry land training each practice that promotes physical literacy. Athletes should be playing 2 games per day (maximum of 3) and a maximum of 5 games over a 48 hour period. There should be a minimum rest time of 30 minutes between games. Suggested annual training and competition calendar is available from WPC.
- Athletes should be encouraged to participate in other sports and activities – namely swimming, athletics, gymnastics and other team sports.

⁵- Goals can be made up of any material. They can be floating in the water or on the side of the pool. Please see the NCCP Community Club Coach Toolbox for guidelines.

⁶- Four quarters of 6 minutes running time with a 1 minute break between quarters.

Stage by Stage Recommendations

EARLY COMPETITIVE FOUNDATIONS (12-14 BOYS; 11-13 GIRLS)

AGE GROUP: 14 AND UNDER, GENDER-SPECIFIC

PRIMARY OBJECTIVE: CONSOLIDATE BASIC SKILLS, FURTHER DEVELOP AND CONSOLIDATE SPORT-SPECIFIC SKILLS.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR TRAINING AND COMPETITION:

- Build the engine
- Evolve to specialization
- Early stages modified sport
- Promote local competitions
- Monitor growth (physical, mental, cognitive and emotional)
- Match skills and abilities and allow for new participants
- Train more than compete
- Double periodization

GAME STRUCTURE:

GENDER	GAME FORMAT	TEAM SIZE	GAME DURATION	BALL SIZE (MIKASA OR EQUIVALENT)	POOL SIZES		GOAL SIZES
					LENGTH	WIDTH	
Male	6 on 6 + goalie	Min 11; Max 14	¾ x 7 min	Mikasa 6000 or 5500 series	23-25m	13-20m	FINA regulation (WP 2) L: 3m H: 0.9m from water
Female				Mikasa 6009 or 5509 series	23-25m	13-20m	

TRAINING AND COMPETITION CONSIDERATIONS:

- Refer to modified rules table on page 14.
- Athletes at this stage of development should focus on consolidating the basic and advanced water polo skills, fitness training (core strength and speed) and linking training to competition.
- Coaches must pay special attention to growth and development differences (especially in male athletes).
- It is recommended that athletes play 1 game per day, however, 2 games per day is permissible provided there is a minimum of 5 hours of rest between games.
- Athletes who have entered the Excellence stream¹⁰ should begin training in water-polo 12 months per year and 6 days per week with periodic rest of no more than 2 consecutive weeks.

COMPETITION FORMAT AND CALENDAR: Provincial and club-level competitions.

7- Length is measured from goal line to goal line.

8- It is recommended that teams carry two goaltenders – one of which is at the early stages of this pathway (~13 years old).

9- Four quarters of 7 minutes stop time with a 2 minute interval break between the 1st and 2nd quarter, 3 minute half-time and a 2 minute interval break between the 3rd and 4th quarter.

10- See Useful Definitions for stream of competition, training and competition explanations.

Stage by Stage Recommendations



LATE COMPETITIVE FOUNDATIONS (14-16 BOYS; 13-15 GIRLS)

AGE GROUP: 16 AND UNDER, GENDER-SPECIFIC

PRIMARY OBJECTIVE: CONSOLIDATE BASIC SKILLS, FURTHER DEVELOP AND CONSOLIDATE SPORT-SPECIFIC SKILLS.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR TRAINING AND COMPETITION:

- Build the engine
- Evolve to specialization
- Early stages modified sport
- Promote local competitions
- Monitor growth (physical, mental, cognitive and emotional)
- Match skills and abilities and allow for new participants
- Train more than compete
- Double periodization

GAME STRUCTURE:

GENDER	GAME FORMAT	¹² TEAM SIZE	GAME DURATION	BALL SIZE (MIKASA OR EQUIVALENT)	¹¹ POOL SIZES		GOAL SIZES
					LENGTH	WIDTH	
Male	6 on 6 + goalie	Min 11; Max 14	¹³ 4 x 7 min	Mikasa 6000 or 5500 series	23-25m	13-20m	Règles FINA (WP 2) L : 3 m H : 0,9 m de l'eau
Female				Mikasa 6009 or 5509 series	23-25m	13-20m	

TRAINING AND COMPETITION CONSIDERATIONS:

- Refer to modified rules table on page 14.
- Athletes at this stage of development should focus on consolidating the basic and advanced skills developed at previous stages, acquiring new advanced and position-specific skills, fitness training and linking training to competition.
- Coaches must pay special attention to growth and development differences (especially in male athletes).
- It is recommended that athletes play 1 game per day with a maximum of 5 games over a 4 day period.
- Athletes who have entered the Excellence stream¹⁰ should begin training in water-polo 12 months per year and 6 days per week with periodic rest of no more than 2 consecutive weeks.

COMPETITION FORMAT AND CALENDAR: National League for the athletes in the Excellence stream.

¹¹- Length is measured from goal line to goal line.

¹²- Four quarters of 8 minutes stop time with a 2 minute interval break between the 1st and 2nd quarter, 3 minute half-time and a 2 minute interval break between the 3rd and 4th quarter.

¹³- See Useful Definitions for stream of competition, training and competition explanations.

Stage by Stage Recommendations

**TRAIN TO COMPETE (16-19 TEENAGE BOYS;
15-18 TEENAGE GIRLS)**

AGE GROUP: 18 AND UNDER, GENDER-SPECIFIC

PRIMARY OBJECTIVE: OPTIMIZE THE ENGINE AND LEARN TO COMPETE

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR TRAINING AND COMPETITION:

- Position-specific skills
- Learn to compete under any circumstances
- Monitor growth – late maturers
- Match similar skills and abilities
- Train more than compete
- Promote Canadian competitions
- Double periodization
- Promotion of the student athlete in Canada

GAME STRUCTURE:

GENDER	GAME FORMAT	¹⁵ TEAM SIZE	GAME DURATION	BALL SIZE (MIKASA OR EQUIVALENT)	¹⁴ POOL SIZES		GOAL SIZES
					LENGTH	WIDTH	
Male	6 on 6 + goalie	Min 11; Max 14	¹⁶ 4 x 9 min	Mikasa 6000 or 5500 series	30m	20m	Règles de la FINA (WP 2)
Female				Mikasa 6009 or 5509 series	25m	20m	L : 3m h : 0,9 m de l'eau

TRAINING AND COMPETITION CONSIDERATIONS:

- Refer to modified rules table on page 14.
- Athletes at this stage of development should focus on consolidating and refining advanced and position specific water polo skills, water polo and position specific physical conditioning and training for specific competitions.
- It is recommended that athletes play 1 game per day with a minimum of 10 hours of rest between games. Teams should provide game-day training at least 6 hours prior to game.
- Athletes should be training in water-polo 12 months per year and 6 days per week with periodic rest of no more than 2 consecutive weeks.

COMPETITION FORMAT AND CALENDAR: 18 and under National League for athletes in Excellence stream.¹⁷ Detailed information in the full Competition Review Document.

¹⁴- Length is measured from goal line to goal line.

¹⁵- It is recommended that teams carry two goaltenders.

¹⁶- Four quarters of 9 minutes stop time with a 2 minute interval break between the 1st and 2nd quarter, 3 minute half-time and a 2 minute interval break between the 3rd and 4th quarter.

¹⁷- See Useful Definitions for stream of competition, training and competition explanations

Stage by Stage Recommendations



TRAIN TO PERFORM (19-25 MEN; 18-23 WOMEN)

AGE GROUP: SENIOR SEMI-PROFESSIONAL LEAGUE (TARGETING 18 AND OLDER)

PRIMARY OBJECTIVE: OWN THE PODIUM

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR TRAINING AND COMPETITION:

- Maximize the engine and position-specific skills
- Team results supersede individual development
- Train more than compete
- Double periodization
- Athletes benefit by training/playing with more athletes
- Promotion of the student athlete in Canada

GAME STRUCTURE:

GENDER	GAME FORMAT	¹⁸ TEAM SIZE	GAME DURATION	BALL SIZE (MIKASA OR EQUIVALENT)	¹⁷ POOL SIZES		GOAL SIZES
					LENGTH	WIDTH	
Male	6 on 6 + goalie	Max 13	¹⁹ 4 x 8 min	Mikasa 6000 series	30m	20m	Règles FINA (WP 2) L : 3 m H : 0,9 m de l'eau
Female				Mikasa 6009 series	25m	20m	

TRAINING AND COMPETITION CONSIDERATIONS:

- Athletes at this stage of development should focus on refining and perfecting all water polo technical and tactical skills, water polo and position-specific physical conditioning and the focus should move from the individual to team performance.
- Athletes play 1 game per day with a minimum of 12 hours of rest between games. Teams should provide game-day training at least 6 hours prior to game.
- Athletes should be training in water-polo 12 months per year and 6 days per week with periodic rest of no more than 2 consecutive weeks.

COMPETITION STRUCTURE AND CALENDAR: International calendar and national semi-professional league (in development). Detailed information in the full Competition Review Document.

¹⁷⁻ Length is measured from goal line to goal line.

¹⁸⁻ Four quarters of 8 minutes stop time with a 2 minute interval break between the 1st and 2nd quarter, 5 minute half-time and a 2 minute interval break between the 3rd and 4th quarter.

¹⁹⁻ See Useful Definitions for training and competition.

Stage by Stage Recommendations

COMPETITIVE FOR LIFE (13 AND OLDER)

AGE GROUP: AGE GROUPS MAY VARY FROM PROVINCE TO PROVINCE – 14 AND UNDER; 16 AND UNDER; 18 AND UNDER; SENIOR; UNIVERSITY; MASTERS

PRIMARY GOAL: TO CREATE COMPETITIVE WATER POLO OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL AGES

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR TRAINING AND COMPETITION:

- Accommodating range of abilities
- Match similar skills and abilities
- Gender-specific teams
- Modified sport
- Adapt training-to-competition ratio to fit needs
- Seasonal programming

GAME STRUCTURE:

GENDER	GAME FORMAT	¹² TEAM SIZE	GAME DURATION	BALL SIZE (MIKASA OR EQUIVALENT)	¹⁸ POOL SIZES		GOAL SIZES
					LENGTH	WIDTH	
Male	6 on 6 + goalie	Min 11; Max 15	¹⁹ 4 x 7 min	Mikasa 6000 or 5500 series	23-25m	13-20m	Règles FINA (WP 2) L : 3 m h : 0,9 m de l'eau
Female				Mikasa 6009 or 5509 series			

- Team size and the number of athletes in the water are dependent upon the size of the field of play. The smaller (length x width) the field, the smaller the number of players in the water and on the bench. The maximum, regardless of field size, should be 6-on-6.

TRAINING AND COMPETITION CONSIDERATIONS:



- Refer to modified rules table on page 14.
- Clubs and Provincial Sport Organizations should create seasonal programs as water polo may not be the priority for the athletes in this stream. However, programs should align with the Excellence stream as closely as possible so new athletes can still enter the sport and be provided with adequate training and competition to make the transition into Excellence stream.
- It is recommended that these athletes play a maximum of 2 games per day with a minimum of 4 hours of rest between games and a maximum of 5 games over a 72 hour period.

COMPETITION STRUCTURE AND CALENDAR: Calendars for each age group within this stream is determined by Provincial Sport Organizations however it are critical that each provincial calendar aligns with the national calendar.

20- Any and all pools that is available. Maximum size of the field of play should be 25m x 20m. The minimum depth should be all deep water.

21- Four quarters of 7 minutes stop time with a 2 minute interval break between each quarter.

22- See Useful Definitions for training and competition.

Stage by Stage Recommendations



ACTIVE FOR LIFE (16 AND OLDER)

AGE GROUP: AGE GROUPS MAY VARY FROM PROVINCE TO PROVINCE – 16 AND UNDER; 18 AND UNDER; MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL; MASTERS

PRIMARY GOAL: A SMOOTH TRANSITION FROM AN ATHLETE'S COMPETITIVE CAREER TO LIFELONG PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND PARTICIPATION IN WATER POLO

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR TRAINING AND COMPETITION:

- Enjoyment of sport through competition, training and social
- Accommodating range of abilities
- Match similar skills and abilities
- Allow for new participants
- Modified sport
- Seasonal programming

GAME STRUCTURE:

GAME FORMAT	TEAM SIZE	GAME DURATION	BALL SIZE (MIKASA OR EQUIVALENT)	²³ POOL SIZES		GOAL SIZES
				LENGTH	WIDTH	
3 on 3 + goalie	Min 4; Max 8	4 x 6 min et pause technique plus 2 minutes de repos entre les périodes	Hommes : Mikasa série 6000 ou 5500 Femmes : Mikasa série 6009 ou 5509	10-12m	8-10m	Règles de la FINA (WP 2) L : 3 m h : 0,9 m de l'eau
4 on 4 + goalie	Min 5; Max 10			13-15m	10-12m	
5 on 5 + goalie	Min 6; Max 12			16-20m	13-15m	
6 on 6 + goalie	Min 7; Max 15			18-25m	13-20m	

- The field of play should be adapted to match skills and abilities (i.e. new entrants to the sport could play 1/2 shallow, 1/2 deep water).
- The field of play, the number of athletes in the water and the length of the game should be modified to encourage new teams and equal opportunity sport (i.e. increase the number of female athletes and minority groups).

TRAINING AND COMPETITION CONSIDERATIONS:

- Refer to modified rules table on page 14. For younger ages, use same modified rules as Early Competitive Foundations.
- Clubs and Provincial Sport Organization should create seasonal programs as water polo is not the priority in this stream. The focus needs to be on fun, social and meaningful training (i.e. exercise) and competition (i.e. match similar skills and abilities).

²³- Any and all pools that is available. Maximum size of the field of play should be 25m x 20m.

Useful definitions

LONG-TERM ATHLETE DEVELOPMENT (LTAD):

is a player and participant development model from playground to podium. It is a philosophy for modifying the sport culture in Canada. LTAD affects governance at all levels, coaching, officiating and competition. LTAD is an athlete-centered approach, coach driven and administratively supported.

NATIONAL CLUB CHAMPIONSHIPS (NCC):

Is the National event for each age group identified by WPC and organized by Water Polo Canada (WPC) and the host club – based on a rotating bid process. The current NCC for each age group is one weekend, however, the proposed changes are for an NCC League over an entire program year with the National Final occurring over one weekend.

STREAM OF COMPETITION:

This term is used to describe the type of training and competition, time commitment, type of competitions, etc. associated with each stage of development. There are four streams identified throughout – Physical Literacy, Active for Life (A4L), Competitive for Life (C4L) and Excellence. Water Polo Canada is responsible for the Excellence stream competitions while A4L and C4L competitions are organized by clubs and provincial sports organizations.

STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT:

This term is used to define the developmental age and the needs of the athlete. Each stage of development has an approximate chronological age, however, the key is to understand training needs based on the physical, emotional, mental and cognitive maturation of the individual.

TRAINING AND COMPETITION:

Training is defined as the development of the athletic abilities in a practice environment or non-league environment: conditioning (physical and motor); technical (skills and individual tactics); tactical (non-league games, simulated games, exhibition games, half-court, etc.); and mental (cognitive and emotional). Competition is referred to as a major competition leading to the final outcome/peak within the program year.

WATER POLO CANADA (WPC):

Is the governing body for water polo in Canada delivering leadership in coach and referee education and athlete development, organizing National level competitions and representing Canada on the international stage.

Modified rules recommendations

	FUNDAMENTALS	TECHNICAL FOUNDATIONS	COMPETITIVE FOUNDATIONS	TRAIN TO COMPETE
Touch and go exclusions	●	●		
No shot clock	●	●		
Limit on goaltenders	●	●		
Technical timeout	●	●	●	
No corner throws	●	●	●	
No zone (press defense)		●	●	
First pass off a turnover		●	●	
Back court violation		●	●	
No active coaching		●	●	●

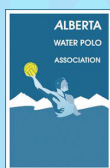
Competitive for Life and **Active for Life** competitions, as determined by the Provincial Associations, should also make use of these modified rule recommendations to increase participation and encourage skill development and fun.

See **Competition Review document** for detailed explanation of modified rules.



This guide is adapted from Water Polo Canada's Long Term Athlete Development (LTAD) Overview document as well as from the LTAD Competition Review Report. Both documents along with other resources and information are available online at WWW.WATERPOLO.CA.

PARTNERS



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Canada



Canadian
Heritage

Patrimoine
canadien