

New water polo: faster, stronger and more spectacular

Olga Kamardina, FINA Press Correspondent in Russia

The FINA Women's Water Polo World Cup in Surgut (RUS) has been the third "field test" of a set of rule amendments, raised by the Technical Water Polo Committee this year. 18 bullet-points reflecting progressive trends in the game's development, have been duly described and distributed among the FINA Member-Federations in charge of the sport. In fact, the changes touched on a number of water polo's major aspects, including shortened breaks, attacking time and after corner throw countdown, cut by 10 seconds to 20, and introducing direct corner throwing and hitting options for goalkeepers, enabled now to cross centre line and shoots, and perform as a shooter in the penalty shout-out.



The number of players in the entry form, seemed to be the most controversial issue, has been reduced from 13 to 11, to meet the IOC requirements for Olympic quotas, issued on June 2017. The quotas are now held true for the Olympic Games-2020 only and will be a subject of further discussions whether to be implemented at FINA umbrella events.

New technological solutions empowered referees, to make it possible for them communicating during the game's run, and even make benefits of the video-repeat system. All in all, it seems that the "deadly boring time" on the offensive side is now largely reduced. The game's speed has raised to highlight intensity, dynamics and energetic attractiveness of water polo.

To learn more of the impressions, which the "new arrivals" produced on all sides in the game involved, we offered floor to the major experts on water polo and players, who took part in the 17th FINA Women's Water Polo World Cup in Surgut, 4 - 9 September, 2018.



Adam Krikorian, head coach of the team USA:

I strongly believe, that the proposed changes in the rules are very beneficial to water polo. There are one or two, with which I do not fully agree, but almost all of them are quite acceptable. We have played according to the proposed amendments for one week in Surgut, and they showed up a good effect: they have increased the speed and the pace of the game. Water polo has become more exciting to watch.

I love the amendment about playing the ball after a foul wherever it lies, contra fault or turnover, as it speeds up the game: instead of passing the ball backwards, we can now move it forward to the offense. I also like the 6m rule, which allows you both: to keep the ball, and then shoot it without a delay. It creates more actions, reduces stoppage in the game. Those two things I have really enjoyed. The most important thing is physicality of the new character of the game, and the way, how the referees are calling it. The more they let it go, the less whistles there are, and the more physical, the tougher it's going to be, and in the end, the more challenging it is going to be for all parties.

Jason Sileno, team South Africa head coach:

I like the 6m rule, and the opportunity to stop the ball before you shoot. The extra man exclusion rule and 20 seconds on positional attack have made the game much faster and more interesting. 11 players in the line-up for the game is a very difficult rule for us, maybe for some countries - no.

New rules are very beneficial. They encourage more action, a faster game, a lot of movement, and this is all very positive for us. When the game is very static, it is neither pleasing to watch and nor to play. If there is no movement, it is not interesting to either side.

Jessica Ann Milicich, goalkeeper of the team New Zealand:

"New rules" are quite OK. You have to be more aware, because they can shoot at you any time. The game has become a lot faster. But that's exciting, and very good for water polo. We are playing not just for ourselves, but for our spectators, which have already appreciated the new tempo of the game.

Krystine Alogbo, center forward of the team Canada:

I have been playing for over 20 years now, and the "new rules" are never easy to adjust. We are to change our game, I mean, we need to learn them better to have better benefits and see their advantageous sides. The rule, where you can play the ball outside 6m, and you can score and attack, is very impressive. It creates more dangers and more attacks.

11 players in the roster is all about adjustment of positions. At the end of the day, it is something new, and every team is in the same conditions.

Emma Wright, forward of the team Canada:

New rules would be a good way to revolutionize water polo and improve the game. Most of all, I like "being live after a foul at 6m", as being live you can take the ball and shoot it any time, which makes the game much more interesting. I am going to try and play it in the next games. It significantly reduces stoppages, and makes the game even more spectacular and exciting for the broadcasters. Good time to test the new rules, and it is the right time for it.

Ashleigh Johnson, goalkeeper of the team USA:

There is not much change in the game, as far as I have noticed. It's pretty fine to play with the new rules. I like, when it's alive from two meters, they can put it in and shoot, which makes me constantly tuned and pay attention a lot, ready for a challenge. It makes my job more difficult, but I like being challenged.



Anna Karnaukh, goalkeeper of the team Russia:

With 11 players in the roster, there are less options for the coaches to rotate players, which means it got much harder physically for the field players. We are used to having two goalkeepers in the line-up for each game, and not they prefer to enter just one to save field player's numbers. It definitely makes the game more interesting to follow. Just imagine, there is an injury happened to the goalkeeper, or something alike, the net is to be guarded and saved by a field player then. New proposals also allow shooting at 6m, which is also very impressive. Forwards have now got a good choice between the variety of modes and ways launching their attack or shooting by themselves.

Ekaterina Prokofyeva, forward of the team Russia:

New rules is like a breath of fresh air, but it is never easy to adapt to them, to make use of them and to speculate on their efficiency before the thorough analyses is done. There are 18 amendments to the rules proposed. FINA Women's Water Polo World Cup in Surgut was a good opportunity to test them to see if all of them should be implemented.

Ge Weiqing, assistant coach of the team China:

90 percent the new testing rules have not changed the game too much. We need time to discuss them. New rules are all about making the game offensively more attractive and intense. The game is supposed to become more spectacular, which will definitely raise more public attention and will be better used for more TV coverage.

Theoharis Pavlidis, head coach of the team Canada:

I like the proposed testing rules. The game has become faster, more beautiful and more attractive for spectators. I think, that most of the amendments are for the good of our sport. "20 seconds rule" after a rebound or after a new offense, "the goalkeeper has a chance to score a goal" from the other side of the swimming-pool are most beneficial to implement, from my view point.

Margaret Steffens, Most valuable player of the gold medal game, most valuable player of the FINA Women's Water Polo World Cup-2018:

We have been testing new rules for 6 days in Surgut, and we liked them a lot. I think, that the most reasonable one to implement will be reducing time for attack to 20 seconds, which will cut the "dead time". An average attack normally takes 10 seconds, so we shall be able to intensify the game and have much more actions on the offensive side. Maybe it will take some more efforts from the field players to get ready physically for the raised tempo of the game, but personally for me, I have not seen much impact on myself. We have been ready for such a game's flow.

Aleksandr Gaidukov, team Russia head coach:

There are a number of interesting moments about the proposed testing rules. They speeded up the game, the game has become more dynamic and intense. I think, that FINA is looking and going in the right direction. As a coach, I did very much like the 20 seconds rule for the repeat of the attack, 20 seconds after the corner throw, and the absence of free throw. 11 players are not so much for a game, which would make the teams have a better trained all-rounders in their rosters.
