USA claims inaugural women's beach water polo tournament

Russell McKinnon, FINA Media Committee

Gwangju, South Korea.— Fast-format beach water polo is here to stay, according to FINA Technical Water Polo Committee member Andy Hoepelman, from the Netherlands.

A proponent of the discipline for some time and instrumental in pushing for official recognition, Mr Hoepelman said the exhibition series here amidst the FINA World Championships had been “very successful with players, referees and spectators alike enjoying it”.

“It should be optimised with a different environment to make it a lot more fun.”
The chair of the beach water polo committee, Ken Kuroda (JPN), has suggested that rule changes would refine the sport. One obvious flaw in the current timing is that players flag in the dying minutes of the halves, even though there are substitutions.

There are seven players per side with three field players and a goalkeeper in the water and three on the interchange bench.

"This sport has great potential. It is a sport for smart players and is a very offensive game. Teams here have been improving each day by watching each other. My hope is to develop this in Europe because of its high potential."

From the referee's perspective, Frank Ohme (GER) says: "You have to have one eye seeing whether a goal has been scored while the other eye is checking the counter-attack. There is a diversity of players, swimming, strong centres and it's not as physical as normal water polo. The cleverness of the player is most important."

And what of the requirements of a top-class beach water polo referee? "You never have a moment to slow down, to reflect. You have to keep going. Concentration is everything — every single second, even though it is only 10 minutes per half."

The Tournament

On the sixth day of the FINA World Championship beach water polo tournament at the Nambu University Grounds in Gwangju, the finals of the four-team women's competition were staged.

United States of America took out first place with an exciting 14-12 win over Spain. These were clearly the sharpest and most consistent team at the tournament, with 25-year-old Claire Butland (19) at her side throughout the week. Older sister Kylie (26) is playing on the senior team in the world championships.

Australia claimed third place with a 20-16 score against China after leading 9-8 at halftime. Morgan Baxter led her team's scoring with seven goals.

Flash quotes:

Chris Lee (USA) — Head Coach
"For us this is a process to something much bigger. It was important to show up and do a good job. My responsibility to coach my team to make them better. I've had to adjust my game plan to be more physical. My players have to play according to the rules and stay out of red-carded for trying to explain to the referee that it was too physical. This is a dynamic game for smaller players."

Ryann Neushul (USA)
"I'm excited to start the journey as beach water polo is fun and combines all the excitement of normal water polo and is fast paced. I hope Kylie joins us for some games back home. I'm excited to represent my country."

Jewel Roemer (USA)
"It was really fun. It was very different than a regular water polo, so it was just cool to have a different experience."

Helena Dalwases (ESP)
"Well, it's a pleasure to play in this competition. It's a very different game because it's faster, but I like it."

Alla Bonamusa (ESP)
"I think it's a more physical game. It's meant to be fast. I don't know, it's hard to play this game. It's different from normal water polo, but it's going to be a nice experience and happy to be here and have the chance of playing in this tournament."