

NFHS Water Polo Points of Emphasis 2010

These points of emphasis for coaches and referees are guidelines in order to bring about consistency in the interpretation and application of the rules of the game. It is important that referees call the NFHS Water Polo Rules as written and as interpreted in the rules book or as distributed as interpretations during the year. It is also important that referees apply the rules consistently throughout the entire game, regardless of the time remaining in the game, the time remaining on the shot clock or the score of the game. For example, perimeter fouls (ordinary and exclusion) must be called consistently throughout the game, including the last minute when the team with the lead has the ball.

This list has been shortened by eliminating those points of emphasis and instructions to referees that are included in the rules book. The term “center” is used instead of “set” throughout these points of emphasis. The detailed instructions for officiating in shallow-bottom pools are located in Appendix C and in Rule 20-5.

1. Risk Management Warnings – Referees and coaches should note the risk management warnings prior to Rule 1.

a. Players shall enter the water feet first at all times. The referee must point out the rule to a representative of the offending institution whose players are not in compliance. If the situation persists, the referee must notify the appropriate authority as determined by the state association or section (each state association or section must draw up guidelines for the reporting of non-compliant coaches/schools). No game penalties may be instituted nor do the game officials contact the school directly subsequent to the game.

b. Before the start of the game, the referees shall meet with facility personnel for the purpose of knowing how to summon emergency assistance should it be required. This includes agreement on appropriate signals (whistles) to summon aid as well as awareness of facility personnel who will summon first responders.

2. Wasting Time – The foul of wasting time has been eliminated from the rules. The elimination of this rule means that a team no longer must advance the ball towards the offensive end of the pool. However, if a team relinquishes possession of the ball by throwing (dumping) the ball into a vacant area of the pool before the expiration of the 30-second possession time, the referee shall blow the whistle, turn the ball over, and the shot clock is reset.

3. Simultaneous Exclusion Fouls – The referees must be certain that both players have fouled each other before calling a double exclusion. It is preferable if the referee can determine which player fouled first, as it is better to call either a defensive exclusion if it was the defense or (usually) an offensive turnover if it was the offense. However, for example, if the center forward and the center defender are both being overly physical, it is correct for the referees to exclude both players and award the ball back to the offense with a new 30-second shot clock.

4. **Promoting Offensive Action** – Referees should promote offensive action. The referees shall refrain from declaring a foul if, in their opinion, such declaration would be an advantage to the offending player's team (Rule 7-3). It is always permissible for the referees to delay their whistle briefly to make sure that any offensive advantage is not taken away. When in doubt, the referees should make their call in favor of the team on offense. The referees should avoid calling ordinary defensive fouls (notably at the center position) away from the ball as this takes away the advantage and flow from the team on offense. If the referees have decided not to call a series of minor fouls committed by the defense, then they should not call an equally minor offensive foul a moment later at that same spot. Likewise, referees should call ball under only when the ball is clearly under water for more than a fraction of a second.

5. **Calling Offensive Fouls** – Referees should avoid calling minor offensive fouls away from the ball if they do not affect the game. Sometimes it is correct to delay making a call for a split-second to see if the offensive foul will affect the game. Obvious fouls (for example, holding above the water) by the player on offense at the center position should be called immediately. In most cases referees should call fouls on the team on offense as ordinary offensive fouls (ball turnover, with no exclusion). At the center forward position, the referee should call an offensive exclusion foul only in the most severe cases (an offensive turnover usually being the more appropriate call). However, if the offense commits a gross or overly physical foul such as kicking or elbowing, it should be called immediately as an offensive exclusion foul or even as an offensive misconduct foul.

6. **Competing for Position at the Center Position** – When the ball is not at the center position, referees should allow competing for position between the center forward and the center defender. However, neither player can commit an exclusion foul to gain a better position or to keep an existing position. Excessive force, overly physical play, arms out of the water and around an opponent, and suit grabbing to change or hold position should be called as an offensive turnover or as a defensive exclusion foul or even as misconduct, depending upon the nature of the foul. If the referee sees this type of foul, the referee should call it. If both the center forward and the center defender are facing each other and holding, the offensive player must let go and face the ball before the pass is thrown to the center position, or an offensive foul should be called.

7. **Calling the Center Position** – Among the most important aspects of the game for referees to call consistently is the play at the center position. Referees should consider the negative consequences of blowing a quick whistle. When the ball comes into the center position, the referees need to be patient in allowing the center forward the opportunity to play the ball. A quick whistle at the center position may take away an offensive advantage and eliminate, however unintentionally, the scoring threat of the center forward. If the center defender holds, sinks or pulls back the offensive player or is overly aggressive, an exclusion should be called unless calling a foul takes away a scoring advantage. If the center defender has established an appropriate defensive position and the foul is not overly aggressive, and there is no scoring advantage, an ordinary foul should be called to maintain offensive possession. If an overly aggressive foul does take away the offensive advantage, then an exclusion foul should be called.

8. Calling the Center Position When a Crash is Coming – When the ball is at the center position and a crash is coming, referees may call either an ordinary foul or an exclusion foul against the center defender. If the center forward has an advantage and wants to try to shoot, the referees should wait momentarily and then call an exclusion foul if the defender commits an exclusion foul to prevent a shot attempt. If the center forward has no advantage and is fouled while trying to pass to an open teammate, it is correct for the referees to call a quick ordinary foul so that the offensive team maintains possession. However, if a bad entry pass is made that is closer to the defense, then the referee may refrain from calling a foul. If there is no crash coming, the referees should let the center forward work with the ball to try to create an advantage.

9. Calling Inside the 5-Meter Area – To determine whether there should be an exclusion foul or a penalty foul called, the referees must concentrate on determining the defender's position in relation to the offensive player. The offensive player having an advantageous position and a probable goal are the crucial factors in determining whether a penalty foul is the appropriate call.

10. Calling the Transition Out of the Back Court – Referees should allow the former offensive and defensive players to separate after a possession change. The referee transitioning from front court to back court must be aware of the effort to separate at the center position and should call the appropriate offensive or defensive foul as determined by who either holds to prevent separation or who initiates the additional contact after separation. Do not call a foul too quickly, but if either player aggressively sinks, pulls back, or kicks off to gain initial separation a foul should be called. Once these players have separated, a foul can be called on either or both of these players for a kick off or for a hold, sink or pull back. This concept refers primarily to the former center forward and center defender, but should be applied to all players in the water.

11. Control of the Game – It is important for the referees to keep control of the game. A player who commits an overaggressive, dangerous or violent foul should be called for either misconduct or flagrant misconduct and removed for the remainder of the game, rather than just excluded for 20 seconds. Players in the water who show disrespect toward the referees should be removed promptly for the remainder of the game for misconduct or for 20 seconds for a minor act of misconduct.

12. Control of the Benches – Referees should be certain to keep control of the benches. However, they should not listen for and be overly sensitive to comments by coaches and players on the bench, and they should not try to “catch” a coach saying something. If the coaches or players on the bench start questioning calls, the referees should issue a stern warning. If the head coach, assistant coach or players continue to question the referees' calls, a yellow card shall be issued to the head coach, assistant coach or bench as appropriate, to be followed by a red card to the head coach, assistant coach or to an individual player on the bench, if necessary. The head coach and captain may address the referee at the intervals between periods, during time-outs or with permission of the referee. In addition, the head coach may speak to the referee when filing a protest. The rule relating to who may address the referee (Rule 7-4) and at what times shall be enforced consistently and according to the rules. The referees must apply the rules equally and fairly, regardless of gender, experience, responsibilities or intonation of voice of the coach.

13. Putting the Ball into Play – Referees shall ensure that players who are awarded a free throw put the ball into play properly and within a reasonable length of time (Rule 19-4). Referees shall also ensure that defensive players do not interfere with the free throw (Rule 21-5).

14. Direct Shots on Goal – The option of a direct shot on goal comes as a result of an ordinary or an exclusion foul called outside 5 meters. Referees are instructed to apply Rule 7-3 at all times. This rule includes the statement: “The referee shall not declare an ordinary foul when there is still a possibility to play the ball.” When an ordinary foul is called outside 5 meters, the defender may not interfere with the taking of the free throw or direct shot as defined in Rule 21-5. The offensive player who is fouled outside 5 meters and chooses to shoot a direct shot must do so immediately, as defined in Rule 14-3.

15. Fouling during a 6 on 5 – Referees must carefully watch defenders during a 6 on 5 to be sure they are not sinking offensive players or grabbing their arms, especially on the posts. If they do, an exclusion foul (or a penalty foul if a goal was likely to occur) should be called.

16. Drive/Perimeter Defense – If the offensive player swims over or into a defensive player (defined as the area between the defender’s shoulders) an offensive foul should be called and the ball turned over. If the defender impedes or blocks the free movement of the offensive player by holding, sinking or pulling back, the defender should be excluded. A defender cannot hand-check, impede, hold or grab the suit of an attacker who is trying to move. Additionally, referees should exclude a defender who initiates contact by moving laterally to prevent an attacker from driving. If a defender grabs the arm or hand or sinks a perimeter player before a pass has arrived, the defender should be excluded. Referees must be aware of the situation where an offensive and defensive player “lock-up” (face each other and hold each other to prevent the free movement of either player). The referee must attempt to punish the player (either offense or defense) who initiates the contact in this situation. If both players are holding, then the offensive player must release the defensive player before initiating a drive or receiving a pass or be called for an offensive foul (Rule 20-9 and Rule 20-10). If the offensive player attempts to separate and the defensive player does not release the offensive player, the defender should be excluded for holding (Rule 21-8).

17. Impeding by Ducking Under – If the player on offense gains advantage by ducking under (impeding – Rule 20-9) the defender, this should be called as an offensive foul and the ball turned over. This action can occur anywhere in the pool, including the perimeter when a driver ducks under to gain a position of advantage, at the center forward position, or in the transition from defense to offense. The referee should not call an exclusion foul on the defense if the referee does not see the offensive player duck under but then does see, immediately after that action, the defender put both arms in the air to show there is no foul. The defender does not need to get off the offensive player, as it was the offensive player who went under water to put the players into that position. However, the defender may not use one or both hands to hold down the offensive player.

18. Minor Acts of Misconduct. The minor act of misconduct (MAM) penalty of exclusion for 20 seconds for player behavior such as minor shoving, taunting or directing minor comments at the referees, can only occur during play (Rule 21-10) If the minor act of misconduct occurs

during interval time, the referee shall exclude the player for 20 seconds with immediate substitution for the first instance of this foul. The referee shall then immediately warn both head coaches that the next minor act of misconduct committed by any player during interval time in that game will result in a game exclusion for misconduct.

19. Recognition of and Correction of Errors – The referees must be aware of and, if possible, correct certain errors as described in Rule 7-9 in the interest of fairness. No team shall gain an advantage over an opponent because of this type of error (technical errors by desk officials, equipment malfunction, difference in hand signals of the referees, and misapplication of rules). Note that this list does not include errors made by the players. For example, if a substitute player enters early during an extra-player situation without being signaled from the desk, a penalty shot and exclusion of the player for 20 seconds must be awarded for a violation of Rule 21-13.

20. Non-Conforming Pool Markings and Equipment – Before the game, the referees shall ensure that the field of play, game equipment, suits and caps comply with the rules, make any corrections possible at that time, and report any issues with the field of play, non-conforming caps or suits, abandonment of game, forfeiture of game, etc., committed by a competing school to the state association or section office, school athletic director, and the assigning authority, in order that these may be corrected. (Note: each state association shall establish its requirements for reporting.)