



**NCAA MEN'S AND WOMEN'S WATER POLO PLAYING RULES
INTERPRETATIONS AND CLARIFICATIONS
2024 – 2025**

January 6, 2025

Approval of Protective Equipment

This clarification updates guidance on Protective Equipment that was issued on January 3, 2023.

Rule 2, Section 4, Article 5 provides as follows regarding the wearing of protective equipment; “A player will be permitted to wear a mouth guard, prescription goggles of the type designed specifically for contact sports to withstand impact and to decrease the likelihood of injury to the eye, a protective plastic face mask prescribed by a physician that closely adheres to the upper face, a plastic protective nose guard and other similar protective devices designed to prevent injury prescribed by a physician if the institution has written approval from the NCAA secretary-rules editor. This letter must be provided to the referees before each game.”

Prior to 2014, approval of protective equipment was obtained from the referees at each game during the pre-game inspection. This situation created the potential for inconsistency from game to game because the judgement as to whether an article could cause injury to the player wearing it or to other players could vary from official to official.

Effective with the 2014-15 and 2015-16 playing rules, approval of protective equipment was made the responsibility of the secretary-rules editor. Please note that under the current rules, the referees at the game no longer have the authority to approve protective equipment if it has not been approved by the secretary-rules editor.

However, if upon inspection the protective equipment is found to be not as described in the approval correspondence, the referees do have the authority to require its removal if they judge the article to be likely to cause injury to the player wearing it or to other players.

Mouth guards worn inside the mouth or routine use of athletic tape with no underlying supporting material do not require prior approval. In all other cases, the following procedure should be followed by coaches and/or team athletic trainers to obtain approval of protective equipment:

- Contact the NCAA Water Polo Secretary-Rules Editor, David Alberstein, at albersteind@gmail.com or by text to 559-901-8159. This should be done as early as possible before the athlete's next game. A timely response to game day or next day requests cannot be assured.
- Provide a description of the equipment item and the purpose for which it is to be worn.
- Provide photographs of the equipment by itself and photographs of the athlete wearing the equipment. In the case of a face guard or eye goggles, the photographs should show the

athlete wearing the equipment with their water polo cap on. Front and side views should be provided. In the case of protective devices for a thumb, finger, or wrist, the photographs should show the supportive device that goes under the tape and the device in place and taped up as it would be during a game.

- Respond in a timely manner to any questions from the secretary/editor.
- Upon approval of the protective equipment, the secretary/editor will issue an email to the coaching staff or trainer documenting approval. A copy of the email is to be shown to the referees prior to each game.

As a note, approvals are provided only for the current season and must be renewed if an athlete intends to wear the same protective equipment in subsequent seasons. The coach and/or team athletic trainer must attest each season that the equipment has not been changed relative to the previously approved configuration.

Based on experience over the last several seasons, the following guidelines will increase the likelihood that a device will be approved for use in a timely manner:

- Faceguards need to be worn such that the adjustment buckles and excess strap length are all tucked under the water polo cap. Ensure that the faceguard fits as close to the face as possible to reduce the likelihood that it could be knocked off or that a finger could accidentally be caught in it. Ensure that the facemask does not have any sharp edges that could injure the player wearing it or another player.
- Eye goggles need to be designed for contact sports. The goggles need to cover the entire orbit of the bone around the eyes to minimize that chance of damage to the eyeball. Ordinary swim goggles are not acceptable.
- Finger or thumb protective devices need to feature an underlying supportive device that is flexible and not totally rigid. It should be as small as possible while remaining effective. The tape that holds the supportive device in place needs to cover the entire device such that no edges are exposed.
- The only wrist protective device that has been approved to date is a small, flexible wrist pad that fits over the injured area and is held in place by tape that covers the entire device. Larger devices that extend from the thumb down to the forearm below the wrist are not acceptable.
- Approval for use of a Q-collar will be provided only for goalkeepers. A request for approval of a Q-collar must be accompanied by a letter from the institution's sports physician attesting that the athlete is not subject to any of the contraindications noted in the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) authorization for marketing of the Q-collar: <https://www.fda.gov/news-events/press-announcements/fda-authorizes-marketing-novel-device-help-protect-athletes-brains-during-head-impacts>

As always, if you have any questions regarding this or other matters of the rules, please feel free to contact me at the email address or phone number shown above.