



GETTING STARTED

Step 1. Plan Your Commitment

Determining exactly what your commitment will be and how your season will be conducted is the first step to getting a program off the ground. Answering the following questions will help you proceed through this step.

1. How many practices per week?
2. When will you begin and end (daily and seasonal)?
3. What ages will be coached?
4. How many games should be played?
5. Will anyone act as an assistant?
6. Will parental involvement be required (transportation, fundraising, publicity, etc.)?
7. How many athletes are practical?
8. Is this volunteer or professional commitment (paid or unpaid)?
9. What are the school or Club requirements regarding registration and clearance of athletes, coaches and officials?

Step 2. Find Athletes

Water polo can provide your swimming program with a great opportunity to recruit new talent from the community. If you are a high school, YMCA or club swimming coach with access to the school system, visit the elementary and middle schools in your area. Summer swim leagues are also a great source for recruits. Try to maintain a positive relationship with the swimming coaches in your area and elsewhere.

Kids with less swimming ability may sometimes be recruited for water polo. Although these kids many not become superstars, their involvement may pay off next swim season by adding greater depth you your roster.

To stimulate interest, show a video of water polo or give a short talk about the sport (promotional videotapes are available for the price of through the U.S. Water Polo office). Some coaches send letters to incoming freshman at their high schools, encouraging them to get involved. Regardless of how you present the material, marketing increases the size of you squad.

If you are not a swim coach with direct access to athletes, determine the age you want to coach and target that group for recruiting purposes. If you don not have a preference, a good age to begin with is 15 years of younger. Contact the local department of recreation or you local swim coach, indication that you would like to begin a program. A high school coach may help to recruit players for you, since it will feed his program at a later date. If you cannot locate a place to get started, contact USA WATER POLO and they will put you in touch with you district chairman, who man know of opportunities available in your area.

If you are targeting your recruitment spiel to parents or administrators, make sure to accentuate the sport's positives:

- Safety – small risk of injury.
- Healthy – great workout for entire body in short amount of time.
- Team sport – benefits of working together with others & learning about others.
- Low cost – need swim suit as major piece of equipment.
- Maximum utilization of aquatic facility.



Step 3. Arrange Pool Time

Most communities have swimming pools available for public use. The local recreation director will normally welcome a volunteer coach with open arms and assist with the arrangements for pool time. If you are dealing with a school administration, speak to the aquatics director first. Naturally, if you are a swimming coach, you have the inside track on pool time, but you will still need to receive permission from your school board or athletic director.

The amount of pool time to arrange will be a function of several variables, including availability, your time, number of athletes, cost (if there is a rental fee), and your philosophy. A typical beginning for kids 15 years of age and under might be once or twice per week for an hour and a half.

Step 4. Determine a Budget

Determining an outline of your costs will be important, although you will be unable to make an exact projection of all your expenses until you actually begin practicing. Most of your budget in the immediate future will depend upon three basic items:

1. Pool costs
2. Equipment costs
3. Travel costs
4. Production and game management costs

The key to the first two costs will be your association with the facility staff. Your success at selling the administration on the value of starting a water polo program at its facility (either for the community or in the case of a high school or college, for the students), will greatly influence whether you will be required to pay for pool time and basic equipment (see Chapter 11, Budgeting For a New Program).

Step 5. Arrange a Meeting

Now that you have all of the details mapped out and a basic idea of your initial costs, the next step is to meet with everyone involved. This provides parents and players an opportunity to ask questions and meet the new coach. Before this introductory meeting, make sure everything is written down and available for those attending. Written information should include:

1. Tentative schedule for practices and competitions
2. Approximate budget and individual costs for each player
3. Coaching philosophy (why are you coaching)
4. Team rules (lateness, drugs, etc.)
5. Permission forms for minors
6. USA WATER POLO registration forms for insurance

This meeting should also include a discussion on parental involvement if your athletes are young. Parents can be valuable resources by handling many of the logistical details involved with running a team.

Step 6. Order Equipment and Register Your Athletes

Collection of the enrollment fee from your athletes will enable you to purchase the equipment not furnished by the facility you will be using. This equipment will be required before your first practice, so this needs to be accomplished as soon after your meeting as possible. Likewise, you will need to register your athletes with United States Water Polo for insurance purposes, in order to protect the facility, yourself, and your athletes.



Step 7. Begin Practices and Games

Since water polo is not as common as other sports, it is unlikely that your players will have seen a game before you begin your first practice. In addition, many of your players have only been exposed to competitive swimming, which is an individual sport. You will therefore need to educate your athletes about both the sport and team concept. (Check the US Water Polo website for a complete schedule of Club competition in your area).

Teaching them about the sport can be accomplished by ordering videotapes of water polo games, or by taking them to a tournament to watch. Teaching them to be unselfish and to rely on one another rather than themselves may be more difficult. Some coaches require the team to do everything together and organize social events for this purpose. Other coaches create games that force the players to depend on each other. For example, conducting a scrimmage where only the weakest players (determined by the coach) may score. Regardless of how you teach this concept, your team's success will depend on how well your players work together.

Mentor Program

New coaches may sign up with experienced coaches in their areas, to gain knowledge and expertise. This program allows new coaches to learn without the pressure of being in charge of the team.

National Camps

You may work as a student coach at one of the Olympic Training Centers, in either Colorado Springs, Colorado, or Lake Placid, New York. In both locations, you will stay at the camp and serve as an assistant, working with some of the best young talent in the country. During your time, you will be exposed to national team coaching techniques and strategies. In addition, members of the national team coaching staff will demonstrate the proper ways to teach the skills of the game. Camps vary in length and occur at different times of the year. United States Water Polo pays for all expenses, with the exception of your round trip transportation and nominal participation fee.

Area Camps

Area camps used in the selection of athletes for the national camps held at the Olympic Training Centers, serve another purpose. Conducted over a weekend or on an afternoon, these camps and clinics increase the skill and knowledge of all those involved.

Clinics at Championship Events

The AWPCA conducts clinics at selected national championship tournaments. These clinics are taught by the national team staff members and other experienced coaches from around the country. Attendance is open to anyone with interest.

P.A.C.E. Coaches Clinics

The national team offers more advanced coaching education seminars based upon the "USA System of Play" at many of their PACE clinics. Contact the USA Water Polo National Teams office at: 714-500-5445 phone or ntprograms@usawaterpolo.org