Water polo’s subtitle often read “soccer in the water”, which may seem absurd on the surface, considering the feet can do nothing. Yet, the correlation between water polo and soccer is striking.

The ball has relatively the same dimensions as a soccer ball. The object of each game is to put the ball in the opposing team’s net. Sharp accurate passing is critical. Players advance the ball by passing or dribbling. Shots on goal are launched with hurling speed. Also, goals can be scored with virtually any part of the body.

Whereas the hand is taboo in soccer, water polo specifically outlaws the clenched fist. Otherwise, just close the eyes and imagine the same flow, the same scoring pace, perhaps even the same plays at work.

**The Game**

Water polo is played between two teams of seven players trying to defend their goals while attempting to score at the other end of the pool. Players are not allowed to touch the bottom or sides of the pool and instead must swim or tread water the entire game. The game consists of four periods, each seven minutes in actual playing time and separated by two-minute intervals. However, stoppages for violations or ordinary fouls, which are frequent for a typical game, that lasts 65 to 70 minutes.

**Field of play**

Water polo at the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games was playing in a common 50-meter swimming pool, as the water was at least two meters deep. Consequently, players swim or tread water the entire length of the game. It is illegal to touch the bottom of the pool or sides of the pool.
Colored buoys mark various imaginary lines across the playing area. White buoys mark the goal lines and the half-distance line. Buoys indicate the two-meter lines near each goal line. Buoys mark the five-meter lines. Two goals three-meters wide and 90 centimeters high float in the water.

Starting Play

Each team lines up in roughly one-meter intervals along its goal line to start the game. The ball is placed in the middle of the field of play on a special buoy. When the teams are in position, a referee blows the whistle to start, and the buoy retracts, leaving the ball floating on the water.

The fastest swimmer on each side dashes for the ball to take possession. The game then flows continuously between the offense and the defense, with each team trying to advance the ball through quick and efficient passing and dribbling while looking for a shot on the goal.

Goalkeeper

Only the goalkeepers may touch the ball with two hands. All other players can only use one hand to receive and pass the ball. Goalkeepers may catch, hold or throw the ball with both hands inside their five-meter lines. Then they can use one hand up to the half-distance line. They must stay on their sides of the half-distance line at all times.

Scoring

The offense has 30 seconds to shoot. A player scores a goal and it is worth one point if the entire ball crosses the goal line between the goal posts. Players can score from any part of the field of play as long as they do not punch the ball with a clenched fist. If 30 seconds expire without a shot the opposing team is awarded a free throw from where the infraction occurred to begin their offensive attack.

Fouls

Ordinary fouls account for 90% of the whistles during the game. The referee gives the opposing team the ball to pass in as a free throw. Besides failing to shoot in time (stalling), other ordinary fouls include touching the ball with two hands, taking the ball underwater, impeding an opponent who does not have the ball and pushing off an opponent.

A penalty foul is an infraction committed by a defender inside his/her own five-meter line to prevent a goal, which results in a penalty throw for the offense from the particular line. Only the goalkeeper defends against it.

An exclusion foul generally crosses the sportsmanship line. Kicking an opponent or reaching over the back of a defending player is considered exclusion foul. The penalty for such a flagrant violation involves sending the offending player to the exclusion area. That can leave the defense in a critical man-down situation for 20 seconds unless a goal or change of possession occurs before this time.

Goal throw and Corner throw

If an attacking player is the last to touch the ball before it goes out of play over the goal line, the defending team is awarded a goal throw, which is taken by the goalkeeper from anywhere within the two-meter area. If a defending player is the last to touch the ball, the defending team is also awarded a goal throw. If the goalie deflects a shot on goal and it goes out of play over the goal line, the offensive team is awarded a corner throw (technically called a two-meter throw.) The corner throw is taken from the two-meter mark on the side of the pool where the ball went out.
Ties

If the score is tied at the end of regulation, the teams play two 3-minute periods of extra time. They change ends between two periods. If the score remains tied then the teams play a third sudden death extra period with no time limit.

Additional Rules

- Players must not pass the two-meter line of the goal they are attacking unless they are in possession of the ball or behind the ball.
- A bleeding player is ordered out of the game immediately and replaced with a substitute.
- As play resumes after a goal, players must position themselves anywhere in their half of the field of play.
- Substitutes may enter the game at any time.

Open Water Swimming Safety

- Never go in the water after a friend that is drowning. Look for something to throw to them, such as a life jacket, the line of a rope or a flotation device. Seek help as needed.
- Never swim alone. Always have a friend that is with you or watching you.
- Never use a flotation device to float in an area that you cannot swim back to safety.
- Always wear your life jacket while on a boat—80% of fatalities associated with boating accidents are from drowning.
- Never dive head first, spinal injuries are commonly caused by head first entries into water that is too shallow.

***When there is a FIRE ALARM, line up on the east wall outside the pool***
***When there is a TORNADO ALARM, go into the middle row of the locker room***