



FINA Water Polo Rules 2013 – 2017 Amendments, Additions, Interpretations and Explanations



Please find below an overview of the changes and explanation in regards to the application and interpretation of the 'new' Rules plus some applications of the 'existing or old' Rules. Changes are highlighted in blue, with clarifications and notes in red. There are only really a few new rules such as number of timeouts, no extra time but direct to penalty shootout, players (2 goalkeepers) and no resetting of possession clock on a double exclusion. All other changes are simply to reinforce the interpretation of the FINA Water Polo Rules 2009 – 2013. By making current interpretations now part of the actual written rules, FINA wants to give referees no other option than to make the desired calls. These rule changes have the intent of producing more movement, creativity and explosive speed in the game. Furthermore these rule changes will also assist in removing static situations and providing more clarity for the correct application of the rules.

WP 5.1 Each team shall consist of a maximum of thirteen players: eleven field players and two goalkeepers. A team shall start the game with not more than seven players, one of whom shall be the goalkeeper and who shall wear the goalkeeper's cap. Five reserves may be used as substitutes and one reserve goalkeeper who may be used only as a substitute goalkeeper. A team playing with less than seven players shall not be required to have a goalkeeper.

Water Polo Canada will not be applying this new rule. Number of athletes and hat number for goaltenders will be outlined in each respective handbook.

WP 5.6 At any time in the game, a player may be substituted by leaving the field of play at the re-entry area nearest to the player's own goal line. The substitute may enter the field of play from the re-entry area as soon as the player has visibly risen to the surface of the water within the re-entry area. If a goalkeeper is substituted under this Rule it must only be by the substitute goalkeeper. If the team has less than seven players the team shall not be required to have a goalkeeper. No substitution shall be made under this Rule between the time a referee awards a penalty throw and the taking of the throw, except at a timeout.

[Note: In the event that the goalkeeper and substitute goalkeeper are not entitled or able to participate, a team playing with seven players shall be required to play with an alternative goalkeeper who shall wear the goalkeeper's cap.]

If during the game a team has less than seven (7) players, for example when a team has no more substitutes remaining and also one of the remaining field



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players is out of the game so there only five (5) field players and one (1) goalkeeper remaining then the team is not obliged to have a goalkeeper and as a result is allowed to play with six (6) field players.

Also during a game should a team have no more substitutes apart from the substitute goalkeeper either the goalkeeper or substitute goalkeeper may play as a field player.

Please note that if during a game a player is excluded, the excluded player in the re-entry area is to be considered as part of the team; that is the team is still considered to have seven (7) and not six (6) players.

WP 5.9 A goalkeeper who has been replaced by a substitute **may not play in any position other than goalkeeper.**

Water Polo Canada will not be applying this new rule. Goaltenders and field players will be able to change caps throughout the game.

WP 5.10 Should a goalkeeper retire from the game through any medical reason, the referees shall allow an immediate substitution by the substitute goalkeeper.

No change from 2009-2013 except the wording since now the 2nd goalkeeper is mandatory. Since Water Polo Canada events do not make a second goaltender mandatory there is no change from the previous version of the rule.

WP 7.3 The referees shall have discretion to award (or not award) any ordinary, exclusion or penalty foul, depending on whether the decision would advantage the attacking team. They shall officiate in favour of the attacking team by awarding of a foul or refraining from awarding a foul if, in their opinion, awarding the foul would be an advantage to the offending player's team.

[Note. The referees shall apply this principle to the fullest extent.]

This rule gives very clear instructions to referees to play advantage at all times. A referee must not call any ordinary or exclusion/penalty foul if it clearly disadvantages the attacking team.

In regards to the possibility for a referee to award a foul which would maintain the advantage to the attacking team an example (and maybe the only example) would be awarding an ordinary foul to the centre forward when the centre forward loses the ball in action. This would mean that the attacking team maintains possession.



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Currently many referees call either exclusion or nothing at all at centre forward and centre back position which in most instances clearly advantages the defending team.

WP 11.3 Should the scores be level at full time in any game for which a definite result is required, **there shall be a penalty shoot out to determine the result.**

This rule removes the concept of extra time and will be applied where a definite result is required. Water Polo Canada events will be using the new extra time procedure for qualification (tournament) and playoffs (league) rounds.

WP 12.1 Each team may request **one timeout in each period of play.** The duration of the timeout shall be one minute. A timeout may be requested at any time, including after a goal, by the coach of the team in possession of the ball calling “timeout” and signalling to the secretary or referee with the hands forming a T-shape. If a timeout is requested, the secretary or referee shall immediately stop the game by whistle and the players shall immediately return to their respective halves of the field of play.

Timeouts are not cumulative therefore if a team does not use it’s timeout in a period of play the timeout is lost. Water Polo Canada events will not be using this rule. We will continue to use the 2 timeouts / team over the course of regulation time.

WP 19.2 A player awarded a free throw shall put the ball into play immediately, including by passing or by shooting, if permitted by the Rules. It shall be an offence if a player who is clearly in a position most readily to take a free throw does not do so. A defending player having committed a foul shall move away from the player taking the free throw before raising an arm to block a pass or shot; a player who fails to do so shall be excluded for “interference” under WP 21.5.

The defending player who committed the foul must move away from the player taking the free throw to allow space for the player to take the free throw without interference. Whilst exact distance has not been specified the notional distance is 1 metre accordingly a defending player within 1 metre of the player taking the free throw gives the referee the opportunity to exclude the defending player. Officials will need to account for the stage of development and experience of the athletes when applying notion of immediately playing the ball after a free throw. As athletes move through the various National Championships referees can begin to



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be stricter on the application. Children learning and turning the ball over each attack is not fun and if children are not having fun then they will leave the sport.

WP 20.16 To waste time.

[Note. It is always permissible for a referee to award an ordinary foul under this Rule before the 30 seconds' possession period has elapsed.

If the goalkeeper is the only player of the team in that team's half of the field of play, it shall be deemed wasting time for the goalkeeper to receive the ball from another member of that team who is in the other half of the field of play.

In the last minute of the game, the referees must be certain that there is intentional wasting time before applying this Rule.]

The goalkeeper cannot receive the ball from any player when all attacking players are over half distance line.

Progressing the ball forward in the field of play is not deemed wasting time however sitting with ball (for example by the goalkeeper) is deemed wasting time and should be penalised accordingly. Players are allowed to incorporate their goalkeeper in the play however once the goalkeeper has received the ball the goalkeeper must progress it forward in the field of play by either swimming or throwing the ball.

Please note that in the last 30 seconds of the game should the team in possession of the ball make no endeavour to progress the ball forward in the field of play the referee should immediately award an ordinary foul against the team in accordance with WP 20.16.

WP 20.17 To simulate being fouled.

[Note. Simulation means an action taken by a player with the apparent intent of causing a referee to award a foul incorrectly against an opposing player. A referee may issue a yellow card against a team for repeated simulation and may apply WP 21.13 (persistent fouling) to sanction offending players.]

It is an ordinary foul to simulate being fouled. For repeated simulation the referee may issue a yellow card which is a warning to a team for repeated simulation following which the referee may apply WP 21.13 (misconduct) for offending players.

WP 21.1 It shall be an exclusion foul to commit any of the following offences (WP 21.4 to WP 21.18) which shall be punished (except as otherwise provided by the Rules) by the award of a free throw to the opposing team and the exclusion of the player who committed the foul.

Should the exclusion foul occur within the attacking teams 5 metre area the referee must in this instance apply the following procedure, namely:

- signal the exclusion
- signal the number of the excluded player both to the player and official table
- signal the restart of play by an upward movement of the hand

WP 21.8 To impede or otherwise prevent the free movement of an opponent who is not holding the ball, including swimming on the opponent's shoulders, back or legs. "Holding" is lifting, carrying or touching the ball but does not include dribbling the ball.

[Note. This Rule can also be applied to advantage the attacking team. If a counter attack is in progress and a foul is committed which limits the attack, the offending player shall be excluded.]

The first thing for the referee to consider is whether the opponent is holding the ball, because if the player is doing so, the player making the challenge cannot be penalised for "impeding". It is clear that a player is holding the ball if it is held raised above the water (figure 9). The player is also holding the ball if the player swims with it held in the hand or makes contact with the ball while it is lying on the surface of the water (figure 10). Swimming with the ball (dribbling), as shown in figure 11, is not considered to be holding.



Figure 9



Figure 10



Figure 11

A common form of impeding is where the player swims across the opponent's legs (figure 12), thus reducing the pace at which the opponent can move and interfering with the normal leg action. Another form is swimming on the opponent's shoulders. It must also be remembered that the foul of impeding can be committed by the player who is in possession of the ball. For example, figure 13 shows a player keeping one hand on the ball and trying to force the opponent away to gain more space. Figure 14 shows a player in possession of the ball impeding the opponent by pushing the opponent back with the head. Care must be taken with figures 13 & 14, because any violent movement by the player in possession of the ball might constitute striking or even brutality; the figures are intended to illustrate impeding without any violent movement. A player may also commit the offence of impeding even if the player is not holding or touching the ball. Figure 15 shows a player intentionally blocking the opponent with the player's body and with the arms flung open, thus making access to the ball impossible. This offence is most often committed near the boundaries of the field of play.]



Figure 12



Figure 13



Figure 14



Figure 15

This rule is mainly there to help the free movement of the attacking players: defenders holding, preventing the attacking players from swimming specifically if they don't have the ball must be excluded. This was previously applied as an ordinary foul, accordingly this is a significant change but it refers only to an opponent not holding the ball.

Should a player lose possession of the ball and the defending player cannot avoid impeding the attacking player in this action an ordinary foul should be awarded under this Rule.

This is to apply anywhere in the field of play and is not restricted to the centre forward – centre back position.

If however the attacking player was never holding the ball an exclusion foul should be awarded under this Rule.

Also similarly if the foul is by the attacking player (centre forward) against the



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defending player (centre back) the referee should simply award an ordinary foul against the attacking player, that is an offensive or contra foul awarded against the attacking player.

WP 21.10 To use two hands to hold an opponent anywhere in the field of play.

This is a clear reinforcement of the interpretation of WP 21.9. A defending player using two hands to hold an attacking player who is not holding the ball must be excluded.

WP 21.11 Upon a change of possession, for a defending player to commit a foul on any player of the team in possession of the ball, anywhere in the attacking team's half of the field of play.

[Note. This Rule is to be applied if the team losing possession of the ball attempts to restrict the attack of the other team by committing a foul on any attacking player before that player has crossed the half-distance line.]

This is a clear reinforcement of WP 21.9 and further emphasized with the inclusion of the new WP 21.8 as an exclusion foul. Any foul with the simple objective to stop the flow of the game especially the counter attack must result in an exclusion of the player committing the foul. This kind of foul is also known as a 'professional foul' or a 'tactical foul'.

Again as with the instructions for WP 21.8 this is to apply only to a player not holding the ball and should the attacking player lose possession of the ball and the defending player cannot avoid impeding the attacking player in this action an ordinary foul should be awarded under this Rule.

If however the attacking player was never holding the ball or the foul has the clear objective of stopping the counter attack an exclusion foul should be awarded under this Rule. Referees should keep in mind rule WP 7.3, the advantage rule.

The reason why FINA has added 'anywhere in the attacking team's half of the field of play' is simply because many referees have only called an ordinary foul for this kind of fouling when it has occurred in the attacking team's half of the field of play (in other words far from the defending team's goal).



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WP 21.15 In the case of simultaneous exclusion of players of opposing teams during play, both players are excluded for 20 seconds. The 30 second possession clock is **not** reset. **Play** is restarted with a free throw to the team which had possession of the ball. If neither team had possession when the simultaneous exclusions were called, **the 30 second possession clock is reset and** play shall be restarted with a neutral throw.

Previously the possession clock was reset when a simultaneous exclusion of players of opposing teams during play occurred this is now no longer the case.

When neither team has possession at the time of the simultaneous exclusion, for example when after a shot the ball rebounded off the goalkeeper and was floating 'in no-man's-land' the possession clock is reset and play is restarted with a neutral throw.

It is important for referees to establish if there was ball possession or not at the time of the simultaneous exclusion.

WP 22.7 For the coach, or any team official of the team not in possession of the ball to request a timeout. **No personal foul shall be recorded for this offence.**

The team requesting a timeout while not in possession of the ball will lose its timeout and a penalty throw shall be awarded to the opposing team.

WP 22.8 For the coach, or any team official to take any action with intent to prevent a probable goal or to delay the game. **No personal foul shall be recorded for this offence.**

'to delay the game' means while the game is in progress and should a coach or team official take any action with intent to prevent a probable goal or to delay the game, a penalty throw shall be awarded to the opposing team.

'to delay the game' does not relate to interval time such as between periods or after a timeout. A coach delaying the game after the end of interval time or following a timeout (by not having his team lining up on time for example) should receive a yellow card but no penalty throw is awarded.

EXAMPLE: WP 22.8 should also be applied to the situation where a defending player deliberately delays the game such as when the attacking team has a 6 on 5 advantage with limited time remaining in the game and a defending player deliberately throws the ball before the recommencement of the game to a



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position in the field of play that makes it impossible for the attacking team in the remaining time to establish or create a scoring opportunity. In this situation a penalty throw shall be awarded to the opposing team.

WP 23.1 A penalty throw shall be taken by any player of the team to which it is awarded, except the goalkeeper, from any point on the opponents' 5 metre line.

It is important that referees ensure that the penalty throw is taken on the opponents' 5 metre line as there is a tendency for the player taking the penalty shot to move forward in the action of the penalty throw such that the shot actually occurs from within the opponents' 5 metre.