



## Water polo, a very little known fringe sport

Do you like being in the water and playing ball sports? If you do, then you should play water polo! Because water polo is a perfect combination of swimming and ball sport. Contrary to popular opinion this team sport is not a martial art.

### An exciting sport

Water polo is very popular, even if hardly mentioned in the mainstream press and media. Why this is the case is hard to understand, because it is a very exciting sport: changing game scenes with plenty of goals on a clear pitch, interesting duels, and athletes in good condition. A water polo player can for example have up a lung volume of up to 9 litres, whereas a “normal” person only has a volume of 4 to 5 litres.

### The history of water polo

The first documented mention of water polo was in Britain in 1869. The sport developed as a kind of “water rugby” played in the rivers and lakes of England. The inflated leather ball came from India where it was called “pulu” – hence the name “water polo”. In those days the goals were still marked by flags and the goalkeeper was even able to use a rowing boat.

Water polo became an Olympic sport in 1900, making it the oldest Olympic team sport. Even though Germany’s first ever international was at these same Olympics, they took the gold medal at the 1928 Amsterdam Olympics. Hungary was the most successful water polo nation for decades, with Deszo Gyarmati being the most successful water polo player of all time. In 5 Olympics he won four gold medals and one silver.

The German water polo team also did very well at the last Olympics, taking 5<sup>th</sup> place in the 2004 Athens games.

### Water polo rules

Each team has 13 players, seven of whom are in the water (including the goalkeeper) at one time. After a goal has been scored the six field players can be swapped. The opposing teams wear different (light or dark) coloured caps to tell them apart. Goalkeepers wear red caps, and they are the only players allowed to use both hands at once. The caps are fitted with plastic shells that are meant to prevent burst eardrums if a player is hit on the ear.

No attack may last longer than 35 seconds. The ball must have been touched by at least two players before a

goal can be stored. A goal can be shot with any part of the body but not with the fist. Free throws and penalties are awarded for faults or fouls, such as holding the ball with two hands or ducking an opponent (penalties are shot from the 4-m line).

In international games the pitch is 30 m long and 20 m wide (25 m x 17 m for women) and the water must be at least 1.80 m deep. This depth should ensure that players cannot stand in the water, as they are meant to keep swimming or treading water. The goals are 3 m wide and 0.9 m high (above the water surface).

A game usually takes about an hour, including all breaks. The effective playing time is 4 times 7 minutes. The clock is stopped with every break. The ball used in men's games has a circumference of 68 - 71 cm and weighs 450 g.

There are currently ten clubs in the 1<sup>st</sup> German national water polo league, also known as the DWL (Deutsche Wasserball Liga). The most successful team in recent years, and series champions is Wasserfreunde Spandau 04.

There is also a specialist magazine for everything to do with water polo. It is called "SPLASH" and is issued every 2 months by Huddle Publishers.

The next major water polo events are the world championships in Montreal/ Canada from 17<sup>th</sup> – 31<sup>st</sup> July 2005 and the 2006 European Championships in Belgrade, the capital of Serbia and Montenegro.

If you want to play water polo in your own pool, it is all very easy. Round up a few friends, choose the teams, goalkeepers and referee, and that's all you need for a game in nice cool water. The only equipment you need is two goals and a ball, all of which can be obtained from any good sport shop.