WATER POLO

A beginner’s guide
Have a child starting water polo?

Congratulations! Your kid is thinking about playing water polo. While trying a new sport can be a bit scary for all involved, we know once you get started, you and your child are going to love it.

Originally played in the rivers and lakes of Great Britain, water polo evolved from rugby during the 19th century. Men’s water polo was the first team sport introduced at the modern Olympics in 1900, and today there are close to 500,000 registered players in the world.

Before your child jumps into the deep-end of the pool for their first chance to participate in the sport, it is important to understand the fundamentals of the game. This guide has all the information you and your child need to get started.
**Fundamentals of the Game**

It’s helpful to understand the basics of the game, and what to expect, before your child jumps into the pool for the first time.

### Pool Size

While there are set standards for the size of a water polo pool, smaller pools are often used throughout the United States.

**Splash Ball** - A beginners program that allows young players to learn how to play the game and become comfortable in the water. Pools are often shallow enough for the participants to touch the bottom while they get used to the game, but are asked not to touch the bottom while in possession of the ball. When the water gets too deep, floatation devices are allowed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Size</th>
<th>Width</th>
<th>Length</th>
<th>Depth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MENS</td>
<td>Splashball</td>
<td>12&quot;</td>
<td>20-30</td>
<td>10-12</td>
<td>1.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>WOMENS</td>
<td>Splashball</td>
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<td>20-25</td>
<td>10-12</td>
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<tr>
<td>MENS</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>18-19&quot;</td>
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<td>10-12</td>
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<tr>
<td>WOMENS</td>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>22-24&quot;</td>
<td>20-25</td>
<td>10-12</td>
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<tr>
<td>MENS</td>
<td>Compact</td>
<td>25-26&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>MENS</td>
<td>MENS</td>
<td>27-28&quot;</td>
<td>20-25</td>
<td>10-12</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Ball Size

The size of the ball is designed to help your child better handle it, with smaller balls designed for younger players to use.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Size</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Splashball</td>
<td>8U</td>
<td>12&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>GIRLS 12U CO-ED 10U</td>
<td>18-19&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>GIRLS 14U BOYS 12U</td>
<td>22-24&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Compact</td>
<td>GIRLS 15+ BOYS 14U</td>
<td>25-26&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>MENS</td>
<td>BOYS 15+</td>
<td>27-28&quot;</td>
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### Team

A water polo team must have a minimum of seven players, which consists of six field players and one goalie. Each team is also allowed a certain number of bench players, as rosters can have a maximum of 13, 15 or 20 competitors, depending on the competition.

A team can substitute after a goal, between quarters, when one of its players is ejected, by a player leaving the field of play at the re-entry point nearest their own goal line, or during play between the goal line and centerline by the players touching hands before substituting.
FUNDAMENTALS OF THE GAME (CONT.)
Before your child jumps into the pool, it's helpful to understand the basics of the game and what to expect.

Water Polo was first introduced to the United States in 1888. At first, it was featured as a rugby-style game that was similar to American football in the water. It wasn't until 1914 that the United States adopted the more civilized international rules.

For more information, visit:
sportsengine.com/article/water-polo/fundamentals-water-polo

Score
Each team tries to throw the ball into the net of their opponents, each goal is worth one point. A goal counts only when the ball goes completely across the goal line and into the goal.

Time
Play consists of four quarters, but the length of the periods differ depending on the age of the competitors.

SHOT CLOCK - Teams are allowed 30 seconds to shoot the ball. Possession time shall be reset to 20 seconds when a corner throw is awarded, after a shot is taken that does not change possession, and in the event of an exclusion with less than 20 seconds remaining on the shot clock.

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Starting the game
Games are started with both teams on their own sides of the pool. The referee will then place the ball in the center of the pool and then both teams race to the ball. The first one to reach it gains the first possession of the game. These sprints will start play at the beginning of each quarter.

Moving the Ball
When trying to get down the pool quickly, players will perform a basic front stroke, while keeping their head above water and looking forward, with the ball in front of them. This allows them to continually push the ball ahead of them without slowing their pace. Players are also allowed to pass the ball to their teammates, however, players are only allowed to handle the ball with one hand, except for the goalie who can use two.

Out of Bounds
If the ball goes out of the playing area, or hits the edge of the pool and then falls back into the water, a free throw is given to the team that did not touch the ball last.

Fouls
There are two different types of fouls in water polo: minor (ordinary) fouls, and major (personal) fouls. There is no limit to the amount of minor fouls a player can commit, but they will be removed from the competition after recording three major fouls and may not return.

Minor Fouls - After a minor foul, a member of the fouled team starts play back up by taking a free throw. If the foul is committed outside the 6-meter line, though, then the player may take the free throw as a direct shot at the goal. There are numerous minor fouls in the game of water polo, which coaches will continually teach.

Major Fouls - A major foul is assigned to the player who commits it, and therefore they are often referred to as a personal foul. A major foul can result in the player being excluded from play for 20 seconds, or from the remainder of the game. Major fouls are often handed out for violence or disrespect towards other players. A player fouls out of the game after three major fouls.

For more information, visit: sportsengine.com/article/water-polo/basic-rules-water-polo
GETTING INTO POSITION

Each team will have one goalkeeper and six field players. Unlike most sports, there is little positional play as each field player is often asked to play multiple positions over the course of a match. All six field players also have to play defense, which is usually mirrored from how they position on offense.

Center
Often the closest player to the net, and typically score the most goals for their team due to their close proximity. They’re also responsible for directing their team’s plays.

Wings
There are often two wing players in the pool for each team. They are located on or near the 2-meter line, just outside the goal posts.

Driver
They will start at the 5-meter line and then drive towards the net and pass the ball out to their teammates in hopes of generating better shots.

Point
There is one point for each team and they are usually lined up as the furthest player from the goal. They’re on, or behind, the 5-meter line and usually in the middle of the goal.

Goalkeeper
The goalkeeper’s main role in water polo is blocking shots. They are the only players allowed to punch the ball with a clenched fist, and touch the ball with two hands.

Hungary has the most all-time Olympic water polo medals with 15 (nine golds, three silvers, and three bronze). The men’s team won three consecutive medals in 2000, 2004, and 2008.

For more information, visit: sportsengine.com/article/water-polo/getting-position-water-polo
WATER POLO TERMS EXPLAINED

Your child will have a tough time getting the hang of water polo if they don’t understand the game’s lingo. Communication between players, coaches and referees is crucial to the game. Here are a few terms you and your child will come across in the pool.

**Advantage Rule**
Permits the referee to refrain from calling a foul if, in their opinion, the foul would be an advantage to the offending team.

**All Rounder**
A well-rounded player that is able to play most, if not all, the positions for their team.

**Ball Under**
A technical foul that occurs when a player holds the ball under water while being held or tackled by an opponent.

**Bunny Shot**
A goal that’s scored by a hard shot aimed at, or close to, the goalie’s head.

**Corner Throw**
Awarded when the goalkeeper deflects the ball out of bounds, or a defensive player intentionally sends the ball over the back line.

**Counter Attack**
An offensive strategy that tries to give the offense an advantage by quickly moving the ball down the pool after a turnover.

**Dead Time**
Refers to the time between the whistle after a foul, which stops the clock, and the resetting of the clock after the ball returns to play.

**Double Post**
An offensive strategy that uses two players in the post, with one positioned in front of each goal post.

**Dribbling**
Swimming while controlling the ball in front of the head.

**Drop**
Similar to a zone defense where the defensive players drop back to protect the middle of the pool and block shots, while also making shooting more difficult.

**Dry Pass**
A pass made where the ball is caught without touching the water.

**Eggbeater**
A kicking stroke used for stability and support in treading water, similar to an alternating breaststroke kick.

**Field Player**
A player other than the goalkeeper.

**Flat**
Refers to the positioning of an offensive player. The flats are usually the area 15 to 20 feet to the side of each goal post, from which most drives are initiated.

For more information, visit: sportsengine.com/article/water-polo/water-polo-terms-explained

The youngest player to ever earn an Olympic medal in water polo was Paul Vasseur (FRA), who was 15 years, 305 days old when he won the bronze in 1900.
**WATER POLO TERMS EXPLAINED (CONT.)**

**Free Throw**
The method of putting the ball in play after the team is awarded the ball by the referee. It must be taken from the spot the infraction occurred (or anywhere behind that point), unless otherwise specified. The free throw can be taken by any player, and they may pass or dribble the ball. They cannot shoot on net unless the foul occurred outside the 5-meter zone.

**Fronting**
Defensive positioning where the defender stays in the passing lane between the ball and the 2-meter man.

**Goal Throw**
A free throw by the goalkeeper, awarded when the ball goes over the end line after being touched by an offensive player other than the goalkeeper. Also awarded if a defensive player unintentionally tips the ball over the back line.

**Greenie**
A quick and sudden shot taken by a perimeter player following a pass from the 2-meter man in an effort to catch the defenders and goalkeeper off guard.

**Inside Water**
A situation when the offensive player has an advantageous position in front of the defender, with nothing but open water between them and the goalkeeper.

**Lane Press**
A defensive strategy where defensive players are positioned in the passing lanes (between the ball and their man), rather than between their man and the goal.

**Lob Shot**
A high-arcing shot that is intended to fall above the goalie’s hands and below the crossbar.

**Neutral Throw**
Similar to a jump ball in basketball; the referee drops the ball between players from each team.

**Penalty Shot**
A free shot taken by an offensive player upon the referee’s whistle from the 5-meter line. Awarded for a foul that occurs inside the 5-meter line preventing a goal.

**Pick**
Creating a screen to impede a defender and free another offensive player for a shot attempt.

**Point**
A position at the top of an offensive set.

**Press**
The most commonly used defensive strategy, a man-to-man defense.

**Release**
A free throw by the 2-meter man where the ball is passed to a teammate on the perimeter.

**Wet Shot**
A shot that is attempted while the ball is touching the water, usually a quick, wrist shot; also called an off-the-water shot.

**Wing**
An area on the perimeter of the offensive set, away from the center of the pool.

Water polo got its name from the fact that in early days players rode on floating barrels made to resemble horses. The players had sticks and swung at the ball, hence the name water polo.
DRESSED TO PLAY

Water polo balls vary in size based on the age of the player. They begin at Size 1 and work all the way up to Size 5, which is the regulated competition size. Other equipment used includes special swimwear since games take place in pools.

Caps
The water polo cap comes with protective coverings that go over a player’s ear and protects them from injury in the event that there is contact to the head. The caps also have a player’s number printed on them. Goalies are the only players who wear red caps, while their team traditionally wears white or blue caps depending on if they are home or away.

Goggles
Goggles cannot be worn during a game, but can be very helpful during warmups and swim sets, especially if your eyes are sensitive to chlorine.

Mouthguard
Mouthguards are not required based on the rules, but are highly recommended as a way to help further protect the player from injury.

Swimsuits
Male competitors typically wear swimming briefs or thigh-length trunks, while female players are required to wear a one-piece suit. Most water polo players prefer to wear tight-fitting swimwear as it is common for opponents to grab onto each other’s suits during a game.

Sunblock
This is less necessary for players who play at indoor pools, but is important for players who participate outdoors. Make sure it is waterproof to help protect your child while they are in the pool.

Towel
Having a good towel to dry off with after games is important. But if you are looking to save space then consider getting a smaller, more absorbent, chamois cloth.

For more information, visit:
sportsengine.com/article/water-polo/dressed-play-water-polo-gear

Professional athletes will swim just under two miles in a game, on average.
WAYS TO PLAY

With a little research, you should be able to find a water polo program that fits your child’s interest level. There are several types of programs, each with varying structures and commitment levels.

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**Splashball**

Used to introduce the sport of water polo to children with the intent to provide basic skills and an understanding of the sport in a recreational format. Games are usually 20 minutes long, either broken up into two 10-minute halves or four 5-minute quarters.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age: 5-11</th>
<th>Season Length: 8 weeks long. Each week focuses on area of the sport.</th>
<th>Travel: There is very minimal travel required, usually it is just traveling to the facility where practices and competitions take place.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commitment: Teams will meet once or twice a week for one to two hours, competitions are usually held on Saturdays.</td>
<td>Structure: No tryouts are required and teams are divided as equally as possible. There is a high priority put on learning the fundamentals of the game instead of the competition.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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**School**

Preparing for college and participating as a member of your school against other schools in your area.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age: 15-18</th>
<th>Season Length: August to November</th>
<th>Travel: Local travel is required.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commitment: Once the season starts there are typically one or two games a week with tournaments on weekends. Teams will also meet for practice after school.</td>
<td>Structure: Teams compete against other high schools. Coaches are paid and stured players are generally skilled, depending on the division and school district.</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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For more information, visit: sportsengine.com/article/water-polo/ways-play-water-polo
WAYS TO PLAY (CONT.)

With a little research, you should be able to find a water polo program that fits your child’s interest level. There are several types of programs, each with varying structures and commitment levels.

Rec/Community

Coaches at this level continue to work on developing fundamentals in ball handling, technical movements, mobility in the water, and game tactics. As players get older the level of competition increases.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age: 12-18</th>
<th>Season Length: January to July</th>
<th>Travel: Depends on club. Weekend tournaments can often be held in different states or internationally, especially for clubs who compete at a higher level.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commitment: Practices are held two to four days a week, and the sessions usually run from 60-90 minutes. Also expect to play in tournaments that take place on weekends.</td>
<td>Structure: Clubs are usually broken up by age groups (12-, 14-, 16-, and 18-and-under teams), but some areas do not have the same amount of participants as others so their number of programs shrink. As the age group increases, so does the level of competition.</td>
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</table>
The annual varsity match between Oxford and Cambridge Universities is the sport’s longest running rivalry, with the first game being played in 1891.

WATER POLO HIERARCHY

Water Polo was the first team sport to be introduced at the Olympics, and continues to be a popular game across the globe. Learn more about how your child fits into this sport by viewing its hierarchy, starting and the international level and moving into the local level.

For more information, visit: sportsengine.com/article/water-polo/hierarchy-water-polo
### WATER POLO HIERARCHY (CONT.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FINA</td>
<td>The International Swimming Federation is the international governing body for swimming, diving, high diving, water polo, synchronized swimming, and open water swimming.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UANA</td>
<td>Amateur Swimming Union of the Americas is responsible for organizing aquatic sports in the western hemisphere.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USAS</td>
<td>United States Aquatic Sports represents USA Swimming, USA Diving, USA Synchro, USA Water Polo, and U.S. Masters Swimming at the world level (FINA).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA Water Polo</td>
<td>WSA Water Polo (USAWP) provides play opportunities for all ages, abilities, and commitment levels throughout the United States.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zones</td>
<td>USAWP has 11 zones across the country. Zones are divided up geographically by states and populated areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Teams</td>
<td>There are a wide number of teams throughout the nation that compete at different levels. With a little search you will be able to find the right teams for your child.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Players</td>
<td>USA Water Polo has 38,078 members that are under the age of 18. There are a total of 44,210 high school athletes participating in the sport of water polo across the United States.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For more information, visit: sportsengine.com/article/water-polo/hierarchy-water-polo

The last major league stadium to install lights was Wrigley Field, who only played daytime games until 1988.
ABOUT SPORTSENGINE

We’re proud to be home to the world’s largest directory of youth sports programs, hosted on SportsEngine.com. With 120,000+ organization and program listings for 100+ sports, a full marketplace of sports-related apps, and curated content for coaches, athletes, administrators, families, and fans, SportsEngine.com is the Home of Youth Sports for everyone, of all sport interests and abilities.

ABOUT USA WATER POLO

Founded in 1978, USA Water Polo is the National Governing Body for water polo in the United States of America. USA Water Polo’s mission includes governance of the U.S. Olympic Men’s and Women’s Water Polo Teams and the development pipeline of future athletes for the Olympic Games. It is also a member organization with nearly 500 high performance club programs across America, and over 50,000 active participants annually. The organization hosts a variety of national championships to serve the clubs, including Junior Olympics, Masters Nationals, Champions Cup, the Rock-tober PCA 12 & Under Classic and more. USA Water Polo is also a member of the Positive Coaching Alliance and the US Olympic Committee “SafeSport” programs, both designed to provide encouragement to athletes within a safe environment.