

# **A History of The Rules of Water Polo: The finest game under the sun, or what's wrong with this Olympic sport?**

“Water polo is the finest game under the sun - or anywhere else. It is an excellent training ground for the temper. More so even than football, because more dirty work can be done in the water than on a football field. It is left to the players to prove their manliness by abstaining from committing fouls or by refusing to retaliate when fouled without the referee observing the matter.”

Points of Herbert Crapper  
President of the Yorkshire Amateur Swimming Association  
Recognized as one of England's best referees  
From “A talk on Water Polo,” July 9, 1913

**“INSANITY IS DOING THE SAME THING OVER AND OVER AGAIN AND  
EXPECTING DIFFERENT RESULTS”**

Attributed to Albert Einstein

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## INTRODUCTION

**The legacies of the past are alive and well in the sport of water polo. So understanding the linkages between the past and present is absolutely essential for a good understanding of current condition of the sport.**

When the rules for the sport of water polo were first being developed in the early 1870s, few people in Great Britain knew how to swim. But after Matthew Webb swam across the English Channel in 1874, swimming became a fad. Those who could swim did so primitively by today's standards. The eggbeater kick was unknown and the rules of the game -designed to resemble football/soccer in the water - were made with the capabilities of the athletes of the day in mind.

Perhaps more than any other sport, water polo captured the imagination of the British upper-class because it exemplified the educational ideals and evangelical moral values of the Victorian Era. It provided excellent training for temper - more so than football - because more dirty work could be done in the water than on a football field. The rules left it to the players to prove their manliness and good sportsmanship by abstaining from committing fouls or by refusing to retaliate when fouled, especially when the referee failed to observe it. But this quaint "gentlemen's code" of fair play and sportsmanship died out with the Queen, and it wasn't long before the British developed "foul play" into a fine art.

The British, having invented it, were naturally the first masters of the sport. It was their superior swimming, ball-handling and tactical skills that led them to easy victories in the Games of 1900 and 1908. But as the competition grew stronger the riot of deliberate and planned fouling and dirty play became part of the sport. By 1924 teams from France, Holland, Germany and Hungary were beating the Brits at their own game. They did not blame the rules or players for the epidemic of "foul play," instead they blamed it on the laxity or incompetency of referees who did not enforce the rules.

Water polo enthusiasts in South America saw the game differently. After their experiences in the 1932 & 1936 Olympics, they began playing under an entirely different set of rules based on the concepts of basketball, which proved very popular with both players and spectators alike.

Then came the riot of fouling, controversies and protests at the 1948 London Olympics, after which the I.O.C. placed water polo on probation. They told F.I.N.A. to make the game respectable, or the sport risked suspension or removal from the Helsinki Olympics. F.I.N.A.'s first act was to recommend that all nations experiment with the South American Rules (SAR).

Most of the members of F.I.N.A.'s International Water Polo Board (IWPB), were skeptical about making major changes, but the British found the game easier to officiate and that it was thoroughly enjoyed by players and spectators alike- as there was "never a dull moment."

But as the IWPB was controlled by representative of the nations, who were now masters of the game, they were naturally opposed to making drastic changes in rules of a game where they were successful. So instead of adopting the main principles of the SAR, they incorporated a few of their novel concepts that did improve the game. But they still left the punishment for "holding, sinking, pulling-back or impeding the movement of an opponent" up to the judgement of the referee. And ever since the 1952 Helsinki Games, water polo has continued to build on its well deserved reputation as being the toughest, most brutal and dirtiest of the Olympic sports.

Until recently most of the dirty work had been invisible to referees and spectators alike, except for an occasional above the water retaliation or agonized facial expression. But today, underwater cameras have provided viewers with a bit of risqué theater, featuring "wardrobe malfunctions" in addition to the kicks, punches and groin grabs.

It must be admitted that spectators get some amusement at the underwater antics once every four years. And that proponents and players alike accept and even take pride in these

delightful aspects of the game they love. But this reputation has done little to attract interest from major sponsors, the media, the public or for creating profitable professional leagues that serve as aspirational models for children and which exist for other team sports on the Olympic program, like football/soccer, basketball, Ice Hockey, Field Hockey, Team Handball and Lacrosse.

We have to ask Why is there no great following for the sport outside of Hungary, Serbia, Croatia and Montenegro, when swimming is one of the world's most popular recreational activities? Why other Olympic team sports have succeeded commercially outside of the Olympic Games while water polo has not?. Could it be that the public finds it uninteresting? That it clings to a set of archaic rules designed for players of another era and a cultural legacy that accepts kneeling, knuckling and punching, breast pinching and testicle grabbing as "just part of the game"?

The 1948 London Olympic Games was not the first or last time Water Polo's position as an Olympic sport was threatened. The first time was 1928, but as the most influential members of the I.O.C. were from the major water polo powers, the early calls were muted.

In the 1950s, with the Russian, Yugoslavians and Hungarians taking the podium, the cold war saved the game, and it was a factor again in the 1960s, when there was a call to reduce the number of sports on the Olympic program. It was the support of the Soviet Block nations that helped F.I.N.A. successfully argue that water polo, diving and swimming were all disciplines within the sport of Aquatics. In 2000, the growth of women's water polo and gender-equity were significant factors in keeping men's and adding women's water polo to the program.

In 1949, water polo had the opportunity to re-invent itself with rules that had been successfully tested and proven in South America for over a decade. Later, when American colleges reacted like the I.O.C. to the "riot of fouling" and decided to throw out the game played under F.I.N.A. the SAR saved collegiate and high school water polo water polo 1952 - 1973. The results were the same as in South America - a surge in popularity and participation. A sport easy to officiate and that made sense to fans and spectators of the world's two most popular sports: football/soccer and basketball. A game that could be played as "pick-up games" without officials, like all other Olympic team sports. It was a game for swimmers and the great American swimming coaches encouraged the great swimmers of era, including Don Schollander, Mark Spitz, Gary Hall and John Naber to play the game. Surely water polo should be a game of skill showing the advantages of swimming, ball handling, shooting and maneuvering.

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The new F.I.N.A rules of 1950 significantly improved the game because it adopted the SAR rule that eliminated the "no movement rule" during "dead time." It also attempted to make "holding sinking, pulling-back or impeding the movement of an opponent" a "major foul" that required the referee to exclude the offending player until the next goal - but under the SAR, major fouls excluded the offending player for the remainder of the game, with substitution. They also failed to adopt the idea of excluding players for the game after accumulating 4 personal fouls.

In reality, the new rules made little change in the game, as British IWPB member E.C. Scott pointed out. If the referees adhered strictly to the rules, the game would be a complete and absolute farce because he would be continually blowing his whistle and waving players out of the pool.

### **Historical Perspective #1: Swimming Development and the Field of Play**

When the rules of water polo were being developed in nineteenth century England, few people knew how to swim. Consider that over the past 100 years, no sport has seen more dramatic improvement in human capabilities than movement in the water. The chart below<sup>1</sup> demonstrates the dramatic improvement in the water swimming compared to running on land. Over the last 100 years, there has been little change of man's physical capabilities on land, but in the water, the advancement has been explosive and has dramatically changed the way water polo can be played.

<b>SPORT</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Distance</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>improvement</b>
AQUATICS	1908	100m	1:05.8	
	2017	100m	:44.94	:20.86 seconds
AQUATICS	1908	400m	5:36.8	
	2017	400m	3:40.07	116.73 seconds
ATHLETICS	1908	100m :	10.8	
	2017	100 m :	9.5	:01.3 seconds
ATHLETICS	1908	400m	:48.2	
	2017	400M	:43.03	:05.17 seconds

With the physical capabilities in mind, water polo was modeled after the game of association football/soccer with players distributed on the field of play: 2 offensive players, two players in the middle of the field and two backs, or later, 3 and 3, as shown in this scene from the 1924 Olympics.



The 30m x 20m field of play was devised because swimmers could swim a distance of 100 meters swimming in roughly the same time as humans ran 400 meters the field of play was designed to be 1/4 that of a football pitch.

The originators of water polo could **NEVER** have imagined 12 players swimming end to end like in a modern basketball game, which was not yet invented.

<sup>1</sup> From Wikipedia - "world record progressions" for each event.

## **Historical Perspective #2: Historical development of the rules: 1874 -1948**

The first rules of competitive swimming competitions were devised in Victorian era Britain in the 1840s. As team sports, like cricket, rugby and football/soccer were popular and aquatic enthusiasts began experimenting with ball games in the water that resembled these games.

When the rules for the sport of water polo were first being developed in the early 1870s, few people in Great Britain knew how to swim. But after Matthew Webb swam across the English Channel in 1874, swimming became a fad. Those who could swim did so primitively by today's standards. The eggbeater kick was unknown. The most popular rules of the game - designed to resemble football/soccer in the water - were made with the capabilities of the athletes of the day in mind.

Perhaps more than any other sport, water polo captured the imagination of the British upper-class because it exemplified the educational ideals and evangelical moral values of the Victorian Era. It provided excellent training for temper - more so than football - because more dirty work could be done in the water than on a football field. The rules left it to the players to prove their manliness and good sportsmanship by abstaining from committing fouls or by refusing to retaliate when fouled, especially when the referee failed to observe it.

An early match played in 1878, in the Dundee (Scotland) Public Baths was described as follows :

“Last night a very interesting exhibition of water polo was witnessed at the First-Class Swimming Bath, there being a numerous assemblage of spectators notwithstanding the inclement of the weather. **The game is very similar to that of football/soccer, with the difference that it is played in the water.** A large light india-rubber ball was used. There were two periods of ten minutes each, and an interval of five minutes for changing sides and rest. It is only permissible to strike the ball with the hand, and any stroke made while the swimmer had his foot on the ground was deemed a foul. The match created much amusement, while it tested to the full the endurance and dexterity of the competitors. Many of the movements on both sides were so admirably executed that the audience applauded vociferously. **Mr. M’Gregor, the Superintendent of the Baths was the umpire, but the match was so good humouredly conducted throughout that his interference was not necessary.**<sup>2</sup>

Various versions of the sport eventually evolved into an accepted set of water polo rules, adopted by the Amateur Swimming Association (ASA) in 1892. It proved to be a popular spectator sport and quickly spread internationally, first to America in 1891 and then to the European continent.

In 1903, the aquatic historian Archibald Sinclair declared: *“The game of water polo has perhaps done more during recent years to popularize and to cause an interest to be taken in swimming than any other branch of the sport.”*<sup>3</sup>

Initially, the rules relating to fouling (Rules 14 & 15) were, in principal, similar to the use of the yellow and red cards in football/soccer, in that “accidental” physical contact while playing the ball called for a yellow card, while fouls deemed “willful”, “pre-meditated” or “intentional” by the referee (playing the man rather than the ball) called for an exclusion of the offending player until the next goal.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *Water Polo at the Dundee Public Baths*, Dundee Evening Telegraph, August 16, 1878

<sup>3</sup> *Swimming*. By Archibald Sinclair & William Henry, 1903, p. 259

<sup>4</sup> These rules from the ASA taken from “Swimming and Watermanship, by L. de B. Handley, 1919.

**Rule 14. Ordinary Fouls** - nearly every type of foul - from standing on the bottom to holding, sinking or pulling back an opponent. - was considered to be an ordinary foul which was awarded a free throw from the spot of the foul, unless “in the opinion of the referee” the foul was committed willfully. Swimming was in its infancy and people were clumsy in the water and many foul were viewed as being unintentional.

**Rule 15. Willful Fouls** - If in the opinion of the referee a player commits a foul willfully, foul he shall be cautioned for the first offense, and for the second the referee shall have the power to order him out of the water until a goal is scored.

**Hints:** Be particularly stringent with regards to willful fouls. Only caution the players once, and then enforce the penalty (by wording him out of the bath).

Rule 15 was equally troublesome as players continually tried to gain an advantage over an opponent by “moving” during dead time (the time between the whistle was blown and the time the ball was put back into play.)

**Rule 18. Declaring Fouls** - The referee shall declare a fouls by blowing a whistle and exhibiting the color of the side to which the free throw is awarded, whose captain may appoint any player to take the throw from where the foul occurred. The other players **shall remain in their respective positions from the blowing of the whistle until the ball has left the hand of the player taking the throw.**

**The quaint “gentlemen’s code” of fair play and sportsmanship died out with Queen Victoria and it wasn’t long before the British developed “foul play” into a fine art.** As a consequence, the game seriously deteriorated.. Players came to rely not on speed and clever passing, but on how they could dispose of an opponent while another player shot the ball. Proponents of the game who came to enjoy this aspect of the game did not see this as a problem caused by either the players or the rules. It was with the officials.

“In my opinion,” declared John Derbyshire<sup>5</sup>, in 1907, “officials are more to blame than the players or clubs in not making full use of the powers vested in them. As a rule they utterly fail to check unfair play at its birth, with the rest that players take all sorts of liberties, and often enough water polo matches develop into boxing contests.”<sup>6</sup>

Looking at these rules with hindsight of over 100 years, we can see that they were written for the “gentlemen” class of amateur athletes who played in the “First Class” Public Baths with the unwritten rules of Victorian morality, sportsmanship and fair play of a bygone era in mind.

See: *WATER POLO. IS THE "FINEST GAME UNDER THE SUN - OR ANYWHERE ELSE.*

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<sup>5</sup> John Derbyshire was the superintendent of the Manchester Baths and father of the Hall of Fame swimmer and water polo player Rob Derbyshire.

<sup>6</sup>*Water Polo Sensation, Serious Charges of Rough Play*, Sporting Life (UK) August 12, 1907

## **WATER POLO. IS THE FINEST GAME UNDER THE SUN - OR ANYWHERE ELSE <sup>7</sup>**

Last night, Mr. Herbert Crapper, the president of the Yorkshire Amateur Swimming Association, and one of our best referees, gave a “talk” on the game of water polo. Mr. Crapper dealt with sundry knotty points about which players and spectators have vague notions, and he also tendered a little advice on the manner in which the game should be played.

Mr. Crapper was keen on polo being played in the best sporting spirit. “It is,” he declared, “the finest game under the sun - or anywhere else - but it leaves more scope for the dirty player than other games, and, therefore, it is for men prove their manliness by abstaining from fouls.

Mr. Crapper interested his audience by reference to an incident which arose out the recent Sheffield-Bradford English Cup-tie. It was a very “hot” game, but yet was the cleanest game, probably, that has ever been played by such rivals Sheffield and Bradford. As might, have been expected, no one played more perfectly to the rules than the Rev. C. C. Stirason, the Sheffield half-back. But, in the heat of the match, one of the Bradford men committed a foul on the St. Mary’s curate, before he noticed who was his opponent. Nobody saw the foul. Only the two players concerned knew of it. But, returning to the train, the Bradford man admitted to his club officials that the affair had quite upset him, and he could not sufficiently express his regret for having done such an unsporting thing against a man who had played so magnificently clean polo. Mr. Crapper thought this incident showed the influence of the clean player on the game, and appealed for fair play polo, that this great game might not be sullied or spoilt.

### **On Captaincy**

- The captain of the team should be a man who able control men. He must, therefore, be able to control himself, and should have the full support of his committee.
- Don’t pick a man as captain because he is your best player.
- Choose the man who doesn’t care a button what his team thinks, but plays the game and fears nothing.
- The captain is the man responsible for all rough play. It is him to make team good or bad. In this respect. The dirty player is disaster to his side.

### **Advice to Players**

- Don’t “swank” before your own supporters. Pride before a fall.
- Don’t assume that the referee is frightened of you.
- Don’t, when you know you have given away foul, assume an attitude of injured innocence and try to bring the referee into disfavour with the onlookers.
- Don’t think the referee is trying to please the home crowd.
- Don’t nurse petty grievances.
- Don’t try to “get your own back.” Two can play that game and sometimes three —if the referee takes hand.
- Don’t think you will get “put on” and that the referee won’t see.
- Don’t criticize other players.
- Don’t forget to play polo for the benefit you will get out the game; not win any price.

### **Advice to Referees**

- Don’t expect applause. You’ll only be disappointed.
- Don’t walk into the dressing-room after the game and ask for compliments. You’ll get none.
- Don’t wait after the match. Just put your coat on and go home; you’ll sleep lot better for it.
- Don’t forget that a referee should be good tempered Smile right through the match?
- Don’t forget that a blind eye often is a big help to a referee—-and may improve the game.
- Don’t argue. You may be right, but perhaps someone who can talk better will make you small. The soft answer turneth away wrath, and it’s useful to “act a bit daft” at times.

A very hearty vote of thanks was accorded Mr. Crapper or his talk, which aroused considerable discussion.

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<sup>7</sup> *The Week and Sports Special*, August 9, 1913



### **Historical Perspective #3: Water Polo “Incidents” 1900 - 1948**

Unfortunate “incidents” of unsportsmanlike conduct or “foul play” led to melees or all out free fights among players and even spectators from its earliest beginnings.<sup>8</sup>

The British, having invented it, were naturally the first masters of the sport. It was their superior swimming, ball-handling and tactical skills that led them to easy victories in the Games of 1900 and 1908. But as the competition grew stronger among clubs in Britain and internationally, the riot of deliberate and planned fouling and dirty play became part of the sport.

By 1924 teams from France, Holland, Germany and Hungary were beating the Brits at their own game. They did not blame the rules or players for the epidemic of “foul play,” instead they blamed it on the laxity or incompetency of referees who did not enforce the rules.

Here is a brief history of some of the “incidents” which have tarnished the reputation of water polo at the Olympic Games.

- **1912 - Stockholm** -Swedish newspapers were unanimous in declaring that Great Britain’s victory at water polo was only due to the reckless and unfair playing of Britain against all other competing nations and that several of their athletes should have been disqualified.<sup>9</sup> As to the charges of foul play in the water polo, Mr. George Hearn<sup>10</sup> did not disagree with the fact that British team fouled, but asserted that such tactics were forced upon them. “In the match against the Belgians, who were the strongest of the Continental sides, the British team found itself subjected to many fouls that were overlooked by the referee, who Mr. Hearn described as incapable and weak, and who would not be considered good enough to officiate in a third-class match. The Belgians, he said, knew enough of the game to take advantage of a weak referee, and did so, and the result the British team, who for some time played fairly, found themselves two goals behind. “Then it was that our man played to the referee and beat the Belgians at their own game. Under a weak referee a fair polo team will always be beaten by a foul side, and it was for these reasons Great Britain adopted the same tactics as their opponents. As for the match against Sweden, Mr. Hearn said that the referee Mr. Van Heyden, was fair, but not firm enough as it was the Swedes who did most of the fouling. He considered the Swedish papers responsible for the hostile reception and hissing when the British men went up to receive their medals.<sup>11</sup> In the match between Austria and Belgium, one of the players was ordered out of the water. He thereupon

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<sup>8</sup> *Free Fight at Water Polo*, Birmingham Daily Gazette, June 19, 1909; *Regrettable Polo Match Incident*, Shrewsbury Chronicle, July 16, 1909; *Water Polo Players at Blows*, Hull Daily Mail (UK) August 14, 1908.

<sup>9</sup> “Foul Play.” Swedish Charges Against British Athletes, Dundee Evening Telegraph (UK) July 16, 1912

<sup>10</sup> As president of Great Britain's Amateur Swimming Association, it was George Hearn called a meeting at the 1908 London Olympics to start the Federation Internationale de Natation Amateur (F.I.N.A.)

<sup>11</sup> *Swimming: Notes of the Week*, The Sportsman, July 20, 1912

assaulted the referee, who was with difficulty saved from being thrown into the water.”<sup>12</sup>

- **1920 - Antwerp**- The gold medal match between Britain and Belgium ended in a whirl of excitement. When the Brits scored what would be the winning goals with three minutes remaining, the Belgian spectators hooted and hissed at the referee till the final whistle.. The fans were so incensed by perceived bias that they climbed down from the stands and attacked the British players. The reaction of the crowd was attributed to the fact that Belgium was young to the sport.<sup>13</sup>
- **1924 - Paris** - The success of the British team in the Olympic Games came to an end early against Hungary. Two minutes into the game, they were three goals ahead. Then, the British press claimed, a series of “inaccurate decisions by the referee” put the British players completely off. In fact, they hardly knew what to do to conform to the referee’s conception of the rules. Every British official spoken to expressed their dissatisfaction with the work of the referee. In the Championship game, fouls were frequent, but fairly well handled by the British referee with no friction as his decisions were unquestioned.”<sup>14</sup>
- **1928 - Amsterdam** - After watching the game between England and Holland, “one (reporter) concluded **“it is safe to say the best player is the best fouler.”**<sup>15</sup> The gold medal match between Germany and Belgium “was so exceedingly rough that at one stage three players from each team were ordered out of the pond.”
- “It was a pity some of the water polo matches could not have been played behind closed doors. It is not a parlor game, but at this Olympiad the public has been given a wrong impression of the sport. **When men climb out of the pool in a dazed condition, minus costume, and bearing bleeding scratches down the chest it is time the Olympic authorities thought about eliminating this department of the swimming competition.** It was a pity, because the swimming events provided wonderfully keen and sporting races.”<sup>16</sup>
- **1932 - Los Angeles** - Brazil’s water polo team was disqualified from further participation in the championships of the Xth Olympiad following their massed attack on Bela Komjadi<sup>17</sup>, of Hungary, who had refereed their match with Germany. The game was won by Germany 7 to 3 after 40 fouls had been called against the Brazilians to only 4 on the winners. The referee’s decisions during the game had been greeted by frequent boos from the 9,000 persons in the stands, with most of the spectators feeling that the Brazilians had been discriminated against. When the final

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<sup>12</sup> *Water Polo: The Referee Assaulted*, Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer, July 16, 1912

<sup>13</sup> *British Olympic Water Polo Victory*, Dundee Courier (UK) August 28, 1920

<sup>14</sup> *The Water World* by W. J. Howcroft, Athletic News,(UK) July 21, 1924

<sup>15</sup> *Arm Thrashing of Water Polo Often Turns to Slugging; Best Player is Best Fouler*, Consolidated Press Assn. Argus Leader (USA) August 8, 1928

<sup>16</sup> *Athletic News*, Manchester (UK) August 13, 1928

<sup>17</sup> Bela Komjadi is the man credited with having made water polo the national sport in Hungary and popular throughout Europe.

whistle was blown, the Brazilians moved in mass toward the official and before stadium police could come to his aid, Komjadi took a couple of blows on his chin. And to add a bit more excitement to the melee on the pool deck, Los Angeles police manhandled Dr. Leo Donath of Hungary, who was the F.I.N.A. secretary. Dr. Donath tried to get to the center of the fracas to break it up, but police, thinking he was going to join in the fisticuffs, slammed him back against a concrete wall.<sup>18</sup>



- **1936 - Berlin** - In the 1930s “Water Polo Incidents” were so common that there was a column under that heading in British papers for many years. One “incident” reported from Berlin read: “So severe was the Belgian referee in penalizing technical fouls by both teams that at one period there were only four players left in the water on each side in Great Britain’s water polo match with Austria.”<sup>19</sup> Because the USA and Great Britain were eliminated in the preliminary rounds, there was very little coverage of the rest of the competition in English language papers.

<sup>18</sup> Officers Quell Riot As Fists Fly At Olympics, Los Angeles Times (USA) August 9, 1932

<sup>19</sup> *Water polo “Incidents”*, Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail, August 14, 1936.

- **1948 - London - WATER POLO PLACED ON PROBATION BY THE I.O.C.**
- “One thing is certain: if the standard of refereeing is not considerably improved, water polo will be erased from the aquatic program of future Olympiads.”<sup>20</sup>
- “Even with the best will in the world, the appointed referees could not stop the riot of fouling. All too often the games degenerated into a rough house, with the defending backs wrapping their arms and legs around the opposing forwards. **It was not a case of accidental fouling, due to the excitement of a close game. It was deliberate planned fouling.**”<sup>21</sup>
- **“Water polo today has deteriorated from a scientific point of view.** The competitors here have been playing the man instead of the ball and many players have been ordered from the water. It is significant that many protests have been made by various countries against the referees decisions to F.I.N.A. and it seems the general idea is “If you lose, protest.” On one day, two games where protests had been upheld were replayed in Wembley Stadium before empty seats.<sup>22</sup>
- **The Olympic swimming fathers are experimenting with measures to remove the arts of mayhem and near-drowning from water polo competition. If they can’t do it, the sport may be removed from the Olympic Games,** according to authorities who witnessed the recent slugging and tugging matches that were supposed to pass for good clean competition at the Wembley Olympic pool.... **The first move to clean up water polo in the four years leading to the 1952 games is a recommended experiment with South American Rules.** In a general way, the South American way is like basketball with the idea of reducing under-water sleight-of-hand tactics that are visible only in the reflections of agony on the victim’s face - in the event that part of him is still surfaced under attack....**A F.I.N.A subcommittee is seeking whether water polo can be taken off the probation list and made fairly respectable by 1952.**<sup>23</sup>

Complicating matters for water polo were proposals from both France and Britain to cut back the number of sports on future Olympic programs. Water polo, soccer and basketball were among the sports considered for elimination as they were not traditional “Olympic sports.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> *Official Report of the 1948 Olympic Games*, W. C. Howcroft, Published by World Sports 1948

<sup>21</sup> *Official Report of the 1948 Olympic Games*, W. C. Howcroft, Published by World Sports 1948

<sup>22</sup> *Olympic Comments*, Hastings and St Leonards Observer (UK), August 7, 1948

<sup>23</sup> *Efforts Being Made To Ease Mayhem In Olympic Water Polo*, Associated Press, Clarion-Ledger (USA) August 22, 1948

<sup>24</sup> *Wide Cuts In Olympic Program Proposed*, NY Times (USA) August 2, 1948

#### **Historical Perspective #4: THE SOUTH AMERICAN RULES**

Prior to WWII, Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay represented South America in Olympic water polo tournaments. The continent's best performance was by the team from Uruguay in 1936<sup>25</sup> when they tied the eventual bronze medal winning team from the Netherlands in the preliminary round and lost two other games by a single goal.

As the clouds of war were gathering over Europe, Argentine referees Manuel Segura, Ezequiel Lipretti and Eduardo Barrenechea, came to believe that Water Polo rules were archaic and needed to be reformed, modernized and made more dynamic. In 1939, they presented their ideas to the South American Swimming Confederation, which accepted the rules for all continental play. Under the new rules water polo grew greatly in popularity in South America, particularly in Argentina. It should be remembered that at the time, Argentina was the epicenter of Spanish Culture and Buenos Aires was known as the "Paris of South America". It was also one of the sports leading aquatic nations.<sup>26</sup>

When the I.O.C. put water polo on probation after the 1948 Games, F.I.N.A. Bureau member and the President of the South American Confederation **Mario Negri** led the effort for F.I.N.A. to clean up the game by adopting the rules developed in his country, which were based on the sport of basketball.

The main differences in rules impacted the punishment for fouls, the elimination movement during dead time as a foul, and the man-up advantage as a penalty. The rules that concerned these issues were as follows:<sup>27</sup>

- Elimination of the 2m line. (the effect was to move the static center forward outside of the 4m line, or eliminate it tactically).
- Substitutes replaced any player withdrawn from the game for any of the following reasons:
  - Having committed four personal fouls
  - Having committed a major foul, or
  - Due to an accident, at the commencement of the half or extra time.
- The Player who has entered the 4m area, taking the ball with him without holding it - that is by dribbling it - is the only player who may shoot at the goal (from inside the 4m area). In the event of the ball being returned to play by striking the goal posts, the same player may repeat shooting at goal.
- Fouls were divided into (1) technical, (2) personal, and "(3) major:
  - Technical fouls:
    - Start before referee blows his whistle;
    - Assist another player at the start or during a game;
    - Hold onto or push off from the goal or sides of the pool'
    - Play the ball before the referee blows his whistle
    - Take or hold the ball under water when tackled;
    - Strike the ball with a clenched fist;
    - Touch the ball before it reaches the water when thrown i by the referee
  - Personal Fouls are made those in general by intentional contact between two opposing players and shall be penalized with a free throw and a personal foul computed against the

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<sup>25</sup>Results of the 1936 Olympic water polo tournament, wikipedia

<sup>26</sup> Alberto Zorilla was the 1928 Olympic Champion in the 400m freestyle and in 1936 Jeanette Campbell was the silver medalist in the 100m free.

<sup>27</sup>Federation Internationale de Natation Amateur handbook, 1949 - 1952

offending player who shall immediately leave the field of play upon having committed four such fouls, when the game shall be stopped to allow a substitute (if there is one) to take the offender's place. It is a personal foul to:—

- Hinder the free movement of an opponent;
- Swim on the shoulders, back or legs of an opponent;
- Splash water in the face of an opponent.
- To attack the goalkeeper for any reason whatsoever when in possession of the ball;
- To push off from the or push and opponent;
- To deliberately throw the ball at the body of an opponent.
- Major Fouls - shall be penalized with a free throw and the offending player ordered from the water. He cannot continue to play but may be replaced by a substitute. It is a major foul to: -
  - Hold, sink, pull back or retard an opponent in any way;
  - Deliberately push off an opponent with the feet, or make ostensible movements with that intent;
  - For the goalkeeper or any other player to hold on to or move the goal posts in order to prevent a goal;
  - To attack an opposing player;
  - To refuse obedience to the referee.
- Penal foul - was a major foul committed within the 4m line, resulting in a penalty throw. As a major foul, the player committing a penal foul was excluded from the remainder of the game with substitution.

It was play under these rules that led to the golden age of Argentinian water polo in the 1950's when the country won gold medals in the 1951 and 1955 Pan American Games, defeating a USA team that finished 4th and 5th in the Olympic Games of 1952 and 1955. And which produced Osvaldo Codaro, one of the legends of water polo history.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> <http://www.waterpolo-bariloche.com.ar/Decada%20de%20oro%20waterpolo%20argentino.htm>



### **Historical Perspective #5: South American Rules in the USA**

In 1952, when American colleges decided to throw out the game played under the F.I.N.A. rules it was the SAR saved water polo in the schools, particularly in California.. With slight modifications, the SAR were used in 95% of all water polo games played in the USA from 1952 to 1973. The results mirrored what happened in South America - a surge in popularity and participation. The sport was easy to officiate and that made sense to fans and spectators who understood the rules of basketball. It was game that could be played as “pick-up games” without officials, like all other Olympic team sports. **It was a game for swimmers and the great American swimming coaches encouraged the great swimmers of era, including Don Schollander, Mark Spitz, Gary Hall and John Naber to play the game.**

The game, like the game that had been played in South America, did what the FINA Bureau was asking the IWPB to do. Seven players were in the water the entire game, as there were no exclusions without substitutions. The strict enforcement of these rules made for a game that was clean, fast, limited the number of whistles and took the advantage out of fouling. It was a game of skill showing the advantages of swimming, ball-handling, shooting and maneuvering. And it was played successfully in the USA for TWENTY YEARS.

After the success of the US team in 1968 and 1972, there was a great debate in the USA over whether all water polo should be played under the same rules. Many saw it as the death knell for water polo in the USA.



Articles in Water Polo Scoreboard by former Hungarian player Dez *Farnady*<sup>29</sup> called changing the rules to FINA’s “stone age game of wrestling” and “whistle ball” and it was “slow, dirty and boring with more action on the deck with the one referee running up and down the pool like crazy and having to blow his whistle constantly.” The only justification anyone has for the FINA rules has to do with increasing our international success. But this only affect a small handful o players.

To change the rules for the benefit of

such a small group would not only be irresponsible, but also stupid...If we stick to our rules, the Europeans will find out who has the better game and if they are smart they will change to our way and we will have water polo in every high school and college pool in the country.”

As chairman of the AAU water polo committee, future FINA president Bob Helmick walked a fine line of trying to persuade FINA to adopt more of the concepts from the American game within the FINA rules to “Take the Advantage out of Fouling”<sup>30</sup>.

<sup>29</sup> *The Assassination of Water Polo*, By Dez Faraday, Water polo Scoreboard, July 1972

<sup>30</sup> *US Speak out: Take the Advantage Out of Fouling*, Bob Helmick, Water Polo Scoreboard, July -August 1969

### **Historical Perspective #6: Rules 1952 - 1972**

While all members of F.I.N.A.'s International Water Polo Board (IWPB) were skeptical about making major changes, the British found experimental games easier to officiate and that they were thoroughly enjoyed by players and spectators alike- as there was never a dull moment.

However, the IWPB was controlled by representatives of continental Europe, who were understandably opposed to making drastic changes in rules of a game where they were eminently successful. But they also realized changes need to be made and adopted two ideas from the SAR for the new rules:

- The elimination of the silly nonsense of requiring players to stop after the whistle had been blown which caused so many “flat spots” and the close marking.
- Making it a “major foul” to “hold, sink, pull-back, or retard the free limb movement of an opponent, or to impede him in any way unless he is holding the ball: swimming on the shoulders back, or legs of an opponent, constituted impeding.”

Initially, the changes were well received. But as accurately predicted by M.C. Scott, it did not end the constant cacophony of whistles or the riot of fouling:

*“ I will reiterate what I have so often stated, the referee is not born who could stop fouling if both teams or, for that matter, one team, adopts the technique of close marking.*

*“The referees of to-day, and particularly does this apply to Europe, are greater students of the rules than ever, but trouble lies in being unable to apply the rules as laid down. It is not the referees but the rules - they just cannot be carried out.*

*For example, Rule 17b<sup>31</sup> states: —*

*It is a major foul to hold, sink pull-back, or retard the free limb movement of an opponent, or to impede him in any way unless he is holding the ball: swimming the shoulders, back or legs of an opponent, constitutes impeding.*

*If a referee strictly adheres to what is written, the game would be a complete and absolute farce.*

*I state without fear of contradiction, that most players hold, pull-back or retard the free limb movement of their opponents and to blow the whistle for each and every infringement would merely confirm what one well-known scribe stated in the national Press to the effect that the referee in one particular match at the Games played every tune of his whistle except Tannhäuser<sup>32</sup> !*

*I have been actively associated with water polo for over 30 years, and so long as I can remember referees have always been slammed as being inefficient and I argue that if we continue with the existing rules the same remarks will apply 100 years hence.<sup>33</sup>”*

But the IWPB left the punishment for “holding, sinking, pulling-back or impeding the movement of an opponent” up to the judgement of the referees. While the elimination of the “no

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<sup>31</sup> See interpretations of F.I.N.A. rule 21.9, 2013 - 2017, which is virtually identical.

<sup>32</sup> Tannhäuser is an opera written by Richard Wagner in 1845.

<sup>33</sup> *Everything But Tannhäuser*, Article No. 26, By E.J. Scott, Swimming Times (UK)



movement” rule was a great improvement, there was still constant whistling and wrestling, and rough play at the 1952 Helsinki Games.

Over the course of the next 20 years, the IWPB entertained a number of changes and modifications to the rules, because, as Hungarian Bela Rajki said, **the increase in the popularity of water polo has not been what might have been expected in view of the modifications made to the Rules in 1950.**<sup>34</sup>

Because Rajki believed that the problem was not with the rules, but because the referees were not of the same mind. Over the next few years, he proposed that FINA organize annual conferences where members of the IWPB and referees could discuss rules and get on the same page. But FINA would not have the budget to fund it until 1970<sup>35</sup>.

### 1956<sup>36</sup>

After the Helsinki Games, there were a number of proposals submitted to the IWPB for the 1956 Games that were rejected, including:

- that the 2m line be removed and that rules for the 2m line shall apply to the 4m line.
  - That a player guilty of four personal fouls be removed from the game, with substitution.
  - That after a goal has been scored, the ball be put back into play by the goalkeeper instead of the swim for the ball
  - That a player ordered out of the water should be allowed to return to the game for 1 or 2 minutes.
  -
- Changes that were approved were:
- any foul committed during “dead time” the offender must be ordered from the water and the original throw maintained.
  - No coaching permitted during the game. This did not prevent a coach from talking to his team at halftime.

### 1960<sup>37</sup>

Mr. de Vries, President of FINA emphasized that there should be no changes to the rules unless absolutely necessary.

- Sweden proposed that the start and restart of the game shall be as football, from the middle of the field of play. A coin toss to determine who gets the ball first. The USSR preferred to keep the rule, for a swim off at start and restart, where the team that swims for quickly masters the ball -Countries to experiment for 12 months and provide reports.
- Proposal to allow the goalkeeper to move outside the 4m line, but only to the half line.
- In contradiction to Mr. Rajiki, Mr. Scott contended that it was not refereeing which was the cause for lack of great support of the game so much as the game itself left something to be desired to hold the interest of spectators and players. He referred to the “Advantage Rule.” He contended it might improve the game to add that, “The opportunity of gaining an advantage is not sufficient in itself - an actual advantage such as territorial gain, a good

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<sup>34</sup> FINA Official Bulletin, 1955

<sup>35</sup> The first international referee meeting was held in Budapest, May 6 - 11, 1970.

<sup>36</sup> FINA Official Bulletin 1952

<sup>37</sup> FINA Official Bulletin, 1957

pass or good shot, should be obtained, failing which, the punishment for the foul where it occurred must be applied.” - essentially a “delayed” penalty.

### **1964<sup>38</sup> FINA Congress Minutes**

Approaching the 1964 Tokyo Games, I.O.C. President Avery Brundage proposed reducing the number of sports on the Olympic program. Among the sports proposed to be eliminated was water polo.<sup>39</sup>

- The FINA Bureau places on record with the IOC that swimming, diving and water polo are one sport and unless all are included in the Olympic program in 1968, the FINA will organize the swimming for such Games.
- Water polo was discussed in general and it was common felt that the rules require improvements so as to reduce the number of whistle.
- Free throw at present often penalizes the thrower. 80% of goals are scored when some players are out of the water.
- Minimum dimension of playing field does not suit present day requirements, etc., etc.. (Major controversy over the depth of the pool in Tokyo, so shallow that 5'3" Gyorgi Karpati could stand in some parts)<sup>40</sup>
- These remarks will be referred to the IWPB.

### **1968<sup>41</sup>**

FINA Bureau charged the IWPB to reduce whistling and also to retain all 7 players in the water as far as possible. They came up with a number of proposals which the Bureau did not support. Some argued that too frequent and radical changes to the rules make the game less and less interesting for the public, and that the new rules, if accepted would result in more whistling than ever and also give the referees too much power over the result of the matches. After many deliberations the FINA Congress decided by majority that the new Bureau be authorized to study this further in collaboration with the IWPB and see a solution which could be in force in time for the 1968 Games. Proposals submitted to the the IWPB for the 1968 Games included:

- Eliminating the 2 line and substitute 5 meter line.
- Require 2 referees to eliminate all fouls which one referee cannot see.
- Change the duration to 3 periods of 7 minutes each
- Change the duration to 4 periods of 6 minutes each
- Allow goalkeeper to advance beyond the 4m line, but not past half line, but lose privileges beyond the 4m line.
- Corner throw taken from the 4m line rather than 2m line
- A player excluded for 2 minutes
- To persist in any ordinary foul considered a major foul
- Punishment for kicking and striking or intent to do so, the offending player must be ordered from the water for the whole game.

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<sup>38</sup> FINA Official Bulletin December 1960

<sup>39</sup> *Avery Still Up To Old Tricks*, Los Angeles Times (US) June 7, 1964

<sup>40</sup> *Brundage Criticized by Russia, Hungary*, United Press International, October 7, 1964

<sup>41</sup> FINA Official Bulletin, May 1964

After the study by the IWPB, the Bureau approved the following New Rules which came in force April 1, 1967<sup>42</sup>

- Duration: 4 periods of 5 minutes
- The goalkeeper can go beyond 4m line to half line
- Free throw can be made by player nearest to the ball.
- Ordinary Fouls - punishment a free throw
  - **To deliberately to impede or prevent the free limb movement of an opponent not holding the ball. Swimming on the shoulders, back or legs of an opponent constitutes impeding.**
  - To waste time
- Major fouls -
  - For the same player to persist in any ordinary fouls
  - the punishment for a major foul is a free throw and the award of a penalty point.
  - Upon the award of every third penalty point against either team a Penalty throw shall be awarded.
  - A penalty throw may be taken by any player.
  - In case of brutality, a penalty point shall be awarded and the offending player removed from the game without substitution.

For the further development to water polo the Bureau proposed to the Congress to charge the IWPB to submit an analysis of the application of the now water polo rules used at the 1968 Olympics and their effect on creating an improved and fairer water polo and on raising public interest for the game. At the same time and on the basis of said analysis proposals for the eventual change or amendment of the existing water polo rules, which are known to be necessary, and which shall be submitted to the Bureau for consideration.<sup>43</sup>

Proposals to be considered after the 1968 Games included:

- To exclude the “dead time” rule which provides for one and the same severe punishment for ordinary and major fouls
- To referee matches by 2 referees
- replace 4 periods of five minutes by 4 periods of 6 minutes
- For a team to have the ball more than 45 seconds without taking a shot is an ordinary foul
- In cases of brutality a substitute can replace the excluded player after 1 minute
- In cases of brutality a substitute can replace the excluded player after 5 minutes.
- To cancel the penalty point system
- To order a player out of the water for a major foul for not more than 1 minute, or if a goal is scored.
- Penalty throws to be taken from a 5 meter line.

## 1972<sup>44</sup>

The Bureau studied the recommendations of the IWPB, and expressed the desirability of having as far as possible always seven (7) player of each team in the water during the whole of the games. After an experimental period, the rules were changed to the following for the 1972 Olympic Games:

- 2 referees

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<sup>42</sup> FINA Official Bulletin, January, 1967

<sup>43</sup> FINA official bulletin May, 1968

<sup>44</sup> FINA Bulletin April 1969

- 4 x 7 minutes periods
- penalty for a major foul should be 1 minute out of the water
- goalkeeper can go to half, but loses privileges outside of 4m line
- start quarters with swim off - after a goal, mid court
- **Major foul interpretation of “hold sink or pull-back an opponent not holding the ball. This is one of the cornerstones of water polo and has remained unaltered for many years.** The fact whether it is interpreted correctly or incorrectly is of paramount importance both as to the external picture of the game, and to arriving at a correct and fair result. in recent years the majority of complaints lodged against referees at major international tournaments have related to arbitrary interpretation of this paragraph yet the wording is clear and can be interpreted in only own way. the punishment is a free throw and the player at fault is excluded for a period of one minute.or until a goal is scored. If committed inside the 4m line, a penalty throw must be awarded.
- to commit any foul but for which a goal could have been scored is a major foul
- **A player committing a major foul shall be awarded a personal fault** and upon being awarded a **third such personal fault** he shall be excluded from the remainder of the game with substitution after the expiration of one minute or until a goal is scored.

### **Historical Perspective #7: Incidents 1952 - present**

- **1952 Helsinki** -With Finish and British royalty looking on, the Hungarians instigated a confrontation with Dutch players at the conclusion of their tie game. The incident was so contentious that F.I.N.A. threatened Hungary's water polo team with exclusion from the Olympic tournament.<sup>45</sup> But the roughest match of the tournament was between Italy and Hungary, where the referee constantly sent players out of the pool. The match almost broke up in complete disorder when an Italian player swam to the side of the pool clutching his face while players from both sides and officials were shouting and gesticulating to each other.<sup>46</sup> Yugoslavia won a replay of game they lost earlier to Holland after they won a protest against "irregular" refereeing by a Belgian official.<sup>47</sup>
- **1956 - Melbourne** - The famous "**Blood in the water game**" between the Soviets and Hungarians ended a minute early to prevent a full-scale brawl."
- **1960 - Rome** - **The game between the Russians and Romanians took second place to slugging matches as the appreciative crowd cheered and booed as players hit each other and did their best to drown their opponents.** The referee banned seven players from the game but that didn't slow down the trouble.<sup>48</sup>
- **1964 - Tokyo** - **The pool was shallow leading to many controversies due to the depth of the pool which allowed the tall Yugoslavians to stand on the bottom.** Even Hungary's smallest player, Karpati, could stand in some portions of the pool. It was alleged that the officiating encouraged rough play, which was the European style and Europeans copped the top 8 places.
- **1968 - Mexico City** - In the US vs. Cuba game, Cuba was able to gain a tie without taking a single shot from the field, while the US had 19 attempts. There was something wrong with rules that made it possible for 11 of the 12 goals scored to come from penalty shots. It was disappointing to witness more than half of the large crowd leave the gold medal math between Yugoslavia and Russia because of the continuous whistle blowing, holding and wrestling type of play, which holds no spectator interest.. Having only 1 referee on games left a lot to be desired.<sup>49</sup> In the final analysis water polo as played in International competition is a brutal, physical and archaic game. It is my opinion that rule changes are needed governing players and officials to modernize the game to create greater interest for players and spectators alike.
- **1972 - Munich** - **Two matches on the same day turned into brawls:** Russia-W. Germany and Hungary-Italy, which drew so many penalties and ejections that only six

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<sup>48</sup> Russians Win Water Polo Brawl, United Press International, August 30, 1960

<sup>49</sup> *Water Polo Results XIX Olympiad*, by James Smith, Swimming World Magazine, December 1968, pp. 6 - 7

of the fourteen players lasted until the final whistle.”<sup>50</sup>.After Yugoslavia tied Italy, a Yugoslavian player spat at the Cuban referee at poolside and then was knocked down by the referees brother. Others joined the melee, which was described as an “all-out brawl.”<sup>51</sup>:After Mirco Sandic (called the dirtiest player in water polo at the time) was excluded for fighting in the game vs. the Soviets, a member of Tass said: “**That man is an embarrassment to socialism.**”<sup>52</sup> Statistically, 71% of goals scored were with an extra man or penalty throw. Teams played with one man short 81% of the time. A whistle was blown every eleven seconds. Driving during dead time, nearly always resulted in an ejection. Teams used the entire 45 seconds of the power play.

Exciting?<sup>53</sup>

- **1975 - Cali** -When the US and USSR tied, **a swinging free for all ensued in front of the Russian net** and it took nearly :30 to restore order in the pool.<sup>54</sup>
- **1992** - After the first extra period, of the gold medal match, Italy vs. Spain, the physical play had been relentless. **When the players climbed out of the pool to change ends yelling and shoving ensued, that fell just short of an all-out brawl.** Coaches Rudic and Matutinovi bounded into the fray and began grabbing players from both teams, which initially inflamed the situation.
- **2000** - Italy’s coach Ratko Rudic is suspended for a year for his angry display after his team lost to Hungary in the finals. and allegations of a conspiracy by officials to have his team lose.

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<sup>50</sup> *The Olympics (Two Water Polo Matches)*, The Baltimore Evening Sun, (US), September

<sup>51</sup> *Water Polo or Spitball?*, Chicago Tribune, September 3, 1972

<sup>52</sup> *‘Beast’ Says Water Polo Dirty Game*, United Press International, September 10, 1972

<sup>53</sup> *A Sport of A Different Color*, by Jimmy Smith, Swimming World Magazine, November, 1968 pp. 10-11.

<sup>54</sup> *Detente be damned! U.S., USSR Slug It Out*, Press-Telegram (US) July 20, 1975

**From the mouths of the players:**<sup>55</sup>

"Viewers only see a quarter of what goes on but that's part of the game, that's why you love it, you love getting a bit rough, a little dirty out there. If you don't enjoy it you shouldn't be playing this sport," said Holly Lincoln-Smith, who plays center forward for Australia's women's team.

"You get out and compare broken fingers, noses, bruises. **You learn to love it.**"

**Holly Lincoln Smith**  
**2012 Australian Womens Olympic Team**

"Here it's been tough, the referees have let a lot of calls go. But you're ready for that, at the world championships it's much worse. These are the games so people even bite because the medal is at stake. They'll do anything for it."

**Marca Garcia**  
**2012 Spanish Women's Olympic Team**

"If you punch someone, someone punches you. So we try to play normally without punches."

Q: Have you ever punched an opponent?

"Yes, of course.. It's water polo."

**Niksa Dobud**  
**2012 Croatian Men's Olympic Team**

"Everyone likes underwater cameras because you get to see what's going on, but as players we hate them because you're being grabbed, you're being exposed underwater, and we don't want that on TV."

**Brenda Villa**  
**4 x Olympic medalist**

"It's really the fine art of looking as calm as possible above the water, but being as dirty as possible and getting away with as much as possible under the water."

**Constantine Kudaba**  
**Canadian men's national team.**

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<sup>55</sup> <http://www.espn.com/espn/wire?id=8247247>, <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/09/sports/olympics/water-polos-increased-exposure-at-the-olympics.html>, <http://www.cbc.ca/sports/panam-d3/water-polo/water-polo-a-dirty-war-underneath-water-1.3136297>,

## **A NEW Vision for the sport of Water Polo - It starts with a BHAG**

### **What is a BHAG?**

A **Big Hairy Audacious Goal** (BHAG) is a strategic business statement similar to a vision statement which is created to focus an organization on a single medium-long term organization-wide **goal** which is audacious, likely to be externally questionable, but not internally regarded as impossible.

**Our BHAG:** For the sport of water polo to become one of the world's Top 25 sports!

### **Historical Perspective #1:**

To be among the top 25 sports in the world is not such an audacious goal. In 1900 water polo was one of only 19 sports and 2 team sports (football/soccer & water polo) on the Olympic program. At the 1924 Games, water polo players were national heroes in Great Britain (Radmilovic), France (Padou) and America (Weissmuller). At the 1948 Olympic Games it was one 21 sports and one of 5 team sports, all with similar concepts of getting a ball into a goal for a score (basketball, field hockey, & lacrosse). In 2016 water polo was one of 32 sports and one of 5 team sports (team handball & Rugby 7 - no lacrosse lacrosse) on the Olympic Program.

### **Criteria for ranking the world's most popular sports<sup>56</sup>**

1. Global base & audience
2. TV Viewership numbers
3. Number Professional leagues around the world
4. TV rights deals
5. Endorsement & Sponsorship deals
6. Average athlete salary in top league
7. Biggest competition & (number of countries represented)
8. Social media presence
9. Prominence in sports headlines on media outlets (websites, tv)
10. Relevancy through the year
11. Regional dominance
12. Gender equality
13. Accessible to general public worldwide

Based on the above criteria, five team sports similar in concept to water polo, and on the Olympic program, are in the top 25 sports of world sports ( football/soccer #1, basketball #2, ice hockey #9, field hockey #15, handball #22). Swimming is #8.

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<sup>56</sup> <https://www.totalsportek.com/most-popular-sports/>





**WATER POLO** — The spirit of detente between the American and Soviet water polo team ended last night with a brawl that followed the teams' 4-4 tie at the World Aquatic Championships in Cali, Colombia.

# Finish of farce in water polo

**MEXICO CITY, Monday.** — "We will be at the pool in time for our first match tomorrow."

This was the reaction of Australian water polo team manager Mr Oscar when he learned last night of an I.O.C. letter telling Hungary to play Hungary, 1964 gold medalist, yesterday received a letter saying it would be disqualified if it plays Hungary.

The letter was written by the president of the International Olympic Committee Mr Avery Brundage.

Australia, marked the draw made by the International Swimming Union, was scheduled

against the Australian water polo team.

Any water polo team playing a match against the Australian water polo team will be disqualified.

The letter bore the signature — sincerely Avery



## Chicago Tribune in Munich

### Water Polo or Spiltball?

Yugoslavia, the defending water polo champion, was tied 4-4 by Italy in a game followed by a bizarre fighting incident. A Yugoslavian player spat at a Cuban referee at poolside and was then knocked down by the referee's brother. Others joined the melee, which was described as an "all-out brawl." The player was suspended for one game.

## Russians Win Water Polo Brawl

**ROME, Aug. 30 (UPI)**—A water polo match between Russia and Romania turned into a free for all tonight, with the game taking second slugging matches.

Hot tempers flared, the match, which R 3-2, and fighting broke out. As the appreciative crowd cheered and booed, the game

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### Editorial

## Anybody For Water Polo?

As the 1970 Olympics near to a full stop, it is time to review one of the most remarkable and memorable phenomena to come out of Munich.

We are talking about television coverage. Without a doubt, the Munich Olympics represent the finest hour of the American Broadcasting Company ABC presentation of the Games was on the whole exciting and memorable. The commentators (with a few exceptions) were expert and philosophical enough to tell viewers into an exciting arena of imagination. The camera work and editing were inspired. (The ABC live coverage of the terrible hours of Boxing 2) was historic.)

That's right—water polo! Of all the sports ever invented by man, none is less qualified as a visual electronic spectacle or has fewer Freudian overtones than water polo. It is a slow and unconvincing spectator water sport. For good reason it has never enjoyed the popularity of bull-fighting or bear-baiting. Yet, for hours on end, ABC slopped water polo down the throats of good American viewers by the bucketful. If another water polo match comes on the TV screen ever again, every man jack will run screaming into the streets and head for the nearest movie house.

The American public would far rather watch a second-rate American boxer being knocked out by a European than see an Oriental judo wizard or European diving master win the world championship.

### 4 The Slightly Hazy Struggle

Thursday, September 28, 1966



## Dirty pool! Players in the grip of underhand tactics

**MUNICH, Germany.** — The water polo players in the pool tonight were not playing a game, they were playing a dirty pool. The referee, who was supposed to be impartial, was not impartial. He was playing a dirty pool. He was playing a dirty pool. He was playing a dirty pool.

Underhand tactics were used by the players. They were using dirty pool tactics. They were using dirty pool tactics. They were using dirty pool tactics. They were using dirty pool tactics.

The referee was not impartial. He was playing a dirty pool. He was playing a dirty pool. He was playing a dirty pool. He was playing a dirty pool.

## Italian coach alleges high-level conspiracy following loss to Hungarians

**WATER POLO** — The Italian coach, Enzo Berti, claimed that under the rules of the game, the Italian team was unfairly treated by the referee and the other players.

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## Questions for the Leaders of the sport

- How has the reputation of being the “toughest Olympic sport” helped promote and make the sport more popular?
- Why has it failed to attract top flight corporate sponsorships?
- Why has it failed to attract major media/TV attention in major markets?
- Why has it not developed truly professional leagues with salaries comparable to other team sports on the Olympic program?
- Why does China not have more than 500 athletes in a nation of 1 Billion playing water polo?
- Why are there so few nations who take the game seriously?
- Why does water polo stand alone as a ball sport that cannot be played as a recreational “pick up game” without officials?
- Why is it the only sport where fouls go unpunished and in many cases committing a foul benefits the offender?
- Why are the referee calls in water polo so difficult to understand not just by the public, but often by the players themselves?
- Why are there so many whistles and referee interruptions?

If the goal is to make water polo as popular as other team sports, it should follow their recipes for success:

### Core Principles of a modern vision for water polo

- Rules are designed to be easy to understand for players and public.
- The sport is safe at the entry level (low incidence of injury)
- The cost of equipment is not a limiting factor
- There is an aspirational objective that is attractive to parents (and kids) - i.e., scholarships and/or professional opportunities in addition to the Olympics.
- Rules enable the natural flow of the game to be un-interrupted by officials for minutes at a time - not because fouls are not called, but because players do not commit fouls!
- Rules are designed to create a dynamic, fast moving game that attracts spectator, sponsorship, media and broadcast interest.