INTRODUCTION TO WATERPOLO

Background Information

The game was introduced in England in the 1860's and by 1885 the game of Water Polo was recognised by the Amateur Swimming Association. Water Polo became an Olympic Sport in 1990 and, has remained as an Olympic Sport to this day.

Water Polo is a fast, furious and exciting team game, similar to basketball and football but played in the water. In its full form it is a technical game, demanding high levels of swimming ability and fitness and it is played all over the world by men, women, boys and girls.

Why develop Water Polo?

- It's a team game - developing team spirit and comradeship
- It's fun and exciting
- It's available to both boys and girls –you can play with mixed teams up to 16 years of age
- it keeps young people in aquatics
- equipment costs are low
- all children love to catch and throw a ball
- it provides variety and pathways for swimmers, from local authority/school and club swimming lessons
- it provides an extra dimension to swimming training – improving strength and cardiovascular endurance – a fun way of developing swimming ability – it's a great game for extracurricular activities
- There is an excellent Teaching/Coaching Education Programme available!

What age should we start to play Water Polo?

Mini Water Polo (e.g. Aquagol):
5 – 11 years of age (Key Stages 1 and 2)

Junior Water Polo:
11 – 14 years of age (Key Stages 3 and 4)

Water Polo:
14 years onwards (Key Stage 4)

Where a swimmer has gained ability, games can be adapted to suit.

Requirements for a full competitive game

Equipment:

- Goals
- Hats (to distinguish the two teams
- Ball

Basic Format:

- Each team consists of a goal keeper, six players plus a maximum of six substitutes
- Players can be substituted and be re-substituted at various times throughout the match
- Each match is controlled by two referees
- The match lasts approximately 50 minutes with 4 quarters, each containing 7 minutes of actual playing time
- The team that scores the most goals wins the match

Main rules of the full competitive game:

- Players must throw and catch the ball with only one hand
- The goal keeper is allowed to throw and catch the ball with two hands
- No standing on the bottom of the pool (except the goalkeeper if there is a shallow end)
- No ATTACKING player is allowed within 2m of the opposing goal unless the ball is in front of him/her
- No HOLDING, SINKING or PULLING BACK if you haven't got the ball (major foul)
- A major foul results in the player who committed the foul being excluded for 20 seconds or a penalty shot at goal
- There are two major class of fouls:
    - **Minor foul** - which results in a free throw
    - **Major foul** - which normally results in a player being sent off for a short period of time (like the "sin bin" in ice hockey)
- Should a player incur three major fouls, that player is excluded from the rest of the game
- There is a penalty area in water polo which is the space 4 metres from the goal and extending across the playing area. Penalties are awarded when a foul is deemed to have prevented a goal

HOW TO INTRODUCE YOUNG PEOPLE TO WATER POLO!

PLAY MINI WATER POLO USING MODIFIED EQUIPMENT

What is Mini Water Polo?

Mini Water Polo is an adaptation of the full game played with suitable modified equipment which can be used anywhere near water. One way you can do this is by using the Aquagol equipment.

The Aquagol Equipment

Each Aquagol kitbag contains two inflatable mini goals, one pump, one set of mini hats and one small ball. It takes about ten minutes to inflate the goals, put them into the water and start a game of Mini Water Polo.

The goals are used most efficiently across the width of the pool, in deep or shallow water; according to the swimming ability of the players. They can even be used in a laned off area or across diving tanks and in shape or size of pool. This means that Water Polo can be played anywhere there is water, including the sea.

How to play Mini Water Polo

Play either in all shallow water or all deep water, increasing the depth according to ability and size of the swimmers. Select teams of 4-5 players of similar size and swimming ability. Encourage every player to take a turn in goal, enabling the goalkeeper to be changed regularly. Allow weaker swimmers to stand in the shallow end. Allow players to catch the ball with one or two hands, but make sure they throw with one hand. Use a size 3 water polo ball.

Adapting the Game

Once children have learned to play using these simple rules the following adaptations could be made:

- all players must touch the ball before a goal can be scored
- players must not swim with the ball for more than two meters
- introduce a 2m line in front of the goal and do not allow attacking players to go inside this line unless they are holding the ball. Mark the line with cones or floats on the poolside
- catch the ball with one hand only.

GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR THE TEACHER

Lesson Organisation

IMPORTANT THINGS TO REMEMBER ABOUT LESSON ORGANISATION

- Always plan your lesson
- Always start with a good swimming warm-up
- Always include shooting in your lesson
- Always include a game even if it's just a small sided game of possession across the width
- Always try and keep everyone busy all the time
- Let players try things and allow them to make their own mistakes – don't be tempted to 'over' teach
- The lesson should be fun

Sample Lesson Plan

Lesson Duration: 1 hour

Warm Up (10 – 15 minutes)

Head down Front Crawl (do not use Breaststroke, Egg Beater or Head Up Front Crawl until players have warmed up properly using head down Frontcrawl)

Increase pace of warm up by including shorter head up swims, change of direction, backstroke, stopping and starting with or without the ball

Warm up legs by doing some egg beater or jumping

Game (5 – 10 minutes)

Get everyone into a short game to conclude the warm up. This does not have to be a 'full game' it could be, two mini games across the width or some small possession games

Skill Practice (10 – 15 minutes)

Now take a skill from the game and spend time developing it. This could be a basic technique for example passing, shooting or a tactical situation i.e. 2 v 1 attack

The important thing is that it relates to the game that has just been played

Game (5 – 10 minutes)

Now return to the game and if possible condition it to make best use of the technique or tactic you have just practiced

This pattern of GAME – SKILL – GAME – SKILL – GAME can be repeated as many times as you like as long as the lesson format and you are not interrupting learning too frequently.

It is important to learn games in a WHOLE – PART – WHOLE way so that players are able to understand the relevance of techniques and tactics.

ADAPTING THE RULES FOR BEGINNERS!

Some helpful hints

Rules of Full Competitive Game	Adaptation which can be made
Players must throw and catch the ball with one hand	Catch with TWO hands, throw with one hand
The goal keeper is allowed to throw/ catch with both hands	
No standing on the bottom of the pool With the exception of the goal keeper	Weaker swimmers could be allowed to stand with their shoulders under the water Standing could be allowed if it does not interfere with play Alternatively, a game may be played across the width in the shallow end, aimed at the weaker swimmers – standing is allowed throughout. The teacher must use discretion about the swimming ability of the players
No attacking player is allowed within 2m of the opposing goal unless the ball is in front of them	This is a good rule to apply at all levels
No player may take the ball under the water	This is a good rule to apply at all levels
No holding, sinking or pulling back	This rule should be interpreted as no physical contact whatsoever. It should be applied rigidly

BASIC MOVEMENTS

Water Polo involves the basic movements of swimming, jumping from the water (usually by means of the ‘egg beater’ kick), receiving and delivering the ball and stopping the ball with the arm (as in goalkeeping). There are, of course, many sub areas under these general headings, such as changing directions and different types of shooting.

Swimming

The major stroke used in Water Polo is freestyle, usually with the head above water so as to see what is going on around you. Backstroke is sometimes used, especially when waiting to receive a pass from behind. Breaststroke is rarely used as it is too slow, but it may occasionally be used for slight alterations in pool balance, for example in a rather static situation.

Swimming is the means of locomotion in the game of water polo, and a fast, fit swimmer, all else being equal, has an advantage over slower, less fit counterparts. In order to get from end to end, to get a break on an opponent or to get back to defend, a player must be able to swim and be aware of the progress of the game. Freestyle with the head held high is used due to its speed and the game awareness it offers a player.

Quite short, high elbow strokes are used with a powerful but shortened underwater pull phase in the arm action of this stroke. A strong ‘patter’ or freestyle kick is also required to keep the tail end up and enhance the high head position. High elbows serve the duel purpose of added control when dribbling the ball and a warning to opponents who swim to close. An important movement related to the swimming movement is the take-off from a stationary position. It involves a frog kick to get the legs close to the surface of the water, and then a powerful scissor kick in conjunction with the start of the arm pull. Changes of direction whilst swimming involves the ability to stop dead, pivot the arms and upper body and get the legs into position to start the propulsion in another direction. Therefore, the scissor and frog kicks are important movements in water polo both by themselves and in conjunctions with swimming.

The water polo ‘backstroke’ is usually performed with the head held clear of the water for better vision. Once again, short, strong strokes are needed with a powerful leg kick which may often be egg beater when on the back.

The breaststroke used is simply with the head kept clear of the water.

Egg-Beater

This fundamental water polo movement must be taught as early as possible to all players. Basically, it is the means by which players stay high in the water, jump to perform skills, and generally stay comfortable afloat. The movement involves alternate frog kicks in a cyclic motion with each leg in turn. Upward thrust comes from forcing of water downwards by the insides of the shins and feet. Knee flexibility and strong thighs and calves are an advantage. Goalkeepers need the strongest egg-beater kick because they must constantly be high in the water and are often called upon to move quickly and make saves.

Receiving and delivering the ball

The egg-beater is used to deliver a high body position in the water to leave the arms free for ball movement. When shooting, the whole body unites to apply maximum possible force to the ball. Such vigorous actions involve a great deal of conditioning and strength and may be incorporated into swimming and egg-beater drills for specific conditioning.

Goalkeeping

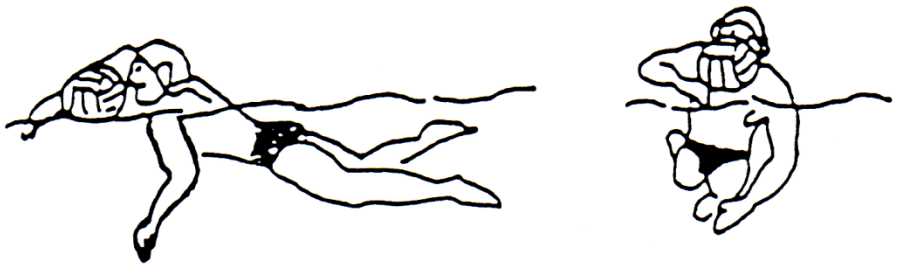
The goalie's movements basically include minimal swimming, a great deal of egg-beater kicking, passing the ball (often over long distances), and stopping or catching the ball. A combination of strong egg-beater, body position, angle of jump and reflex actions of the arms is used when making the save. Goalkeeping techniques vary, but a great deal of leg strength and the ability to jump both high and long way horizontally across both goals is important.

The use of the arms involves good co-ordination as a decision to catch or deflect the ball must be made, depending upon the speed and location of the shot. Once a save is made, the ball must be passed accurately and safely to a team mate by the goalie, often up to distances of 20 metres. This accuracy requires a great deal of ball skill and strength essential in a goalkeepers training and program.

Swimming with the ball

When swimming with the ball, the head and shoulders are kept high out of the water. This requires a strong, continuous and driving kick. (Patter of flutter kicks).

The ball is controlled by pushing it forward with the face and/or the wave created by the high position of the head and shoulders. It should not be propelled forward by putting it from side to side to side to arms with the arms.



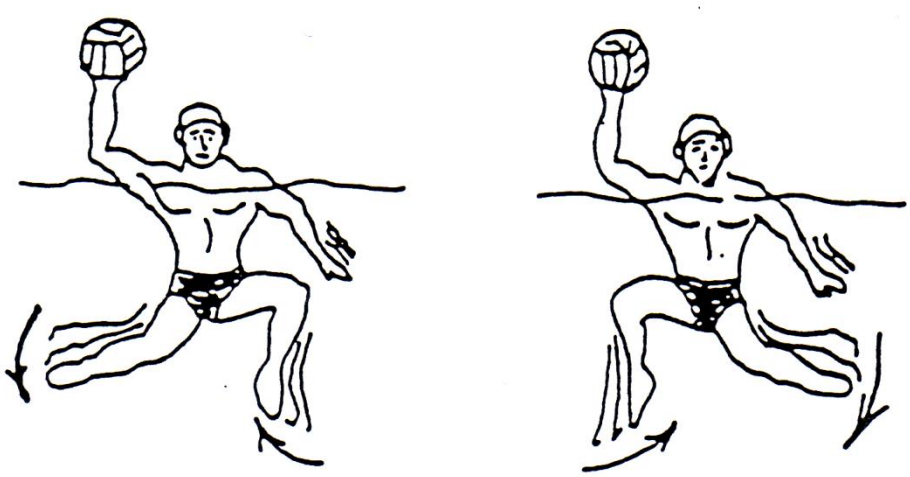
FUNDAMENTAL TEACHING POINTS FOR THE BEGINNER PLAYER

Treading Water/Water Polo Kick

Treading water requires the player to use the alternating breaststroke, or, as it is more commonly known, the egg beater kick. It requires flexible ankles and the keg action is somewhat similar to that used in the breaststroke kick.

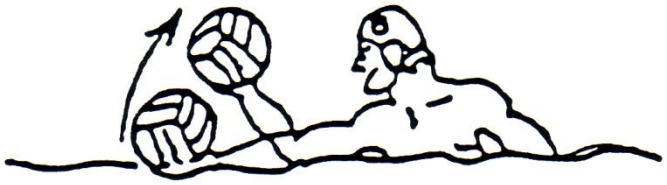
The legs move alternately in a rotary motion. The inside surface of the lower leg, including the ankle, toe and heel, provides the main propulsion as it is driven downwards each time.

This type of kick allows the body to remain at a constant level in the water so the ball handling can be effected easier.



Picking up the ball

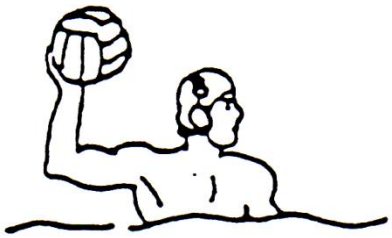
From underneath – For beginners, the simplest method of picking up a ball is to reach out and lift it from underneath. The fingers are held loosely and spread wide to provide support for the ball over the greatest surface area.



From the Top – For the proficient player, the most convenient method is to place the hand on top of the ball and, with the palm and outspread fingers, press it into the water. When the ball bounces out. The palm is turned under it in a quick wrist movement.

Throwing the Ball

Once the ball has been picked, it is carried to a position behind the head ready to be thrown. As this point the arm will be bent at the elbow and the elbow will be well clear of the water. The thrower's body should be "leaning" slightly forward in the water.



The arm now swings forward in one complete movement. The body remains face on to the shooting or passing destination. The eyes must remain fixed on where the ball will land, and the legs keep the body position high in the water.

The hand at this point should be directly behind the ball to stop any side spin on the ball after delivery and to maintain the best accuracy.

Once the ball passes the shoulder line, the hand releases it with fingers following through in a whip-like movement, putting a light backspin on the ball. The throwing shoulder also follows the arm through.

Catching the Ball

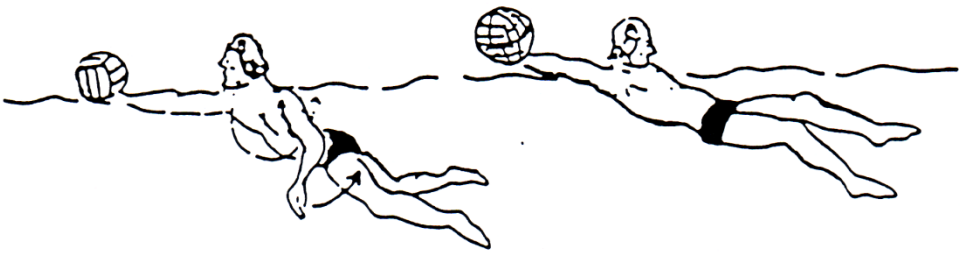
When catching the ball, the receiving arm is held with the elbow clear of the water and reaches forward towards the approaching ball. At this stage, the fingers held loosely and spread wide.

Just as the ball touches the fingers, there must be a “giving” of the hand and arm backwards to absorb the impact of the ball.

The hand continues its backward movement with the ball until it reaches a position behind the head. At this point, the arm is bent and the elbow clear of the water.

How to Roll

To roll from front to back the throwing arm reaches forward and picks the ball up from underneath. The other arm then pulls upward toward the surface and initiates the roll. The throwing shoulder is pulled under the body, and the legs cross to complete the roll. The throwing arm remains extended throughout and supports the ball.



Shooting

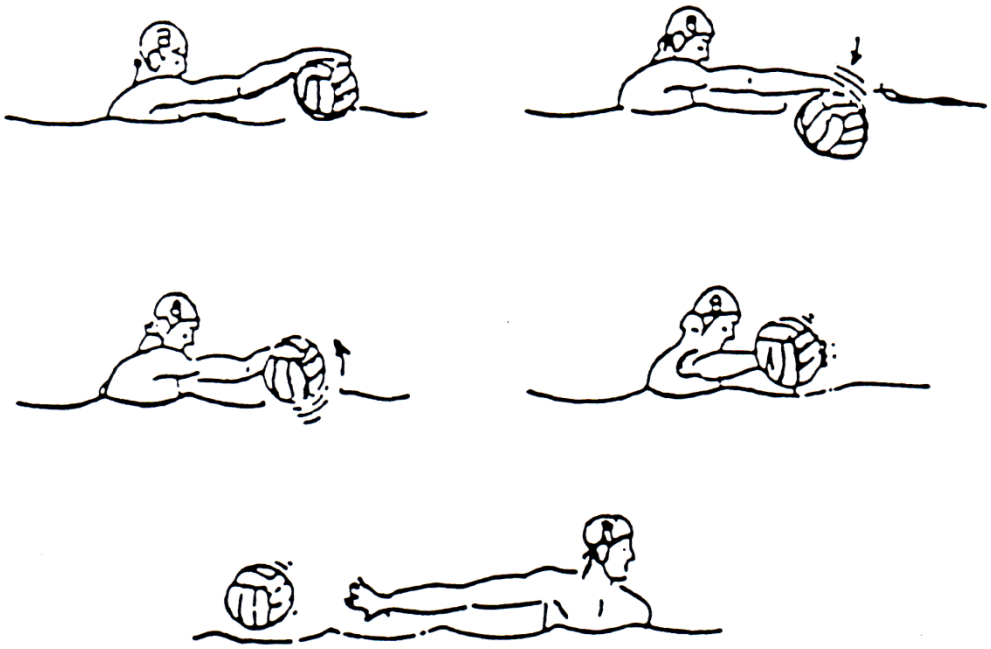
Forehand – The action involved in the forehand shot has previously been described in the section entitled “Throwing the Ball”.

Backhand – To perform the backhand shot, the player reaches forward, grips the ball on top, and with the palm and outstretched fingers, presses it into the water.

When the ball may also be picked from beneath by twisting the forearm and wrist so that the palm on the hand is facing up with the thumb pointing away from the body and the same following procedure adopted.

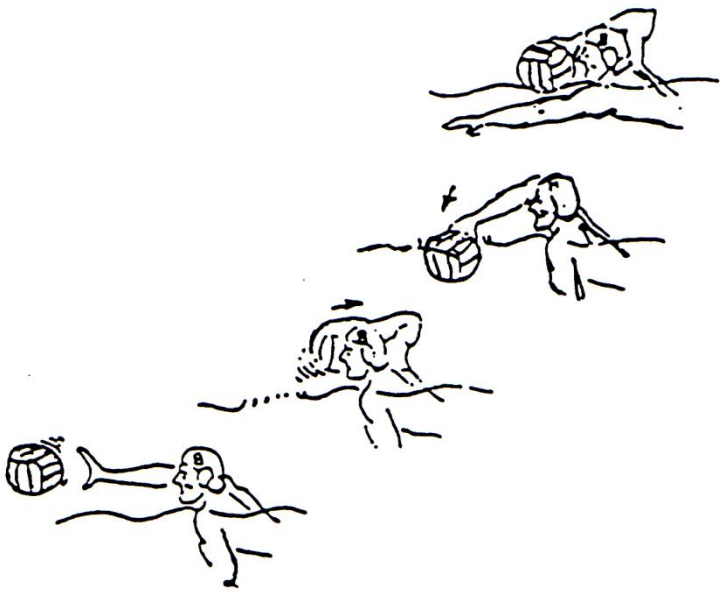
Leading with the elbow, the ball is swung around to the side, just clear of the water. As the arm swings around, the legs must keep the body position high in the water.

Once the ball passes the shoulder line, the hand releases it with the fingers following through in a whip-like movement, spinning the ball sideways. The throwing shoulder also follows the arm through.



Push Shot – The push shot is performed while swimming forward with the ball. The player reaches forward grips the ball on top and presses into the water. When the ball bounces out of the water and backwards towards the shoulder, the thumb is rotated downward, and the ball is controlled by the hand near the face.

Push the ball quickly form the shoulder by driving the arm forward to full extension.



Bat Shot – The bat shot is also performed while swimming forward with the ball.

It requires the player to control the ball from underneath with one hand as the second arm recovers from its stroke.

The ball is then trapped above the water and struck by the hand of the recovering arm.

The fingers of the striking hand are kept together and the hand follows the ball through to full extension.