

Water polo



■ The origins of water polo

Water polo is a sport played in a pool, often described as a mix of swimming, football, and wrestling.

The sport originated in the late 19th century in Great Britain and Scotland. Its earliest versions were more similar to rugby played in water, often involving significant wrestling and less swimming. The modern set of rules, focusing on swimming and ball-handling, was codified around the beginning of the 20th century. Water polo was one of the first team sports included in the modern Olympic Games, debuting at the 1900 Paris Games.

■ How the game is played

A match is typically played between two teams of seven players, six field players and one goalkeeper, in a deep pool, where standing on the bottom is impossible. The objective is to score more goals than the opposing team by sending the ball into their net.

The game is divided into four quarters. Field players can only hold the ball with one hand; they advance the ball dribbling, that is swimming with it, or passing it to teammates. Teams must attempt a shot on goal within thirty seconds since the player has had possession of the ball.

Fouls are common because of the physicality required to maintain position and defend. Major fouls, like holding or **sinking** an opponent, often lead to a twenty-second exclusion of the player from the game, giving the attacking team a temporary advantage. The game is played at a fast pace; it requires constant movement and strategic passing.

■ The equipment

The ball is made of waterproof material; the surface is designed to grant the grip players need. Caps, made of **cloth**, are essential to identify players; for this reason, large numbers are printed on each side. Moreover, the caps are needed to protect the players' heads, so they are fastened under their chin. Goalkeepers wear a distinctive red cap, usually numbered '1'. All caps include plastic ear guards to protect the players' ears from impact from the ball or other players' elbows. The goals are **floating** and are positioned at each end of the pool. They are generally 3 metres wide and 0.9 metres high above the water surface. The playing area is marked by coloured floating lines and **buoys**.

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Answer the questions.

1. Where is water polo played?
2. What sports does it combine?
3. Where and when was water polo played at the beginning?
4. When were the modern rules established?
5. When did it become an Olympic sport?
6. How many players are there in a team?
7. Can the players stand on the bottom?
8. How do players send the ball forwards?
9. How long can a player keep the ball before shooting it to the net?
10. Give examples of major fouls in water polo.
11. What is the penalty for major fouls?
12. What is the ball made of?
13. What are the functions of caps?
14. How do they perform this function?
15. What colour is the goalkeeper's cap?
16. What are caps equipped with?
17. What size is the goal?
18. How is the field marked?

buoy: *boa*
cloth: *tessuto*

to float: *galleggiare*
to sink: *affondare*