

# Water Polo

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**WATER POLO IS ONE OF THE WORLD'S** more diversely conceived sports. It is thought to have originated in lakes and rivers of England in the mid-1800s as an adaptation of rugby. The London Swimming Association designed a set

of water polo rules for indoor swimming pools in 1870. The early rubber balls used for the game came from India and were named *pulu*—the Indian word for ball. So the sport came to be known as “water polo.”

The Scots added goalposts to the game in 1877 and replaced the rubber ball with a soccer ball. They also transformed it into more of a competitive sport by establishing additional rules, which mandated that the ball stay on the surface and that the players could not be tackled unless they had the ball. The Scottish version of the game became popular in England and Europe in the late 1800s. Modern water polo is played with teams of seven players, using a water polo ball made of waterproof nylon.

Water polo is now popular around the world—in Europe (particularly in Hungary, Greece, Italy, Russia, and the

former Yugoslavia), the United States, Canada, and Australia—and in recent Olympic Games China has been a significant presence.

Water polo was the first team sport added to the Olympic program, in 1900, and women's water polo made its first showing in 2000. The Fédération Internationale de Natation Amateur (FINA) was founded in 1908; it has been the international governing body for the sport since that time.

## Colonial Development

After the first Opium War (1840–1842), Hong Kong became a colony of England. The English brought competitive swimming and water polo to their new colony, but until 1930, only English residents could participate in events. Nonetheless, in 1924, local Chinese built several swimming pools, allowing them to play water polo, and by 1928 the sport had spread to the mainland of China.

In 1929 the Hong Kong and Macao Aquatic Games were held in Guangzhou, the entry city to mainland China and the Pearl River Delta. Before the games the Singapore water

China's men's water polo team.



polo team had visited Hong Kong and Guangzhou, providing examples of “pass,” “shot,” and “move” techniques. The Singapore team was the first foreign water polo team to visit China. In 1930 the Zhongshan University and Yuexiu District water polo teams were founded. They later competed with water polo teams from Hong Kong.

In 1931 the Guangzhou Water Polo Championships were held. This event was the first formal water polo championship held in mainland China. After the championships elite athletes were chosen to form the new Guangzhou water polo team. Between 1932 and 1937, water polo boomed in Guangzhou; dozens of water polo teams were formed, and tournaments were held frequently. But as the Japanese troops invaded China in 1937, war put an end to this and other recreational activities.

After World War II, water polo started up again, first in Guangzhou, and then in other big cities, such as Beijing, Tianjin, and Shanghai. By 1959, ten years after the People's Republic of China (PRC) was founded, the First National Games were held in Beijing and nine teams participated in the water polo events. From then on water polo became a formal sports event in China. Due to the great famine in the early 1960s, local governments were unable to support the training of water polo teams; competitions and training stopped between 1961 and 1962.

Since 1973 water polo has begun to develop again in China. The national team swept the gold medals at the Eighth, Ninth, and Tenth Asian Games.

**TABLE 1 ■ Olympic Games Water Polo Medal Winners—Men, 1988–2004**

CITY	YEAR	GOLD	SILVER	BRONZE
Athens	2004	Hungary	Serbia-Montenegro	Russia
Sydney	2000	Hungary	Russia	Yugoslavia
Atlanta	1996	Spain	Croatia	Italy
Barcelona	1992	Italy	Spain	USSR
Seoul	1988	SFR Yugoslavia	United States	USSR

**TABLE 2 ■ FINA Water Polo World League Medal Winners—Men, 2002–2007**

CITY	YEAR	GOLD	SILVER	BRONZE
Berlin	2007	Serbia	Hungary	Australia
Athens	2006	Serbia-Montenegro	Spain	Greece
Belgrade, Serbia	2005	Serbia-Montenegro	Hungary	Germany
Long Beach	2004	Hungary	Serbia-Montenegro	Greece
New York	2003	Hungary	Italy	United States
Patras, Greece	2002	Russia	Spain	Hungary

However, in the 1980s the development of the game in China slowed down due to the expense of maintaining water polo teams. Many provincial teams were disbanded. China then fell behind other Asian countries. It was not until 2000 that women's water polo started to develop, and the national team was formed in the hope that China would win a medal in the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing. Since then, the women's team has played in the 2006 and 2006 World Championships.

Twelve men's teams and eight women's teams qualified for the Beijing Olympics, with China the representative of the Asian continent. Based on past performances in the Olympic Games and the FINA Water Polo World League (see tables 1–4), Hungary and Serbia were among the favorites in men's water polo, while Italy and the United States were considered favorites in women's competition.

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**TABLE 3 ■ Olympic Games Water Polo Medal Winners—Women, 2000–2004**

CITY	YEAR	GOLD	SILVER	BRONZE
Athens	2004	Italy	Greece	United States
Sydney	2000	Australia	United States	Russia

**TABLE 4 ■ FINA Water Polo World League Medal Winners—Women, 2004–2007**

CITY	YEAR	GOLD	SILVER	BRONZE
Montreal	2007	United States	Australia	Greece
Athens	2006	United States	Italy	Russia
Kirishi, Russia	2005	Greece	Russia	Australia
Long Beach	2004	United States	Hungary	Italy