



2024-25 and 2025-26 Men's and Women's Water Polo Rules Changes

The following rules changes were approved by the NCAA Men's and Women's Water Polo Rules Subcommittee and the Playing Rules Oversight Panel. All rules changes are effective with the 2024-25 season.

NOTE: The rule references listed below are reflective of the 2024-25 and 2025-26 rules book.

Rule	Rules Change and Rationale
Field of Play and Equipment 1.8 (NEW)	<p>To define a Goal Area in front of the goal that attacking players cannot enter unless they are behind the line of the ball. This change permits an attacking player who is outside the goal area to go inside 2 meters ahead of the ball without being penalized.</p> <p><u>“Section 8. Goal Area</u> <u>Red markings shall be placed at each end of the field of play on the boundary line to denote the Goal Area. The marks shall be placed 2 meters outside the inner side of each goal post such that the Goal Area is defined as the rectangular area in front of the goal bounded by the goal line, the 2-meter line, and lines 2 meters outside the inner side of each goal post.</u> <u>Beginning September 1, 2024, non-continuous temporary markings can be used. For floating goals, the temporary markings can include red tape, red paint, red foam markers, or a red towel tied to the goal line lane line, each at a distance of 2 meters outside the inner side of each goal post. For wall goals the temporary markings can include a cone on the pool deck, long red horizontal deck markers, red tape, or red paint, each at a distance of 2 meters outside the inner side of each goal post.</u> <u>Beginning September 1, 2025, continuous red markings will be required. For floating goals, continuous red buoys on the goal line lane line for a distance of 2 meters outside the inner side of each goal post are required. For wall goals, the continuous markings can be provided using long red horizontal deck markers or continuous red paint.”</u></p> <p>Rationale: Allowing offensive players to go inside the 2-meter line if the player is located outside the Goal Area will provide more room for the offense to use and allow for more movement. The results of applying this rule in international competition have confirmed that this change will add to the appeal of the game by creating new offensive strategies, promoting more scoring opportunities, and enhancing spectator appeal. This rules change also includes adjustments to rules pertaining to the location of the free throw for fouls with the ball inside the Goal Area vs. inside the 2 meter line, violations of the Goal Area vs. the 2 meter line, and other similar adjustments.</p>
Numbers on Caps 1.25.2	<p>To require a change in cap numbers to be reported to the referee by a member of the coaching staff.</p> <p><u>“Art. 2. A player shall not be allowed to change cap number during the game except with the permission of a referee and with notification to the -game secretary. A change in cap number shall be reported to the referees by a member</u></p>

	<p><u>of the coaching staff. The referees shall notify the game secretary and the opposing team bench of the change. Failure to notify the referees of the change shall result in a warning for the first offense. For the second offense, the referees shall issue the next available card to the head coach.”</u></p> <p>Rationale: This change clarifies who is responsible for reporting a change in cap number, which is not currently specified. The requirement for the referees to notify the game secretary and the opposing team bench of the cap number change ensures that all participants are aware of the change. Additionally, the associated penalty for failing to report a cap number change is now specified.</p>
<p>Entry of Substitute 2.7</p>	<p>To allow referee the authority to issue warnings followed by the next available card should repeated delays in substitutions interfere with the progress of the game.</p> <p>“Section 7. Entry of Substitute A substitute may enter the field of play from any place:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. During the interval between periods of play, including any periods of overtime; b. After a goal has been scored; c. During a timeout; and d. To replace a player who is bleeding or injured. <p>A substitute shall be ready to replace a player without delay. If the substitute player is not ready, the game shall continue without the substitute and, at any time, that player may then enter the field of play from the re-entry area nearest to that player’s own goal line.</p> <p><u>If a coach repeatedly delays in making substitutions after a goal has been scored, the referee may issue a warning to the coach. If the delays continue, the referee may issue the next available card to the coach for interfering with the progress of the game.”</u></p> <p>Rationale: To formalize the authority of the referees to control repeated delays in substitutions.</p>
<p>Referees – Control Over Conduct 3.6.3.d</p>	<p>To require individuals who receive a red card to leave the venue and remain out of sight and sound until the conclusion of the game.</p> <p>“d. Red card: A red card is issued for disruptive behavior to the head coach, assistant coaches, other team officials on the bench and to individual players on the bench. A red card may also be issued directly to a player on the bench</p>

	<p>or in the water who is disruptive (no warning or yellow card is issued to an individual athlete). A referee may award a red card at any time from 30 minutes before the game to five minutes after the conclusion of the game or until any protest procedure has been completed (that is, at any time during the duration of jurisdiction of the referees, as described in Rule 3-3-2).</p> <p>If a coach or team official is disruptive after receiving a yellow card, a red card is issued. If in the judgement of the referee, the infraction is severe, a red card may be issued immediately to a coach or team official without issuing a warning, a yellow card or a yellow/red card.</p> <p><u>If a player, coach or other bench personnel is issued a red card, the individual must leave the venue, be out of sight and sound and is prohibited from any communication or contact, direct or indirect, with the team, coaches and/or bench personnel until the completion of the contest, including the overtime periods. Exception: The athletic trainer is permitted to be in the designated spectator area if they are issued a red card. The replacement for the head coach inherits the rights and privileges of the of the head coach but also the restrictions of any yellow/red card previously issued and should know that the next occurrence of disruptive behavior could lead to another red card and possible suspension of the game.”</u></p> <p>Rationale: This change is consistent with other NCAA sports and aides the game officials in their ability to officiate the remainder of the contest without the potential of further disruption. It also removes the opportunity for fans to engage with the ejected individual and aides host personnel in avoiding any potential game management issues. Some water polo conferences already have this enhanced rule in place; however, some do not. Instituting this rule change provides consistency across all conferences as well as for any institutions that may be competing as independents.</p>
<p>Correctable Errors 3.11.3 (NEW)</p>	<p>To add the following language to Rule 3.11 as Article 3.</p> <p><u>“Art. 3. During an extra player situation, if:</u> <u>a. A warm-up ball inters the field of play where the extra player situation is being played;</u> <u>b. A goal comes loose and moves or is blown over by wind; or,</u> <u>c. The game is stopped for lightning, a clock malfunction, or similar event that affects play.”</u></p> <p><u>The game shall be stopped, the game clock shall be reset to the time of the exclusion, and the shot clock shall be reset.”</u></p>

	<p>Rationale: The procedure to be followed under these circumstances is not currently specified in the NCAA water polo rules. This rule change addresses these situations.</p>
<p>Correctable Errors 3.11.4 (NEW)</p>	<p>To add the following language to Rule 3.11 as Article 4.</p> <p><u>“Art. 4. If a signal is not given at the proper time by the exclusion secretary for the entry of an excluded player, and a goal is subsequently scored, the game shall be stopped, the game clock shall be reset to the entry time, the shot clock shall be reset to the appropriate time, the goal shall not be counted, and play shall resume from the reentry time with the excluded player in the reentry area until play restarts.”</u></p> <p>Rationale: The procedure to be followed to correct the error of a late entry signal for an excluded player is not currently specified in the NCAA water polo rules. This rule change addresses this situation.</p>
<p>Goal Judges – Balls 3.16.2 (NEW)</p>	<p>To add the following language to Rule 3.16 as Article 2.</p> <p><u>“Art. 2. If the bench repeatedly delays in throwing the ball in for the counterattack, the referee may issue a warning to the coach. If the delays continue, the referee may issue the next available card to the coach for interfering with the progress of the game. If the bench delays in throwing the ball in for a corner throw, the provisions of Rule 8, Section 7 (Team Official Preventing Goal) may apply.”</u></p> <p>Rationale: Delays in throwing in the ball for a counterattack can, under some circumstances, create an unfair advantage for the offense by delaying the start of the shot clock. Delays in throwing the ball in for a corner throw can take advantage away from the offense. This rule change formalizes the ability of the referees to control such unfair tactics.</p>
<p>Game Timer— Duties 3.17.2.a</p>	<p>To add “or gains possession of” to Rule 3.17.2.a.</p> <p>“a. Start the game clock at the beginning of each period when a player touches <u>or gains possession of</u> the ball and stop the clock each time the whistle blows. Start the clock again when the ball is put into play. Play is resumed when the ball is put in play by the player taking a free throw, goal throw or corner throw.”</p>

	<p>Rationale: The rules change clarifies when the timer should start the clock at the beginning of a period. The addition of the words “or gains possession of” makes Rules 3.17 and 3.18 consistent and addresses the situation that occurs when the sprint at the beginning of a period is not contested.</p>
<p>Goals – How Scored 4.21.1 Note</p>	<p>To add the following language to Rule 4.21.1 Note.</p> <p>“<u>Note: This includes after a correctable clock error and after the referees stop play and remove the ball from the water prior to a corner throw for any administrative reason.”</u></p> <p>Rationale: The current rules limit the direct shot on a corner throw when the ball is removed prior to the throw only to correction of a clock error, replacement of a cap, or the zipping up of a suit. Because there is usually no offensive advantage prior to a corner throw, that time is often well suited for use by the officials for other administrative reasons, such as addressing an issue at the desk or a clock question. This change provides administrative flexibility for the officials by allowing a direct shot if the ball is removed for any administrative reason prior to the taking of a corner throw.</p>
<p>Leaving the Field of Play 4.26</p>	<p>To add the following language to Rule 4.26.</p> <p>“Section 26. Leaving Field of Play If a player voluntarily leaves the field of play, under the sideline or goal line at other than their own reentry area, the player shall be permitted to reenter the field of play immediately upon reaching the reentry area nearest to that player’s goal line. If a goal is scored, a timeout is called, or the period ends before the player reaches the reentry area, the player may reenter from anywhere. <u>If the player reenters improperly, the provisions of Rule 7-15 shall apply.</u>”</p> <p>Rationale: Rule 4.26 currently does not specify which rule is applicable if a player who voluntarily leaves the field of play reenters in a manner other than that specified. This rule change clarifies this situation.</p>
<p>Free Throws – Time Allowed 5.11 Note</p>	<p>To add the following note between the first and second paragraphs of Rule 5.11.</p> <p>“<u>Note: When there is a counterattack, a player with a position of advantage does not have to give up the advantage to go to the ball and take the free throw. The player on that team who is next closest to the ball can take the free throw as long as there is no undue delay.</u>”</p>

	<p>Rationale: This note formalizes something that has been informally accepted as common practice for many years, i.e., that a player in a counterattack with a position of advantage should not be required to go toward their own goal or toward the sideline to take a free throw and give up the advantage simply because that player is closest to the ball. Instead, the player who is next closest to the ball can take the free throw. It would still be the case that a player who is next to the ball when the ball is awarded to the defense or who swims past the ball on a counterattack and does not put the ball into play would be called for undue delay in taking the free throw.</p>
<p>Failure to Take Position on Goal Line 7.17</p>	<p>To change the following language to Rule 7.17.</p> <p>“Section 17. Failure of Defenders to Take Position During a Penalty Throw For the defending players, including the goalkeeper, to fail to take up the correct positions during the taking of a penalty throw, as required in Rule 9, Section 2, having been ordered once to do so by the referee. If the goalkeeper is excluded, another defending player may take the position of the goalkeeper but without the goalkeeper’s privileges or limitations.”</p> <p>Rationale: Rule 7.17 as currently written applies only to a defending goalkeeper who fails to take the required position on the goal line. This change expands the requirement to apply also to all other defensive players who fail to maintain the required minimum distance from the player taking the penalty throw.</p>
<p>Kicking or Striking Within 6-Meter Area, Flagrant Misconduct or Fighting 8.3</p>	<p>To add the following language to Rule 8.3.</p> <p>“Section 3. Kicking, Striking <u>or Other Physical Misconduct</u> Within 6-Meter Area, Flagrant Misconduct or Fighting For a defending player within the 6-meter area to kick, strike an opponent <u>or commit any act of physical misconduct against an opponent</u>, commit any act of physical misconduct against an opponent for a player at any location in the pool to commit an act of flagrant misconduct or to engage in a fight.”</p> <p>Rationale: This rule change adds violations that constitute physical misconduct, such as overaggressive fouls, to the list of penalty fouls in the 6-meter area and gives the referees the authority to exclude the offender from the remainder of the game when appropriate. This provides the referees with an additional tool to control excessively physical play.</p>

<p>Penalty Fouls 8.9 (NEW)</p>	<p>To add the following language to Rule 8 as Section 9.</p> <p><u>Section 9. Attacking Player from Behind Within 6 Meters</u> <u>It shall be a penalty foul for a defending player to foul or impede from behind an attacking player who has the ball and an open path to the goal within the 6-meter area regardless of whether the player is holding the ball. The only way a defender can defend in this situation is to touch only the ball or the hand holding the ball. If the defending player's actions prevent the attacking player from continuing the action, a penalty must be called.</u></p> <p>Rationale: The new section conforms the NCAA Water Polo Rules with all other rules sets in regard to awarding a penalty throw to a player inside 6-meters who has the ball with a defender behind and an open path to the goal. The change is also consistent with the principle of offensive advantage – reward the offense for good play by calling the penalty.</p>
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