



2026-2028 NFHS RULE CHANGES

1-8: Placement of team benches and the administrative table shall be determined by the facility layout and may be positioned on either side of the pool.

Rationale: Team benches shall be located in close proximity to the administrative (score) table to ensure efficient communication and game management. If structural or facility limitations exist, the benches and tables may be relocated as necessary to promote safety, visibility, and effective game administration.

1-12-4: Prohibits audio or video devices from being worn by players during the game.

Rationale: Defines the types of electronic devices prohibited by the rule.

2-1-1, 7-3-5: After the start of a game, a team is not required to have a goalkeeper and may instead have seven players. In that case, no field player will have goalkeeper privileges. As a result of the change, Rule 7-3-5 has been deleted.

Rationale: Consistent with national trends of the sport.

2-9: Additional language prohibits use of illicit substances by participants, team personnel or coaches during a contest.

Rationale: Provides consistent language for NFHS rules books prohibiting the use of alcohol, tobacco, and controlled or illicit substances.

3-3: Permits an intercom headset system to be utilized by referees.

Rationale: Adds an effective tool for referee communication and collaboration.

3-22: Additional language prohibits use of illicit substances by officials during a contest.

Rationale: Provides consistent language for NFHS rules books prohibiting the use of alcohol, tobacco, and controlled or illicit substances.

4-7-1, 4-13: Allows either the offense and/or defense to call a 30-second time-out after a goal is scored.

Rationale: Previously, the team on defense was only allowed to call a full time-out after a goal was scored, not a 30 second time-out. This rule change allows the defense to call a full time-out or 30 second time-out after a goal.

4-22-1 NOTE: A goal can be scored directly after a correctable clock error and after the referee has removed the ball prior to the corner throw for any administrative reason.

Rationale: Provides administrative flexibility for officials by allowing a direct shot if the ball is removed for any administrative reason prior to the taking of a corner throw.

4-22-1: When the ball is located outside of 6 meters, it will no longer matter where the foul is located to be able to shoot directly and score.

Rationale: This change promotes offense. It also removes one of the parameters of scoring which was that both the ball and the foul needed to be outside the 6-meter line. With the rule change, only the ball needs to be outside of 6 meters (while the foul can take place inside of 6 meters).

4-22-2: This rule change allows the player to put the ball into play, move outside 6 meters, and score from anywhere in the field of play.

Rationale: This change promotes offense.

4-27: A player who voluntarily leaves the field of play may re-enter immediately upon reaching the re-entry area nearest to that player's goal line.

Rationale: Clarifies the protocol when a player voluntarily leaves the field of play and re-enters in a manner other than what is specified by rule.

5-1: The additional language clarifies that a ball is considered out of bounds when a player in possession reaches the ball entirely across the goal line and outside of the goal posts.

Rationale: Clarifies the definition of out of bounds on an end line.

6-1: Player location is determined by the center of the head relative to the 2-meter, 6-meter, half distance and goal lines. The Goal Area was added to the list of boundaries in the field of play.

Rationale: The lines that define the Goal Area also determine where a player may legally be located.

6-10-1, 6-10-2: Permits the center to let go and attempt to play the ball while it is in the air, provided there is no push off or a sink of the defender.

Rationale: Defines how the center is legally able to play the ball.

6-14-1: The additional language clarifies that a ball is considered out of bounds when a player in possession reaches the ball entirely across the sideline.

Rationale: Clarifies the definition of out of bounds on a sideline.

7-2-4: If a player climbs from the side of the pool instead of swimming to the re-entry area, that player is excluded from the remainder of the game, with substitution after the earliest occurrence.

Rationale: Clarifies that any player, even someone leaving voluntarily, cannot leave the water. If any player does, it is a game exclusion.

7-3-1c NOTES: Establishes a clear definition of “control of the ball” - a concept that is the basis for numerous judgments in water polo, including fouls, advantage, exclusion decisions, and goalkeeper privileges.

Rationale: The clarifications ensure officials, coaches and athletes operate with a shared understanding of what it means for a player to be considered “in control.”

7-8: It is an exclusion foul to use two hands to hold an opponent who is not holding the ball.

Rationale: The additional language clarifies that it is only illegal to hold with two hands when the player is not holding the ball. If a player is holding the ball, the defender can hold using two hands as long as that action is not deemed over-aggressive or violent.

7-12-1: A player receiving a second minor act of misconduct (MAM) in a game will be excluded for the remainder of the game for misconduct.

Rationale: Clarifies that if a player receives a second MAM in a game, the referee will signal a double-handed rolling for misconduct.

7-17: If a defending goalkeeper fails to take the correct position on the goal line or moves off of the line before the referee's whistle and the shot is missed or blocked at the taking of a penalty throw, the goalkeeper is excluded for 20 seconds.

Rationale: Further clarifies what constitutes failure to take position on the goal line and adds a penalty for this behavior.

8-2: Defines circumstances that must exist for there to be a probable goal.

Rationale: Establishes consistent criteria for determining probable goals when an offensive player has the ball inside the 6-meter area in situations not otherwise covered by Rule 8.

9-2: Increases the distance opposing players must be positioned away from a player taking a penalty throw.

Rationale: A penalty throw should be free from interference as the team shooting has already been disadvantaged. Having the defenders on the 6-meter line and 3 meters away solves this issue.



2026-2028 NFHS POINTS OF EMPHASIS

Goalkeeper Play

A goalkeeper who leaves the goal area and commits a foul, should not be considered an automatic penalty foul solely by virtue of leaving the cage. Goalkeepers may commit ordinary fouls and exclusion fouls similar to other field players. A penalty foul shall be awarded only when the foul denies a probable goal-scoring opportunity. If one or more defenders are positioned between the attacker and the goal, or in the direct path to the goal, or if the attacker is at a poor shooting angle or otherwise not in a clear scoring position, the situation does not constitute a probable goal. In such cases, the referee shall award an ordinary or exclusion foul, as appropriate to the nature of the foul.

Free Throws

There is a misconception that a player who is clearly in a position most readily to take a free throw may simply swim away from the ball at any time, allowing the next closest player to take the free throw. This is incorrect. Rule 5-11 states that during a counterattack, a player who has a position of advantage is not required to give up that advantage and take the free throw. However, if there is no counter attacker and the closest player does not have a position of advantage, that player must take the free throw. Failure to do so is an offensive foul.

Simulation

Simulation is a foul. A player may not fake being fouled in order to influence the call of the referee. Referees must not reward simulation by calling a foul that did not occur. When simulation is committed by an offensive player, it is an offensive foul. When committed by a defensive player, it is an exclusionary foul. A common example of simulation occurs when a perimeter attacker intentionally drops the ball, throws the head or body into a defender, and slaps the water while the defender is clearly demonstrating two hands up and no illegal contact.

Identification of the NFHS Authenticating Mark on Game Balls

The NFHS Authenticating Mark ensures easy identification of inflated and non-inflated balls used in interscholastic competition for which the NFHS writes playing rules. All such balls are required to display the NFHS Authenticating Mark.

The use of conforming equipment is essential to the integrity of contests played under the NFHS rules. This mark helps to promote a level playing field by ensuring consistency in the equipment

being used. The mark allows for the development of more sophisticated standards in balls and clearly communicates to administrators, coaches, and officials that these standards are being met.

Non-compliance with these requirements will be reported to the state association for potential penalties, following the contest. Administrators and coaches play a pivotal role in making sure all inflated and non-inflated balls meet these specifications. They must instill the importance of proper equipment use through consistent reinforcement during the pre-competition certification meeting and throughout the season. Game officials must also remain vigilant and report any non-compliant balls to the state association office.

Misconduct

A player receiving a second minor act of misconduct will be excluded for the remainder of the game for misconduct. This addition clarifies that, if the player receives a second MAM in a game, the referee will signal a double-handed rolling for misconduct. MAM/Misconduct should be recorded in the game book. State association procedure determines reportability and subsequent suspension for player misconduct.



WATER POLO COMMENTS ON THE RULES - 2026-28

2-1-1, 7-3-5 - This change allows for substitution of the goalkeeper with a 7th field player, because a goalkeeper is not required after the game begins. This rule saves time and the unnecessary hassle of changing caps. 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. Cap switches between field players and goalkeepers are still allowed.

4-7-1, 4-13 - Allows either the offense and/or defense to call a 30-second time-out after a goal is scored.

4-22-1 - With this rule change, when the ball is located outside of 6 meters, it will no longer matter where the foul is located to be able to shoot directly and score. For example, a foul is called away from the ball on a player defending at the one position, if the player in possession of the ball is outside of 6 meters, that player is eligible to take a direct shot. This change promotes offense. Prior to this change, both the foul and the ball needed to be outside of 6 meters; now only the ball needs to be outside of 6 meters (while the foul can take place inside of 6 meters).

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.

4-22-2 - This rule change goes hand in hand with the proposed rule change for 4-22-1. If a player with the ball inside of 6 meters is awarded a free throw, the player may put the ball in play, move outside of 6 meters and is eligible to score from anywhere in the field. As long as the ball and player move outside of 6 meters, a goal can be scored. Prior to this rule change, if the player with the ball was fouled inside of 6 meters, the ball needed to be passed in order for a goal to be scored. This rule change allows the player to put the ball into play, move outside of 6 meters, and score from anywhere in the field. Referees may raise an arm up vertically to indicate the player has left the 6-meter area, but it is not required.

6-10-1, 6-10-2 - This addition of language aligns with how the game is currently officiated. The rule allows the center forward to face the defender and let go in an attempt to play the ball while it is in the air, as long as there is no push off or sink of the defender.

7-3-1c NOTES - These notes are necessary to establish a clear, consistent, and practical definition of control of the ball, a concept that underpins numerous judgments in water polo, including fouls, advantage, exclusion decisions, and goalkeeper privileges.

7-8 - The rule clarified that it is an exclusion foul to use two hands to hold a player who is “not holding the ball.”

7-17 - Currently, there is no penalty if the goalie jumps off the line and blocks a shot; the penalty throw is simply retaken. Adding a consequence to this rule violation (exclusionary foul) acts as a deterrent. If the goalie moves forward before the whistle is blown and the goal scores, the goal counts and no foul is recorded against the goalkeeper.

8-2 NOTES - This guidance is needed to establish consistent criteria for determining probable goals when an offensive player has the ball inside of 6-meters in situations not otherwise covered by Rule 8.

9-2 - The rules should facilitate a penalty throw that is free of interference as the team shooting has already been disadvantaged. Having the defenders on the 6-meter line and 3 meters away solves this issue. Defenders are allowed to swim toward the cage when the whistle is blown.