



Applying the Rules as Written FAQs

Below are a series of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) regarding the directive from the Water Polo Rules Subcommittee to “apply the rules as written,” with responses from Dr. Bob Corb, National Coordinator of Officials for Men’s and Women’s Water Polo.

- Q: When the Water Polo Rules Subcommittee directed the officials to ignore the quality of the pass in determining whether to award a foul, it felt like the Advantage Rule became less important in deciding whether to call a foul or not. Is that true?
- A: No. The advantage rule is still essential to the referee’s decision making process when it comes to deciding whether to whistle a foul or not. But now, instead of focusing on what the offense is doing right or wrong, referees should be focusing on what the defense is doing, and when they break the rules the referee should whistle the foul, but only if whistling the foul would in fact be to the advantage of the offensive team. Applying the advantage rule correctly requires a more subtle understanding of the game because now instead of waiting until an advantage is gained or lost to call a foul, in order to promote the offense a referee must anticipate where the offense is attempting to create an advantage and apply the rules as written. Recognizing when to whistle a foul, and when to withhold the whistle, in other words, applying the advantage rule correctly, will also enhance the flow of the game.
- Q: When I apply the rules as written it feels like I am calling fouls rather than reffing the flow of the game. Will this get better as we go through the season?
- A: Yes. “Flow” is a difficult concept to quantify, but it is definitely influenced by the way the rules, especially the Advantage Rule, are applied by the referees. Initially referees, particularly our more experienced officials, are thinking more about what applying the rules as written means in different situations. It is very possible to overthink the game, resulting in “paralysis by analysis.” It will also take time for the coaches and players to adjust to referees applying the rules as they are written, especially rules such as 7-10 (two hand fouls) which not been called consistently in the past. Once they do, we will see a game with more movement on the perimeter and less physicality at the Center Forward position. The key is for the officials to be consistent in applying the rules as written, especially the Advantage Rule, and it is up to the evaluators to make sure that happens.
- Q: I’ve heard people say that in order to apply the rules as written we need to call every foul that we see. Can you explain why that is inaccurate?



A. Given that we have one rule (Advantage) that instructs us when to, and when not to, whistle a foul, it is logically impossible to apply the rules as written and call every foul we see. Think of it this way: When the police crack down on people exceeding the posted speed limit, due to limited resources, they are less focused on the people going 66 or 67 mph, and more focused on those drivers going 75 mph and above. Likewise, water polo remains a physical sport with lots of contact that does not require the referee to call a foul. Finding and maintaining that line between acceptable and unacceptable physicality is the process we are going through during the early part of the men's season. Look for, and whistle the true offenders; with only two sets of eyes and six pairs of players, if we give too much attention to players who may not even be committing a foul, we will definitely miss some certain fouls that should be whistled.

Q: What are some of the specific things that evaluators are looking for in determining whether or not a referee is applying the rules as written?

A: At the Center Forward position, is the referee controlling the level of physicality by calling an exclusion without the ball when necessary? When a pass is made into the Center Forward does the referee focus on the actions of the defender rather than the quality of the pass? And once the ball comes into the Center Forward does the referee show patience and apply the Advantage Rule fully in determining whether or not to whistle a foul, using the ordinary foul to maintain possession for the offense when warranted?

On the perimeter, is the referee aware of what's going on one and two pairs away from the ball where the advantage may be focused? Is the referee calling exclusions for two hand holds per Rule 7-10? And if the defense plays according to the rules, is the referee whistling the offensive foul when an offensive player pushes, or pushes off (Rule 6-10) the defender (the straight arm)? In other words, is there more movement on the perimeter?

And finally, when two players are "locked up" anywhere in the pool, does the referee show patience and wait to see which player attempts to move and is restricted from doing so and then after giving the player time to release their hold, punish the player who fails to let go?

If you have additional questions with respect to instructions on how to apply the rules as written, please do not hesitate to contact Dr. Bob Corb, at ncaacoordinator@earthlink.net. For questions on the Rules themselves, including clarifications and interpretations, please contact Brian Streeter, Secretary Rules Editor, at bfs6@psu.edu.