



New USAWP Rules and Interpretations

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FAQs Added

Effective January 1, 2026, the following rules and interpretations will apply to all USA Water Polo events.

1. WP 5.1 – Seventh Field Player: A team shall field seven players, one of whom shall act as the goalkeeper and shall wear the designated goalkeeper’s cap, thereby assuming the privileges of that position. *Following the start of the match, a team is not required to have a goalkeeper in the water and may instead have seven field players.*

Additional Comments:

- A seventh field player shall not be granted goalkeeper privileges. If a player attempts to block a shot or play the ball using both hands, the appropriate penalty shall be imposed based on the player's position and/or whether the action prevented a probable goal.
- 12/10U are not allowed to remove the goalkeeper for an additional field player.

2. WP 13.1 – Timeout Before Penalty Throw: Each team may request two timeouts per game. The duration of the timeout shall be one minute. A timeout may be requested at any time, including following a goal or *prior to the administration of a penalty throw*, by the coach of the team in possession of the ball. The coach shall do so by verbally calling “timeout” and signaling to the secretary or referee by forming a T-shape with the hands. If a timeout is requested, the secretary or referee shall immediately stop the game by whistle and the players shall immediately return to their respective halves of the field of play. The timeout request can also be made by any device authorized for use in the game.

3. WP 13.2 – Restart of Play After Timeout: Play shall be restarted on the whistle of the referee by the team in possession of the ball putting the ball into play on or behind the half distance

line, except that if the timeout is requested before the taking of a corner throw *or penalty throw*, the throw shall be maintained.

4. WP 15.3 – Goals, How Scored - A goal may be scored by any part of the body except the clenched fist. A goal may be scored by dribbling the ball into the goal. At the start or restart of the game, at least two players* (of either team but excluding the defending goalkeeper) must intentionally play or touch the ball except at the taking of:

- a) a penalty throw;
- b) a free throw thrown by a player into the player's own goal;
- c) an immediate shot from a goal throw;
- d) an immediate shot after a *free throw is awarded anywhere in the field of play* by the player with the ball outside 6 meters;
- e) *after a free throw is awarded anywhere in the field of play* and the player with the ball outside of 6 meters has visibly put the ball into play.
- f) an immediate shot from a corner throw;
- g) after awarding a free throw inside the 6-meter area, when at least two players (of either team but excluding the defending goalkeeper) intentionally play or touch the ball.
- h) after a corner throw is awarded and the player puts the ball into play, a goal can be scored after faking (simulating a shot) or swimming with the ball.
- i) after a free throw is awarded to a player inside 6 meters, the player is allowed to put the ball into play, move outside of 6 meters, and then shoot and score. Once the player has moved outside of 6 meters, they are considered live and can score from anywhere, including moving back inside 6 meters.*

*At the start of the game or period or if the restart of the game is outside of 6 meters or a corner throw, the player may put the ball into play and then shoot and score.

Additional Comments:

- A player may now score by taking an immediate direct shot or after visibly putting the ball into play if the ball is located outside 6m even if the foul was committed inside 6m. **(12/10U cannot take an immediate direct shot. Only after visibly putting the ball into play)**

- A player may now score by visibly putting the ball into play inside 6 meters and then swim outside 6 meters to shoot, including after a stoppage or delay. Once they move outside of 6 meters, they are considered live and can score from anywhere in the field of play.

- If an exclusion occurs inside the 6-meter area and the whistle is blown while the ball is in the air towards the goal, the goal does not count. A free throw is awarded to the attacking team at the spot of the ball.

- Note: only the first whistle of the exclusion is required before the player outside the 6-meter line may shoot. Additional whistles do not need to be completed before the shot is taken and scored. In other words, a goal may be scored as the official is completing the exclusion whistles.

5. WP 21.16 – To Waste Time - now eliminated from the rules.

NEW 21.16 - *For a team to deliberately give up possession of the ball.*

Additional Comments:

- Teams will no longer need to continue to play offense or advance the ball during their possession time.
- New 21.16 clarifies “dumping the ball” as an ordinary (contra) foul.

6. NEW WP 22.21 - If at the taking of a penalty throw the goalkeeper moves forward before the referee blows the whistle and the player takes the shot and a goal is not scored, the goalkeeper shall be excluded for 20 seconds and the penalty throw shall be re-taken. Another defending player in the field of play may take the position of the goalkeeper but without the goalkeeper’s privileges.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. WP 5.1 – Seventh Field Player

Q: Are cap changes still allowed between goalkeepers and field players?

A: Yes.

Q. Why would a team want a 7th field player with no goalkeeper privileges instead of switching a field player to a goalkeeper cap?

A. If a team is playing for the final shot of the period or game, there would be no need to have a goalkeeper as all of the attacking players would be on the attacking side of half with little or no time remaining when the shot is taken. This rule saves time and the unnecessary hassle of

changing caps. All cap changes must be communicated to the referee, who will then inform the table staff.

Q. While playing with a 7th field player, if a penalty foul is called on a player, can a goalkeeper be substituted before the taking of the penalty throw?

A. No. Substitutions and cap changes before the taking of a penalty throw is not allowed. If the team on offense calls a time-out before the taking of a penalty throw, both teams can make substitutions and cap changes.

Q. While playing with a 7th field player, if the field player blocks or attempts to block the penalty shot with two hands, what is a penalty?

A. If the goal is scored, the goal counts and no penalty is imposed on the field player. If the shot is missed or blocked, the player is charged with a penalty foul and the penalty shot is retaken.

Q. Why isn't it allowed to replace the goalkeeper with another field player in 12/10U?

A 12/10U goalkeeper is not allowed to cross half pool to play with an extra player in the attacking half. Due to this rule, an additional field player is not allowed.

2. WP 13.1 – Timeout Before Penalty Throw

Q. Can the team on defense call a time-out after the offense calls a time-out?

A. No, only the team on offense or the team that will be on offense after a goal is scored can call a time-out.

4. WP 15.3 – Goals, How Scored

Q. Is the referee required to raise their arm if an exclusion is called inside of 6 meters and the player with the ball is outside 6 meters? Also, do they need to raise their arm if the player with the ball was fouled inside of 6 meters but then moves outside of 6 meters?

A. No, for both cases. The referees are only required to raise an arm after a foul is awarded outside of 6 meters, but within one meter of the 6-meter line, to indicate that the player is eligible for an immediate direct shot.

6. NEW WP 22.21

Q. Are the shooter and goalkeeper required to remain on the 5-meter line and goal line, respectively, and not move until the referee blows the whistle to administer the penalty shot?

A. Correct. The shooter must start their shooting motion, without delay, after the whistle has blown. The goalkeeper cannot move beyond the goal line before the whistle has blown.

Q. What is the penalty if the goalkeeper moves forward and the goal is scored?

A. The goal counts and no penalty is imposed on the goalkeeper.

Q. For wall cages, does the goalkeeper's head have to be on the goal line or is it their hips?

A. Due to the limited space inside of wall cages, the goalkeeper hips must be on the goal line. The goalkeeper's hips cannot come forward off of the goal line before the referee blows the whistle. If they push off the wall or goal to block a shot and the goal is not scored, it is a penalty foul and the penalty shot is retaken. If the goal is scored, no penalty is imposed on the goalkeeper.

Q. Wouldn't it be considered a correctable error if the referee blows the whistle as the goalie moves forward off of the line?

A. No, referees will do their best to catch a goalkeeper moving out before they blow the whistle but it is not considered a correctable error. It is similar to a sprinter attempting to time the referee's whistle to get an early jump on the sprint.