

Water Polo Conference, Day 3: the three-day event comes to a close

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The [FINA World Water Polo Conference](#) [1] closed with more than 200 delegates from 105 nations hearing the new direction of the sport and the possibility that rule changes will help drive the process.

FINA President Dr Julio Maglione praised the process with so many of the FINA nations gathered in Budapest.

At the closing press conference he said:

“This gathering was fundamental to discuss the future of Water Polo!

“This conviction was a reality here in Budapest! The protagonists of our beloved sport – athletes, coaches and referees -- but also those in charge of promoting, marketing and elevating the level of water polo, got together and came to a conclusion: We need to change.

“And more important: we must change now!

“I take this opportunity to thank the TWPC and all experts for the extraordinary work behind this organisation. And the main outcome of their effort is that the water polo family is definitively walking in the same direction.

“In the direction of progress, in the direction of a more dynamic and appealing game, in the direction of the younger generations, in the direction of what sponsors and partners are looking for, in the direction of what spectators, TV and digital users want to see and enjoy,” Dr Maglione said.

“Thanks to a courageous exercise of democracy and transparency, everything was discussed openly -- rules, development, branding, event organisation, sport presentation, Olympic challenges, image and communication, technology and innovation and the game’s attractiveness.

“The outcome of these discussions is that the dream of the water polo community may be a reality soon; to transform the game into an even more attractive experience, at all levels.

“We all agree that water polo has all the ingredients to be a great success; it is played in the water, has good-looking athletes, and generates passion and emotion.

“I believe we now have all the tools to modernise the game. To improve it. To take it to another level. To adapt it to the 21st century.

“Let’s do it, without any delays. Water polo has a rich 150-year history. But its future starts now. Today. Tomorrow, when we all return home,” he said.



Session 1

New activities in water polo

The day started with a presentation from a trio of Technical Water Polo Committee members – honorary secretary Wim Keman, Ken Kuroda and Andy Hoepelman.

Keman introduced the referee pathway and the establishment of a two-day referee development school, followed by an examination.

The FINA e-learning platform will be established for entry level officials and mandatory for all referees before being allowed to participate in the certification school. It will all be in English and everyone must have a basic level of the language. This is because technology being used by referees poolside.



The certification qualification will last for four years. Re-certification includes two-day technical workshops before major FINA competitions.

The e-learning platform is set for a **December 2018 launch**.

Code of conduct

The objectives include developing a uniform standard of behaviour and awareness of responsibilities. Also, neutrality and fairness, maintaining a high level of knowledge and professionalism are major factors.

Respect, relations with colleagues, players and coaches and have exemplary behaviour on and off the field.

A dress code must be adhered to and be aware of the danger of social media, especially during competitions.

Kuroda produced the FINA competition update. It has been suggested that the World Championship competition include more than the 16 teams currently for men and women, possibly 20-24 teams with the schedule extended to nine days and preliminary matches played in different cities.

Up to 10 matches could be played in a day, up from the eight currently.

The World Cups, being staged this years, may have lost their lustre, but they do include qualification for World Championships.

The Development Trophy for men might need to be rebranded to the FINA Challengers' Cup with the winner qualifying for the World Championships. This would be for countries ranked 25th and below.

The vision for the sport includes accessibility for youth, fans, sponsors and hosts.

Objectives include creating more exciting events, making the game more interesting, easier to play, rebranding, making tournaments easy to watch and setting a four-year plan for major events. There are challenges, so there are proposals to change competition formats to make it more attractive to fans. There is a move to establish a 16 and under world championship to be held in different cities and staged biennially (every two years).



He closed with an excellent quote:

“If Plan A does not work, we still have 25 more characters in the alphabet.”

Hoepelman talked about fresh ideas and competitions in line with the International Olympic Committee’s quest for sports to establish fan-based events over competition based.

Water Polo By The Sea, established in Sydney, Australia by four-time Olympian Thomas Whalan, was showcased with the ideas of fantastic images from iconic locations.

Elite sport and beach culture are the keys, making it an all-day family fun. Beach water polo is the key to promoting the sport in smaller fields of play and focusing on fun with pre- and after-match entertainment.

“It is an opportunity to promote water polo worldwide.”

The Association of National Olympic Committees will stage the first Beach Games in San Diego next year with water polo a potential inclusion in the future.

Mixed water polo is also a suggestion that could be developed in line with other FINA disciplines.

Beach water polo rules are available on the FINA website, but Hoepelman said that competitions should not be restricted by rules.

Legendary coach Ratko Rudic commented that this was “*jet-set water polo*”.

He said that competition was the heart of our community. He lauded the 16 and under world championship and the Development Trophy concept.

Italian men’s coach Alessandro Campagna suggested that FINA organise the first beach water polo world championships.

The presentations sparked many comments about development, promotion and even one about women’s and men’s competitions being compressed to consecutive days for cost saving and promotion considerations. Going to nine days would mean competitions could be held over 17 days, far too long.

FINA Executive Director Cornel Marculescu even suggested that we go to 3 on 3 water polo much like basketball, which has been included to the 2020 Olympic Games.

Game improvement solutions

Mark Koganov, FINA Technical Water Polo Committee Vice Chairman, addressed the implementation of the new rule suggestions.

The new rule book will be published before the 2019 World Championships, alongside a video rule book, better explaining the rules. He talked of the sharing of information with all national federations, testing of the proposals with referees involved.

Sufficient testing within a limited timeframe, analysis of the testing, clear protocols for data collection and the fact that they should have global support were vital stages of the process.

Tested rules will then go to the TWPC for analysis and eventually to a FINA Technical Congress later in the year.

The world's leading referees will be briefed, trained and utilised in the testing process to maintain consistency.

The suggestion is that the easy adjustments of the 21 suggested rule adjustments be tested first in, perhaps, 100 matches.

Bigger-impact rule changes would need between 300-400 matches around the globe within national federation championships.

Testing will finish in October and the final proposals from the TWPC will be in late October in time for the congress in November 2018.

Major FINA events where testing will occur are the boys' and girls' youth world championships, followed by the two World Cups.

Conference summary Moderator Dale Neuburger, FINA Vice President, wrapped up the outcomes of the three-day event.

“What we know is that we have a great sport: the oldest Olympic team sport. We have an amazing game. We also know we have to step forward. We have to attract new audiences and those who have been our audiences for many years.”

Social media and our delivery, expanding the reach to youth audiences, are key threads in the conversation.

“We have to operate in a similar way to the best leagues in the world. The world expects us to entertain them. They have to come away saying ‘that was a great experience’.”

Neuburger urged delegates not to lose momentum.

“Move forward and make it great.”

The round-table discussions on Friday was a great chance for nations to have their say, firstly on the rule proposals and secondly development.

Technology and innovation was to the forefront with a much higher expectation today, especially from the youth.

“They want to be involved, part of the action.” The broad structure of events on the international level was a prominent discussion both in the continents and world levels. Branding and improving our image is paramount.

“We constantly have to turn the tables to look at the way others see us and make adjustments accordingly.”

“We have to be a leader in the number and quality and interactions relating to our major competitions,” when he spoke about social media. Marketing is another key element while development must be embraced with more people playing the game.

“Now it’s time to flick the switch and ignite the fire,” Neuburger said.

Keynote speaker Adam Krikorian, USA women’s coach, winner of 15 gold medals “*We have a chance to challenge ourselves with new levels of performance. The choice is very clear.*”



“We must move forward with a sense of urgency, but knowing that change does not happen overnight.

“This is clearly our moment and we must embrace it. Nothing we have discussed here should be surprising. We all have the best interests of our sport in our hearts. The past few days have given everyone momentum, he said.

“It is so important that we must push that momentum forward.”

He had a warning that development of the new rules needed to be transparent.

“There is nothing sexy about that.”

Krikorian said the rules *“should be the least of our worries”*.

Some of the challenges include improvements to FINA and infrastructure to promote growth.

“We have to create our own narrative. We have the power to do this.”

Because of the four-year schedule is a “scary” thing for organisers. He said we need to listen to our youth and countries to move forward.

“We must open our hearts and continue forward with maturity and integrity. Put your egos aside and leave them at home.”

He called for transparency with one clear story.

“Now is our time, now is our moment. We must work together that our sport in the next 100 years is the best,” Krikorian said.

Cornel Marculescu, FINA Executive Director He spoke of the brand – FINA.



“What is our main product? The World Championships, the FINA World Championships.”

FINA was unique with so many disciplines and FINA needs to have a good product to go to the market and sell.

“Now I hear the presentation of the new rules. We have to have the courage and the challenge to do it immediately. We need to implement these in the world championships in Gwanju next year.

“We have to take this challenge, otherwise it is going to be very difficult.

“We need to take the courage and take the challenge .. and to be ready to show to the world what we have done here is a step forward for our sport.”

