



FINA Technical Water Polo Committee

Observations, Instructions and Clarifications

November 2017

FINA, and therefore its Technical Water Polo Committee, aims for water polo to be a dynamic, fast, creative and flowing team sport where through the correct application and interpretation of the rules static and overly physical situations are removed from the game in order to enhance player and spectator enjoyment.

The role of the referee(s) in achieving the above is pivotal; they control the game by applying the rules of our sport to make judgements on rule infringements. They act as an impartial judge. This involves an obligation to perform with consistency, accuracy, objectivity and the highest sense of integrity.

The TWPC provides management, leadership and guidance as well as oversight prior during and after competitions.

Water polo is a particular difficult sport to referee; not only must the referee apply the rules, more importantly they need to understand the spirit of these rules and the meaning and purpose behind them.

1. Understanding of the Game

It is vital for the referee to judge the actions during the game correctly; to have an understanding and feeling for it. Without this understanding, especially within the context of a particular game situation, it is very difficult to make the correct decision.

Each rule infringement must be judged and called, or not be called, in relation to the action, the game and the aim of our sport as mentioned at the start of this document.

2. Consistency

Consistency is the key attribute of any referee. Similar, or identical, game situations must be called in the same manner for the complete duration of the game.

3. Clarity

Players, coaches and spectators must understand what kind of call was made by the referee and why. Again consistency must apply in this for the complete duration of the game.

4. Cooperation and Coordination between Referees

- The referees must speak prior to the game, during the period intervals and after the game; they agree on how they will divide the field of play and which referee controls what areas as well as the transitions.

- Referees should in principle not interfere with any actions in the areas of their colleague; this to avoid confusion as to which referee supervises what area. The result of interference can easily be discrediting your colleague and it may create tension between the two referees, as well as create confusion to players, coaches and spectators. Any issues should be discussed at the end of the period.

5. Violent Play and Brutality

WP 21.13 must be applied at all times; consequently and in regards to all the different situations within this rule, especially persistent or aggressive foul play.

It is unacceptable with two referees, not to observe, and therefore not to call, situations of violent play or brutality. Any and all violent play and brutality must be called. This includes situations which occur in your colleague's area of control: violent play and brutality must be called – always.

6. Calling Exclusion

- 1) Only call exclusions for rule infringements that actually deserve to be penalized with an exclusion.
- 2) By calling exclusion, the referee penalizes the infringing player for taking away the advantage from the attacking team
- 3) Exclusion must be called when a foul clearly takes away the advantage or the possibility for the attacking player to SHOOT or to MOVE TOWARDS THE GOAL.
- 4) When a foul is committed, but the attacking player is not in a situation as described at point 3), a minor foul can be awarded in order to prevent loss of the ball for the attacking player.
- 5) Fouls which have no relation to the game should not be called; this goes for ordinary fouls, offensive fouls and exclusion fouls.

7. Advantage: do not stop the flow of the game

- 1) If an ordinary foul or exclusion foul (and in certain situations a penalty foul) has been committed, but the attacking player is able to continue the action to shoot or move to the goal, the referee must allow the action to continue; play advantage. Only call the foul when the attacking player is no longer able to continue the action.
 - 2) The opportunity to finish the action will improve our game and is therefore an objective of the referee.
 - 3) Do not call fouls which do not affect the game, these calls are unnecessary and they affect the positive flow of the game.
8. Strict application of WP 21.8: *To impede or otherwise prevent the free movement of an opponent who is not holding the ball, including swimming on the opponent's shoulders, back or legs.*
- 1) To protect the free movement of an opponent, the action and flow of the game is a key concept in water polo.
 - 2) Strict application of this rule is required in the following situations:
 - a) Any foul to prevent the free movement of an attacking player driving towards the goal area.
 - b) The tactical play of 'pressing' whereby free movement is impeded.
 - c) Use of two hands for holding.
 - d) Continuous or frequent contact of the opponent's body which prevents free movement.
 - e) Swimming on/over the opponent's shoulders, back or legs preventing free movement.
9. Centre Forward with Ball
- 1) The referee must give the center forward an opportunity to shoot. When the center forward has control of the ball, you must delay your call; it is preferable to provide a possibility to shoot and score, than to call the exclusion (and in certain situations the penalty).
 - 2) Movement by the center forward outside his own shoulder area, and especially out of the water, against the defender must be penalized with an offensive foul.
 - 3) Awarding an ordinary foul is an option where the center forward has no immediate opportunity to shoot or where two (2) or more defenders are engaged in this situation; note an ordinary foul must

of course been committed. Often referees award either all or nothing; there is a middle ground.

10. Centre Forward without Ball

When the ball is at the perimeter and an exclusion foul by the defense is committed in the center forward area, the correct procedure to signal the exclusion is:

- 1) To stop the game by simultaneous use of the whistle and hold up one hand.
- 2) Clearly point at, and make eye contact with, the excluded player.
- 3) Signal the cap number of the excluded player.
- 4) To restart the game by moving the hand upwards.
- 5) The above should be done without undue delay.

11. Offensive (or Turnover or Contra) Fouls

- 1) When calling a turnover foul, the referee must ensure that the teams clearly understand the situation to avoid any confusion; this by correct use of whistle and signals.
- 2) Do not call turnover fouls which do not affect the game, these calls are unnecessary and they affect the positive flow of the game.
- 3) Do not call an offensive foul when a player from the perimeter tries to drive into the front court area.

Note it is almost impossible to initiate movement without contact between players; this is water polo.

In a contact situation the referee must advantage the action, the attack; priority must be given the movement of the attacking player.

12. Holding of the Swimsuits

The referee must understand and recognize the difference between the men's game and the women's game. Unfortunately grabbing and holding of the swimsuit is a large factor in the women's game; this because it gives an advantage for the player holding the swimsuit. However this advantage is unfair and an infringement on the rules of the game; therefore the punishment should be accordingly:

Grabbing of the swimsuit should be exclusion if done by a defensive player and an offensive foul if done by an attacking player.

Other Clarifications:

1. CONTROL OF THE BENCH

Control of coaches and benches and yellow cards must be consistently applied during the whole game: from the first to the last second of the game; currently this is mostly applied in the later stages of the game.

2. DURING THE TAKING OF A PENALTY SHOT

The trailing (or second) referee should not stand on the goal line to assist the controlling referee; his main responsibility is to control the remaining players in the field of play.

3. Concerning WP 5.5:

THE USE OF ANTI-SLIP ON THE PALM OF THE HANDS has to be judged / applied in the spirit of this rule (where grease and oil are mentioned).

It is a substance to gain (unfair) advantage during the game and therefor shall not be permitted.

4. Illegal time out

The situation described and regulated by **WP 12.4** of the FINA Water Polo Rules.

There is clear instruction how to handle mentioned situation in the FINA Water Polo Guide 2017-2021, Page 39:

- **WP 12.4** If the coach of the team not in possession of the ball requests a time out, the game shall be stopped and a penalty throw shall be awarded to the opposing team.
- **[NOTE** *After requesting this illegal time out, **the coach has lost the right to request a legal time out in the same period** (if he still should have one).]*

5. Penalty or not

We refer to **WP 20.6**, Water Polo Guide 2017 - 2021, page 92

*"...; but if the goalkeeper then holds the ball under the water when challenged by an opponent, the goalkeeper will have committed an infringement of this Rule and if the goalkeeper's actions prevented a probable goal, a penalty throw must be awarded under **WP 22.2**."*

- Above mentioned instruction refers to the situation when goalkeeper is holding the ball under water while he is close to the goal and “challenged by opponent”
- In other circumstances WP 20.6 shall be used.

6. “Tactical foul” this was always an exclusion foul, even before the introduction of **WP21.11**

- WP Guide 2017- 2021, Page 47: If ... the foul has clearly the objective of stopping the counter attack an exclusion foul should be awarded under this Rule.
- The definition of “Tactical foul” is **to prevent** a pass or attacking actions that can lead to probable goal.
- If it happens in attacking team’s half of field of play or **anywhere else** in the field, an exclusion foul must be called.
- If there is **no advantage** such as an extra player or positioning advantage the situation should to be handled as **an ordinary foul**.

7. After a quick change of ball possession, the excluded player, without leaving the field of play, goes in the attack with his team.....

The situation in question happens very rarely and there is no rule with exact wording that can be applied.

Therefore, the Commission decided to use the following **interpretation**, although the “wording” of the rule is not precise:

- a) If excluded player didn’t interfere with the game, it should be interpreted according WP 21.16
- b) If excluded player interfered with the game WP Rule 22.4 shall be used.