

WATER POLO

THINKING DEFENSE: INDIVIDUAL

What is defense in water polo and who plays it?

Generally speaking, defense is the individual and team effort to protect their cage from being shot on. Every single player plays defense including the goalie. The goalie is the last line of defense. General defensive strategy may be man to man or zone based and is usually determined by the coach.

Preventing shots is obviously the primary objective. What are the most important aspects of defense?

- Awareness: Each defender must be aware of the greatest threat to their cage. Remember that you are not defending a person but part of the team defending the goal.
- Communication: Each defender must help their teammates be aware of the game situation in order to effectively back each other up and put up a good defense.
- Stymie and delay: Look for opportunities to slow down the offense. Pressure the ball all over the field. Try to force bad passes and errors. Force the other team to use up their shot clock.
- Foul judiciously: Inside the 5 meter line, a player can't shoot after a foul. Commit ordinary fouls when needed in order to stop the offense and give the defense time to cover up. Between the five and seven meter marks, it is very important not to foul because a shot off the foul in that zone is a likely goal. Outside of the seven, press without fouling in order to use up the shot clock and preventing the attacking team from playing their front court offense effectively.
- Think offense: Based upon the time left on the shot clock and the threat your player presents to the current attack, move into the passing lanes so you will have inside water on the counter attack.

How is the goalie involved in defense?

The goalie is the last line of defense. Ideally the goalie never has to block a shot because the defense is so good but that's unrealistic. Your goalie is like the eyes of the defense. He can help coordinate the defense to reduce the threat to the cage. Any recovery of the ball by defense should go to the goalie (if he is free) unless a forward pass can be made immediately. The goalie has time to look at how the counterattack is shaping up and can make the critical first pass to initiate the offense.

How do you pressure the ball?

Show your hands and eggbeater into your man. Be patient because you are burning their clock. Try to get them to turn their back to your goal. This will eat up time. Continue to push them in this way until they turn to make the pass. As they turn to make the pass, reach out and push their passing arm and attempt force a bad pass.

Are there any other items to be aware of on defense?

Attackers will look for position that forces you on their back or grab you in order to make it look like you are committing the foul. Show your hands, stay off of people's backs, play good polo. If you are beat, call for help and keep working until the threat is neutralized.

IT'S OKAY TO PLAY IN THE WATER