



Australian Underwater Federation



UWRA

UNDERWATER RUGBY
AUSTRALIA

AUF Underwater Rugby Referee Course Level 1

Participants manual

Section 1: Introduction

1. The role of the referee in the match

Let us start this manual by describing a situation that is all too common, not only in underwater rugby but in almost every competitive sport around the planet. The situation takes place, as expected, during some official match whose relevance is not important to us at the moment. At some point during the game, one of the referees spots something they think is not adequate. They stop the game and signal that a free throw should be awarded. The penalized team's captain is obviously not happy about this, and in the heat of the moment goes all out on the referee complaining about that call, previous calls, mentioning how the other team is being favoured, giving reasons why the call is wrong. This goes on for some time, during which the referee is asking the captain to leave. In the end, seeing that the complaints are not stopping, the referee gives the captain a 2-minute time penalty, and the game goes on.

At this point, it is not important whether the referee's call was right, whether the captain should've been kicked out earlier to prevent the game from being delayed or whether the free throw should've been awarded. What is going to be addressed now is one simple question: Why do these situations happen, and why are they so common in underwater rugby?

In the attempt to provide an answer to this question it is important to keep in mind one unequivocal fact about this sport. Despite what the goals a team may have for a particular match or tournament, nearly every player that jumps in the water has one, and only one, thing in their mind: victory. And the truth is that there are, in fact, very few people involved in an official match that don't, deep down, have a desire to emerge victorious, no matter what their odds are.

For some players this feeling is stronger than for others, but it is undeniable that it exists for all of them.

This desire to win is neither a good nor a bad quality, **it is simply a fact**. And it is very important to acknowledge that this exists because it has one very important consequence. Since a player is always in the search for victory, then every opinion they emit during a match is going to be heavily partialised to benefit their own team, and bring them a little bit closer to winning. Hence way you will find captains constantly approaching match officials and having lengthy discussions about calls made against them.

Now, in a friendly match, played during a training session or a social event, it is not important that there is no control between what each side does or doesn't do. But on an official stage, where there are trophies, titles and opportunities on the line, it cannot be delegated to the teams to make the calls, simply because they cannot be trusted to make impartial decisions.

It is here where the role of a referee in a match is defined. As a referee you will be the impartial judge that will make unbiased and informed decisions that will guarantee that official games remain fair for both sides, providing appropriate penalizations to those who break the rules and ensuring that, in the end, the victorious team was that who played the sport at its best. By doing this you will also contribute in keeping everyone in the pool safe throughout the playing time, since when everyone plays within the rules, the chances of injuries are much lower.

Having defined this, then, the importance of the previous statement, the one about players being in the match to win, becomes clear. If while in the water you hold this assumption true in your mind, at all times, you will understand why your opinion is more important than that of any person in the playing area, other than your fellow referees. The truth is that in an underwater rugby match there are three people, and only three, capable of making decisions that can keep the game fair. Those people are **the referees**.

2. The reason why this course is needed

As you may have guessed by now, whenever disputing an official match referees play a crucial role. It is their job to make sure that both teams play on equal grounds, and that the only advantage that they may have over their opponent is their superior skill. Guaranteeing this is not an easy task, though.

For referees to fulfil their role they need to have a very wide range of skills and knowledge that will allow them to make the right decision, at the right time, at all points during the game. Some of these include:

- Knowledge of the sport's rules.
- Understanding of the sport's rules.
- Impartiality.
- Calmness.
- Fitness.

This is not, by any means, an exhaustive list of what qualities a referee needs to have, but a small example of what is needed. Most of these abilities can be acquired either by self-teaching or by on-the-field experience. These are, nonetheless, two rather harsh ways of developing skills as a referee. It is far simpler if a course can be structured, where the necessary abilities have already been identified, and are taught in a targeted manner, that is also in the context of underwater rugby.

This is, then, the purpose of this manual, and associated course. Through the following pages, the basic skills needed to properly officiate an underwater rugby match will be described. They will be explained in as much detail as possible and in the context of the sport. This should give you the confidence to jump in the water to referee a match, knowing that you have acquired all you need to act in an impartial manner, which will give both teams involved the joy of playing a high quality underwater rugby game.

3. Structure of the course

This course is split into two main sections.

In the first section you will learn about the role that a referee plays during a match. This includes the responsibilities that you acquire once you have the whistles in your hands, be it that you're on the surface or underwater.

This section will attempt to give proper explanations of what the roles are of both a water referee and a surface referee. This includes the moments when each of them should act, what kind of attributions they have, and what tools are at their disposal while the match is happening.

After the responsibilities of each official have been established you will learn certain tools that will allow you to control the tempo and tension of a match. It is crucial that a referee is able to manipulate these factors, as this is what will guarantee that games remain within the boundaries of good sportsmanship.

These pages will also explain what the overall behaviour of a referee should be during a game, and how this influences the perception that players have of you, which will in turn affect your ability to maintain control of the match.

Then, section two will explain some of the most basic instruments that the official manual provides referees. You will read about the purpose of each of these tools, and what situations they should and shouldn't be used in, along with the effect they have on the game.

In particular you will read about the hand signals that indicate why you're making a particular call, and what the players should do about it. It will be discussed how and why these signals should be made.

After that, you will learn about what is arguably one of the most important elements at a referee's disposal, the advantage rule and delayed call. This will allow you to determine in which situations these elements should be applied, and the important role they play during a match.

Finally, you'll learn about being a referee during penalty shots. These are some of the most crucial and tense moments during games. Seeing that there is already enough on the line when there is a single attacker against a single defender fighting for a goal, it is extremely important that the actions of the referees, all of them, are spot on. Hopefully this last section will give you all that you need to achieve this.

To close off this section, it is worth to mention that at the end of each chapter you will find a small **"KEY TAKEAWAYS"** box, which will attempt to summarize the most important pieces of information from the text you read. Hopefully they will serve as a nice go-to when you're going through these pages again when refreshing your knowledge.

4. Things that will be taken for granted

Throughout this manual a certain number of things are assumed, which guarantees that the text can be written at a higher level, and redundancies with other resources is minimized.

First and foremost, if you're reading this manual you should've first read, and have become familiar with, the most recent underwater rugby rules published by CMAS. It is pointless for us to rewrite everything that's already stated there, but it will be referenced both explicitly and implicitly.

Even though not a requirement, it is also highly recommended that you read the UWRA/AUF "Referee Qualities" document. This will give you great insight into the overall attitude that any referee, not just for underwater rugby, should have. It will also make it easier to grasp some of the concepts that are explained below, since most of them are based on those principles.

And finally, it is assumed that this is being read by a reasonable person. Even though this manual is intended to normalize the behaviour of officials during matches, it is not a recipe for refereeing. All of the tools explained should be used in the best interest of keeping a game fair and safe. If this sometimes means going against anything mentioned in this manual, then that is perfectly fine. As a referee your best tool is your good judgement.

5. Disclaimer

This manual was written in good faith, with the expectation that it will put you on the right path to becoming a high quality referee. Nonetheless, remember that every time you jump in the water to officiate a match you are responsible for the decisions that you make and the possible effect that they may have on the game. What is mentioned here is meant to be used as guidelines, not to be blindly followed as rules. Always use your best judgement to determine what decision is most appropriate for a particular situation.

All examples made are of hypothetical cases, and with the only purpose of exemplifying the tools being exposed. Any similarities with real situations or people are pure coincidence.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Player's opinions during a match will always be biased, mainly due to their desire to win.
- It is your role as a referee to guarantee a fair match. This requires knowledge, skills and practice.
- Always use your best judgement when officiating a match.

Section 2: The role of the referee

1. A quick reminder

During a match, probably one of the most important rules to remember from the official CMAS manual is rule number 3.1.1. This reads "At least three referees shall be responsible for each match and their decisions are binding". The reasons why this is so important are:

- It clearly states that the only people in the pool responsible for the match are the referees.
- It makes the decisions of the referees binding, forcing every player to abide them.

This short extract of the manual gives you, the referee, complete power over what happens in a match. If you keep this in mind at all times, then hesitation when a player is complaining should not be an issue anymore. The final decision always belongs to the referee.

Always remember, players opinions will be biased. Keep this in mind when considering reverting a decision based on what a contestant has told you.

2. The role of the bottom referee

The CMAS manual defines two types of officials that take care of a match. One deck referee, and any assistants that it may require, and two water referees. In this section we will be talking about the responsibilities that you will have when you're officiating a match from the bottom of the pool.

As a water referee you have a series of pre-defined responsibilities that are listed under section 3.1.3 of the CMAS official rules. Arguably the most important of these, and definitely the ones you need to watch for the most, are:

- Observing any infringement of the rules.
- Signal when a goal is scored.

These two requirements from the water referee conform most of the decisions that you will be making during a match. It is very important to note, then, that both of them require a certain ability to observe that something has happened during a match. This brings us to one of the

most important lessons you must learn while serving this role. You must locate yourself at all times at a point where you can have a clear view of what is happening in the match, but where you do not interfere with the play.

While the ball is being carried somewhere in the middle of the pool, you should usually be in line with the ball, and as close to the edge of the playing area as possible. Being in line with the ball guarantees that you always get a clear line of view to where the play is, allowing you to catch any infringements that may occur, and that could need your involvement. Being close to the edge of the playing area will ensure that you don't incur into any accidental contact with the ball or other players, which could benefit one team over the other.

Sometimes though, you will find that the ball moves closer to the edges of the pool, especially in playing areas where there is a wall on one or both of the sides. If this happens, make sure that you either dive up, if the ball is at the bottom, or down if the ball is being handled at the surface. While doing this there are a couple things that a referee needs to watch out for. First, you must make sure you keep sight of the play, as near the edges (especially walls) games tend to get intense and particularly dangerous. If you see anything you think is wrong, stop the game. Also, try not to move into the field of play. Instead change your vertical position while staying close to the end of the playing area. In matches, the most likely tendency is for the ball to be moved towards the center of the pool, since this is where the goals are located. If a referees are sitting somewhere in the middle, it is more likely that they will interfere with the match.

If for some reason you are forced to move into the field of play, try to get back to the edge as soon as possible.

Now, if the ball is being moved close to a goal, usually closer than 3mts from the wall, your most important objective should be to keep a clear line of sight with the basket instead.

It is common for water referees to agree that one should keep an eye on the goal and the other one on the play. This is a fine strategy to make sure that no dirty play happens close to the basket, which in particular includes players without the ball attempting to displace the defender or goalkeeper, or the defences attempting to move a player not carrying the ball out of an advantage position they may have gained.

This sort of arrangement works very well to keep players in line while a basket is being attacked, but it should not be an excuse for referees to be in a position where they cannot see the goal. The reason behind this is because a score may be visible from one side, but not from the other. So both water referees must be able to determine when a basket has been achieved.

As with refereeing while play is at the middle of the pool, when the ball is close to the basket you should always make sure that you're at a location where you do not interfere with the play. This principle is particularly important in these situations, since the most crucial moments of a game will happen close to the baskets. Here referee interaction would have a much higher impact.

In general try to:

- **Stay clear of the corner between the wall and the exchange area.**
- **Do not attempt to get close to the goal in order to get a better view. Instead move horizontally.**
- **As before, if the ball comes near you, move vertically to avoid contact.**

It is also important when refereeing a match that's close to a basket to remember that if you are the referee on the side of the exchange lane you could be in the way of substitutions. In particular if you do not have scuba gear, always be aware that you may have players diving from behind you, so staying too close to the wall may pose a risk for you and the contestants. Overall, try to stay clear of the exchange area and the exchange lane.

Positioning yourself properly underwater makes fulfilling your responsibilities easier, and guarantees that your decisions will be opportune and keep the match fair.

After proper positioning, the second most important ability that a water referee should master is making calls when infringements happen. In general, every time that you consider a rule was broken you should stop the game and at least award a free throw to the team against which the offence was made. There are certain exceptions to this, in particular when playing the advantage rule and performing delayed calls. These will be discussed in detail later.

A call does not need to happen immediately after the infringement occurred, but it is crucial that it is eventually made. It is important to remark on this fact because as mentioned earlier the duty of a referee is to keep a match fair. Breaking the rules will almost always put a team in an unfair advantage, and consistently failing to make calls will make matches dirty, unnecessarily violent and at times dangerous. So, whenever you're unsure about whether or not making a call, you should always decide to stop the game.

When you stop the match you must consider everything that happens after your whistle to be invalid, for game purposes. It is very common for referees, especially novice ones, to ring the whistles and, seeing that the players continue with the match, just let it go and allow play to continue. This is wrong. Once a call is made, there may be players that do not stop because, for example, they did not hear the whistle. You must assume though that every player that heard you will have stopped playing, so allowing the game to continue would put all those players at a disadvantage. If you've stopped the game, even by mistake, and play continues, keep on whistling until everyone has stopped.

When you bring a match to a halt, it is your responsibility as a referee to let the players know the reason why this happened and what they should do in response. If the call only merits a free throw, make sure first to do the hand signal that corresponds to the given foul, and then signal where the free throw should be taken. The most important part of this sequence is signaling the free throw, as this is what will get the match going. This means that even if you don't know what the signal for the specific foul is, as long as you signal who should have the ball, the teams can continue playing. Any other penalisation that you wish to give to the team that committed the infringement should be notified verbally.

If on the other hand it was not you who stopped the match make sure first that play stops. If players continue the match, keep on whistling, even if it was not you who made the initial call. When the game stops, point with both of your index fingers to the surface so that players know it is not you who will provide the appropriate hand signal. Then, as soon as you know what action needs to be taken, mimic the appropriate hand signal. This allows information to reach the players faster and allows games to flow much more smoothly.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Positioning is crucial when being a water referee.**
- **When play is in the middle of the pool, keep a clear line of sight to the ball.**
- **When play is close to the basket, keep a clear line of sight to the basket.**
- **Your positioning must not interfere with the match.**
- **When making a call always signal what the next steps are.**
- **When stopping the game, do not back down. Make sure both teams stop playing, and invalidate everything that happened after your call.**
- **When in doubt, stop the match**

3. The role of the deck referee

Just as there are two officials in the water making sure that all rules are followed underneath the surface, the CMAS manual also appoints one official to be at the surface. This is the deck referee.

The deck referee's main responsibility is to guarantee that everything that happens outside of the water remains within the rules. Considering that this sport is mostly played underwater, many deck referees tend to make the mistake of thinking that their job is not as relevant. This is an error that you should never make, as it usually has the same detrimental effects over the game as poor water refereeing. This is because there are, in fact, many situations where it is the deck referee that has the appropriate position to decide whether a penalization should or should not be awarded.

One of the main responsibilities that you will have while officiating a match from the surface will be to make sure that all substitutions that happen are legal, which of course also implies guaranteeing that a team always has the correct amount of players in the water. This is particularly important when the play is close to the baskets, as this is when the most substitutions happen and it is also when an illegal replacement would give a team the most advantage.

When a player is leaving the water, always watch for their teammates coming in. Make sure that they don't enter the exchange lane before they are due, and that exchanges are done one-for-one. Each player entering the water must correspond with one player that exits.

As mentioned before, it is also the responsibility of the deck referee to make sure that both teams have the appropriate amount of players in the water. Note that this is not always 6 players, since teams may have one or many 2-minute penalizations on them. This, along with the fact that the game is played underwater, makes it very hard to know whether a team has an illegal amount of players by attempting to determine the amount of people in the pool. Instead, the approach that most deck referees take is to always keep count of the players each team has on the exchange bench. This number does remain constant, even if there are time penalties. So, if at any point you notice that there are less players in the benches than there should be, you can be almost certain that the corresponding team has more players in the playing field than they should.

Any violation on exchanges or amount of players in the water calls for an immediate stop of the play, since this is the kind of foul that requires a contestant to receive a 2-minute time penalty.

Another important role that the deck referee has is starting play. As the CMAS manual states, in **Section 3.1.2.e**: *“The deck referee always starts the game after an interruption...”. This means that every time that the game is halted, no matter who made the call, play should only be resumed under the indication of the deck referee.*

Even though this sounds like a very simple role to fulfil, this is arguably one of the points where most deck referees fail to do a proper job. When the game stops, usually a lot of tension builds up on either side of the pool, particularly when there is hesitation from the officials. This usually leads to situations where players start the match before any signal is given. Many novice deck referees see this as a minor infringement, and just let the game go on. In reality it is completely the opposite, as allowing teams to start the game early allows them to catch their opponents off guard and most of the times results in massive advantages. As a deck referee, it is your responsibility to make sure players only start when you indicate it, and failing to comply with this must result in a possession turnover every time.

The most common moments when false starts are missed happen during free throws. Ironically these are the simplest ones to prevent, as the player taking the free throw is required to hold the ball at the surface to indicate they are ready. This is the only time when you should make your call to start the game. If the ball is brought below the surface, then you shouldn't start the match, so if players start moving, this indicates a false start, meaning that you should stop the game and give the ball to the other team.

It is important to remark, in particular during free throws, how important it is to prevent false starts. They give massive advantages to the team that starts early, so even if you missed it by a couple of second's, stop the game and award the ball to the opposing team.

As a referee, you must always remember that first and foremost you must guarantee that the game is played on equal grounds. This includes, of course, situations when you are re-starting the match. At all times when starting play, make sure that both teams have been given enough time to prepare for the restart, that all referees are ready to begin the game and that everything is running in accordance to the rules.

Finally, another important role of the surface referee is to make sure that whenever the play comes to surface, everything that happens remains within the rules. There are a couple things that are important to watch out for.

First, you must always think of the safety of the players. When the ball comes to surface it is common to see players swim over the ball carrier, which usually forces them below the surface. This is not only illegal, but also very dangerous, as it implies some degree of pressure over the carrier's neck. Whenever this happens, the game should be stopped, and repeated offenses need to be penalized harshly.

Another important situation that needs to be watched out for is when play comes to surface and close to the wall. Usually at these moments players tend to get very physical, and being close to a wall adds an extra element of peril. You should not allow players to struggle for the ball at the surface for long, so if the hustle goes on for more than a couple seconds, a referee ball should be awarded.

As with the water referees, while being on deck your positioning with respect to the ball is also very important. Whenever possible try to stay in line with the ball, which will guarantee that you get the best possible view of the game whenever it comes to surface.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Always keep count of the amount of players on each bench.**
- **Make sure play is only restarted when you indicate so.**
- **Watch out for surface hustles near the wall and don't allow them to go for too long.**

4. Keeping control of a match

Before explaining all the tips listed below that will allow a referee to maintain control of a match, it is important to first be able to determine how match looks like when the referees have lost control.

As has been mentioned many times, the main purpose of the referee is to guarantee that a game remains fair for both sides, and that the whole match is carried out under acceptable safety standards. So, having this in mind, we can say that a match is spiralling out of the control of the referees when it has either become overly aggressive and dirty, hence augmenting the risk of players contracting injuries, or when a team has come to possess an unfair advantage over their opponent. Whenever these situations occur it can be considered that the referees are not in control of the game.

Usually though, by following a couple of very basic principles, every referee can guarantee that a match remains within competitive standards. Most of what is explained below are ways of preventing a match from spiralling out of your control, but it is all just as valid to bring a game back to normal.

The first and most important thing that you must keep in mind at all times in order to prevent matches from spiralling out of your control is that you are one of the three officials of the match. This means that independently of how experienced the players in the water may be, they do not have any authority over you. Any call that you make is binding, and has to be abided by everyone in the pool. Many referees seem to be intimidated by players that have more experience, either playing or refereeing, and so tend to bend their decisions based on what these players tell them during the match. This allows competitors to take advantage of certain calls that the referee make, and force perhaps unfair changes in the course of the game.

Always remember, as was mentioned earlier, players opinions are biased, and most of the times they reflect their team's best interest. So be skeptical about the complaints that a team captain may be bringing forward to you, and always trust your judgement over theirs. This implies that, unless some very valid points are being brought forward, you should never overturn a decision that you've made, specially if the reasons to do so have been brought forward by the penalized team.

At all times during a match if you're unsure about something that has happened, or if there is confusion amongst the referees, stop the game and discuss what the best course of action to take is. This will guarantee not only that all officials are brought to the same page, but also that there is consistency in the calls being made, which in turn guarantees fairness.

Another important thing to be kept in mind concerns calling fouls. Underwater rugby is a very physical sport, and it is ok for a referee to allow some of this physicality to be carried out throughout the game. Having a very low standard on what is considered unnecessary roughness usually results in games being constantly stopped and becoming dull. So, through the use of the advantage rule you can guarantee that some minor fouls are overlooked, in the benefit of the fluidity of the match. Nonetheless, every time that something happens that poses a threat to a player's well being you must stop the match and penalize the offending player accordingly. Being consistent in this regard guarantees that players self-regulate how much physicality they put into the contests and ensures a safe, fluid game.

Do remember though that after the first call to stop the match is made everything that happens afterwards is considered invalid play. So never allow anything that occurs after you, or any referee, has called for the match to be halted, not even if stopping the match put one team in an unfair disadvantage. Once the referees make a call, play only restarts when the deck referee indicates so.

Now, in some cases awarding free throws does not help regulate the aggressiveness or amount of contempt that a team may be showing. This is why the official rules provide the referees with a series of penalties that escalate in severity, depending on the nature and recurrence of the foul being penalized. Note that even though they are ways to escalate penalizations, these tools don't necessarily need to be used in order. If a particular offence is harsh enough, it could escalate several levels at once.

The most basic penalty that a referee can give, after a free throw, is a warning. These are a way of notifying a particular player that a specific behaviour has occurred more times than desired, and such behaviour must stop immediately. Note that since warnings are already an escalation mechanism, a single player does not get to receive more than one warning for a specific reason. If a second warning was to be given, then instead the next escalation mechanism must be used.

When similar behaviour has been repeated by several members of a team, rather than by a single individual, then a team warning can be given. Note that these don't make a distinction between players, and simply mean that any further recurrence by any team member will cause further escalation.

It is always important to keep track of which players have been given warnings, as escalation of penalization would occur individually if no team warning has been given. Failing to appropriately escalate warnings will be noticed by most players, and will easily cause a match to get out of hand.

If a warning or team warning are not appropriate, either because the foul has already been warned, or because it is of a severity that merits harsher punishment, then you can recur to giving the player a 2-minute time penalty. When a team has received a time penalty on one of their players, neither said player nor a replacement are allowed in the water for the duration of the penalization. This effectively means that the team has to play with one person less in the water.

Note that the 2-minute time penalty is a quite severe punishment that will place the team that receives it in a considerable disadvantage, so always be mindful when you give them. The official rules do nonetheless specify certain situations when a time penalty must always be awarded. The most important ones are:

- **When a player commits a foul for which they, or their team has already received a warning for.**
- **When a player commits a foul that would result in a penalty shot.**

Time penalties can be dismissed before their full time has elapsed if the penalized team receives a goal while being at a numerical disadvantage with respect to the other team. This last remark is actually quite important, since it implies that, for example, if both teams have equal number of players with time penalties, then a goal would not cause any of them to expire.

Usually there is debate amongst referees about which situations merit escalating into warnings and time penalties, and more often than not it depends on how the match is progressing and the style that the referee uses to officiate. Always use your best judgement to try to identify when a match is getting out of your hands, and start escalating penalizations accordingly to bring it back on track. In this matter, the official rules do provide a non-exhaustive list of situations where escalation is appropriate. Some of the most important ones are:

- **Continuous use of unnecessary roughness.**
- **Continuous contempt for the rules and the referees.**
- **Actively ignoring calls to stop play.**
- **Showing un-sportsmanship behaviour at any point during the game.**
- **Continuously questioning referees decisions to waste time.**

These 3 tools (warnings, team warnings and 2-minute time penalties) are, mainly, what you have in order to escalate incidents in the pool. Giving players 2-minute time penalties will usually suffice to bring a game back to competitive standards and, within the time limits of a regular underwater rugby match, you usually won't have incidents that escalate any further than that. The official rules do, nonetheless, provide 2 more escalation steps to deal with more serious issues. Note that these are meant to be used only in exceptional situations where either an individual player is showing no signs of changing their behaviour even after receiving

multiple escalations, or when a foul is so serious that a 2-minute penalty would not be appropriate.

The first tool provided is a 2+2-minute time penalty. When given to a player, they will have to serve the equivalent of 2 full 2-minute penalties, where each of them is independent of the other. Note that the main implication of this is that if while serving the first time penalty the player's team received a goal while in a numerical disadvantage, then only this penalty would be dismissed, and the second one would start. As you can probably conclude, this puts a team in a very serious disadvantage, which means that the associated foul must be of equivalent gravity. Receiving this sort of penalization also constitutes an automatic warning for the next escalation.

The final and harshest resource that exists in the official underwater rugby rules constitutes the expulsion of a player from match. When this happens, the player is required to leave the playing area (as opposed to sitting in the penalty bench) and their team receives a 5-minute time penalty during which they must play with one less person in the water and are not considered at a numerical disadvantage. If this is given during a tournament, the expelled player is also forbidden from participating in the following match. This is the maximum penalization in underwater rugby, and is only reserved for the worst of un-sportsmanlike behaviours.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **When referees lose control of the match, play becomes dangerous and dirty.**
- **Don't be intimidated by a player's experience. During a match, it is your judgement that is the most important.**
- **When a match is stopped, nothing that happens afterwards is valid.**
- **If free throws are not enough to stop undesired behaviour, escalate using warnings, team warnings and 2-minute penalties.**

The official rules give two more escalation mechanisms, only reserved for exceptional situations.

Section 3: Basic procedures during a match

1. Hand signals

In a sport such as underwater rugby, where most of the action happens below the surface of the pool, and no verbal communication is possible, a mechanism is needed to effectively let the players and the other referees know what it is that you're trying to communicate. Having referees in scuba gear go up and down on every single call would, of course, be highly impractical. So we use hand signals every time we need to let other people in the water know what it is that we need of them.

There are many signals in underwater rugby, which are mainly used to indicate all the different kinds of fouls that a player can commit. You can find them all in appendix 4.1 of the official CMAS rules.

Out of the ones defined we will discuss the one that referees, both on deck and in the water, use the most. The free throw signal.

As has been mentioned before, this is arguably the most important of the signals that a referee has to make. Every time you stop the match to penalize a minor foul, the go-to action is to award a free throw against the offending team. Most players will not actually mind missing out on what the specific foul was, but everyone will definitely be expecting to know who should receive the free throw. This means that, even though highly advisable, it is not completely necessary for a referee to have knowledge of absolutely all hand signals. Note that this doesn't mean that not knowing a particular signal means you won't make a call. It simply means that you can stop the game and proceed straight away to indicate who gets the free throw.

Even though it is a simple signal, it is very important to get it right, since signaling the wrong free throw side slows down the game and brings uncertainty about the capabilities of the referee. The correct way to signal a free throw is having one arm extended, pointing at the goal that needs to be attacked, and the other arm extended pointing at the spot where the free throw should be taken from. Both arms should form an "L" shape, which makes the signal visible for all the players and officials.

Note that since the arms need to be extended in an "L" shape, it is necessary that you move in the water until your arm is pointing at the spot where the free throw should be taken from. If the foul happens within the side of the team to which it is being awarded, then the free throw should be taken from the middle of the pool, where the halfway and center lines cross. Otherwise the free throw is taken where the offense was committed, but no closer than 3 meters away from the defending team's wall.

With regards to the procedure to make hand signals, it is always important that the game is fully stopped before starting to make any signals. When you're certain that no one is playing anymore, start by indicating what foul you are calling. This signal should be held for 2 or 3 seconds, just enough to make sure the players get to see it. Then, if a free throw will be awarded proceed to move to the spot where it should be taken while making the "L" shape with your hands. When you reach the desired spot, hold the signal until you are certain the the surface referee is aware that a free throw needs to be made.

Note that there is no hand signal for escalating fouls, so if you want to give a warning or award a time penalty, you must notify so to the players verbally.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Hand signals help us communicate with players and other referees efficiently underwater.**
- **Even if you don't know the signal specific to the foul you want to call, always make sure you signal the appropriate free throw.**

- Always make sure everyone has stopped playing before you start making the appropriate hand signals
- To signal a free throw, extend your arms in an “L” shape, with one arm pointing to the basket that should be attacked, and one arm pointing to the spot the free throw should be taken from.

2. Advantage rule and delayed call

The following section will discuss one of the most important tools that you have at your disposal to make sure a game remains fair, and that no team attempts to acquire an advantage by exploiting the halting of the match that comes from fouls.

Whenever a player commits an offense, it is always possible that stopping the game and awarding a free throw would actually represent a disadvantage to the team the foul was committed on. Also, given the natural physicality of underwater rugby, if the game was stopped every time a minor foul was committed, matches would be dull and full of free throws.

So to prevent stopping the game being detrimental to the match, rather than help make it cleaner, the referee has the option of playing the advantage rule whenever a foul happens. To signal that you're playing the advantage rule, raise one of your arms, to have it pointing upwards, as soon as you see a foul happen. Then allow the game to go on for another couple seconds. If you find that stopping the game would've put the player that received the foul in a disadvantageous position to the one they hold without the call having been made, then simply don't stop the game and allow it to move on. If, on the other hand, after a couple of seconds you realize that the foul actually put the receiving player in a disadvantage, you are allowed to perform a delayed call.

A delayed call consists simply of stopping the game because of a foul that happened some seconds before it is being called, but that was delayed because advantage rule was being played.

The more you referee, you will find that most of the calls you'll be making will actually be delayed, and the result of playing the advantage rule. This is usually because most players are not in the water actively attempting to commit fouls, so most of them will either be unintentional or very mild, and usually will not put the offended player in any major disadvantage. There are, nonetheless, situations where it is definitely not appropriate to play the advantage rule.

In general, at any point where there is a foul that may put player at risk, the game must be stopped immediately. This includes, in particular, dangerous tackles around the head or neck area, swimming without fins and kicks while defending the goal. Also, every time that a player would receive a time penalty a call must be made on the spot.

Another important fact to keep in mind when playing the advantage rule is that a delayed call comes into the referee call order at the point where the original call should've been made. So, if a player receives a foul, advantage rule is played over it, and within the advantage play that person proceeds to commit a foul, the valid call to make would be the first one.

Independently of the gravity of a particular foul, playing advantage on it is always optional, and the decision of doing so relies solely on the referee that saw the foul. It is also the decision of the referee whether they want to perform the delayed call or not. It is never wrong to immediately call a foul, as technically this is what the rules call for. A good referee can,

nonetheless, always accurately determine when it is appropriate play advantage and when not to.

One final remark that must be made about playing the advantage rule is that it can only be used if a call has not been made on a particular play. This is, if the game is stopped and someone keeps on playing, whatever effect their actions may have (scoring a goal, drawing a foul, etc.) cannot be justified or allowed by the means of the advantage rule. Once the game has been stopped, no advantage can be played and everything that happens afterwards is not considered part of the official match.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Playing the advantage rule allows you to overlook milder fouls that, if called, would actually put the offended team at a disadvantage.**
- **If after playing the advantage rule, you realise making the call was the right decision, then you can make a delayed call.**
- **The advantage rule is never a valid argument to justify actions taken after the game was stopped.**

3. Refereeing penalty shots

A penalty shot, as you may know already, is a contest carried out between one attacker from one team and a defender from the other team. For 45 seconds the two players battle it out over the goal in an attempt to each get their own way. They are particularly important moments in matches, where tension usually builds up. Since all of the attention is focused on a single spot, any mishap by the officials is much more evident. This, of course, increases the amount of pressure on referees to perform well.

Before going into the appropriate way of refereeing a penalty shot, it is important to first point out that there are two different moments during a game where these happen.

First, a penalty shot may be called against any player that commits a foul which impedes a clear goal opportunity by the other team. The main reasons to award these include wedging into, or grabbing the basket when an attack is coming and removing an opponent's gear when they would've had a clear path to the goal. When this sort of penalty is given you must remember that any foul for which a penalty throw is appropriate also implies that the player that committed the foul must receive a 2-minute time penalty. This time will begin to be served after the shot is carried out and, of course, the expelled player cannot defend the penalty shot. Since the penalty time begins after the shot finishes, even if the attacking team scores the penalized player is not allowed in the pool. Any fouls committed by the defender while the penalty is carried out should also result in a 2-minute penalty for the offender and a repetition of the shot.

The second moment when penalty shots happen is during a penalty shootout. These are carried out at the end of a match that requires a decision, and that ended in a draw after the appropriate

extensions. In this case the teams will take turns to shoot penalties during which the attackers must be different until one of the teams runs out of players. During a shootout, if a defender commits a foul then they cannot defend the next penalty shot, and the particular shot must be repeated. Also, any player that was serving a time penalty at the end of the match is automatically forbidden to defend the first shot. Shootouts usually consist of at least three penalties, after which each team takes one more until a winner is decided.

Apart from the specific rules that were just mentioned, penalty shots during a game or at a shootout follow the same rules and procedures.

When refereeing a penalty shot the first thing that referees must look after is that the shot begins with everyone in the appropriate position. The defender must be over the basket that they will defend. The attacker should be at the crossing of the middle and center lines.

As with every other foul, it is the responsibility of the deck referee to begin the penalty shot. They should confirm that both the defender and the attacker are ready to start and then proceed to signal the beginning. After this the deck referee will have very little involvement in the rest of the action. There are nonetheless two very important aspects which they should still pay attention to.

The first one is the time. A penalty shot should not last longer, or less, than 45 seconds. Due to the high intensity and immense physical demand that they imply, even a one second difference could mean scoring or missing out on a goal. So at all times be attentive of how long there is left of the shot, and stop as soon as the 45 seconds are over.

The second aspect that the deck referee needs to watch for is of an early finish of the shot when the goalkeeper brings the ball to surface. It is common for both players to dive up fighting for the ball, which may make it hard to determine who has possession. Keep your eyes on the ball at all times and, as soon as it fully comes out of the water signal the end of the shot.

Now, while being a water referee you will be more involved in the shot itself, as most of it will happen underwater and close to the goal.

Just as with refereeing a match, positioning is crucial in order to guarantee that the penalty is properly carried out. You must at all times be located at a point where you can see the basket, and throughout the shot you should keep your eyes on both players.

Be very attentive of what the attacker and defender are doing and be specially attentive of fouls committed. During penalty shots the most common infringements tend to be:

- **Attacking the other players gear.**
- **Grabbing or wedging the basket.**
- **Goalkeeper going out of reach of the basket without possession of the ball.**

If you look out for these fouls in particular you should have most of the possible infractions covered.

Remember too that during a penalty shot you are also allowed to apply the advantage rule and performed a delayed call. This only applies, though, to fouls committed by the defender. It is important to keep this in mind because making an early foul call on a situation where the attacker could have scored would force the shot to be retaken, which would be immensely unfair. If, on the other side, it is the attacker that commits a foul, there is no advantage to be gained by the defender, so you may stop the shot at once and consider it defended.

As always, while refereeing a penalty shot use your best judgement to determine when play should be stopped or when it is appropriate to let it go on. Put first the safety of the players and remain calm.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Penalty shots always constitute moments of tension, where pressure on the referees' performance is increased.**
- **As a surface referee you will be in charge of starting the match, watching the time and calling an end when the defender brings the ball to the surface.**
- **As a water referee you must be in a position where you can clearly see the goal and both players.**
- **During a penalty shot you are allowed to make use of the advantage rule as long as the foul is committed by the defender.**

Section 4: Conclusion

Hopefully after this course you will have acquired the necessary knowledge to be confident the next time you jump into a match with a pair of whistles in your hand. Even though only the most basic skills and concepts that an underwater rugby referee should understand were covered, these should comprise all the tools that you need to properly officiate a match.

Probably from all the concepts explained, the most important one that you should take with you is knowing that, as a referee, your judgement will always be more valid than that of any player in the water, independently of their years of experience as referee or competitor. Whenever you make a call, and a captain comes at you displeased or angry, remember these lines. If you remain calm, and don't let yourself be overwhelmed by the players, your decisions will always lead you in the right direction and gain you the respect of everyone in the water. It is also very convenient that, being the referees the maximum authority in the pool, you can at all times dismiss any player and move on with the game.

As an official you do have, nonetheless, the responsibility to guarantee that your knowledge of the game's rules remains up to date. It is always convenient to go through the manual every now and then to refresh the smaller nuances that it has. This will make you a better referee, as your decisions will be better informed, and will also make you a better player, since you will be able to carry out cleaner games that can only improve your team's performance. It is

recommended that you read the full manual before every tournament where you plan to referee matches.

When officiating a match always try to remain calm. There is no need for you to make rushed decisions, as long as they are assertive and you stand by them independently of what the players think about it. Do remember though that you are still human, so it is not expected that you know everything. When in doubt, consult with your fellow referees. You being clearer on what is happening during a match guarantees that you can do your job better. You are also not expected to see every foul that happens in a match. It is ok to miss out on some calls during a game, as long as overall you manage to keep the match in control, fair and safe.

The tempo, intensity and fluidity of the match are very dependent on what decisions the referees make, how often they stop play and how they deal with the situations that arise. One of the most powerful tools that you have at your disposal is the advantage rule and delayed call combination. Try to prevent as much as possible making calls on the spot. Let the contestants play on for another couple seconds when you spot a foul. You will be amazed at the amount of times the game is actually benefited by not awarding free throws for accidental minor infractions. The only exceptions to this is, of course, when a player's well-being may be jeopardized, in which case you must stop the game immediately and provide the appropriate penalizations.

Finally, as a last word of advice, remember that just like playing underwater rugby the only way to get better at refereeing is by practising. So don't be afraid to raise your hand when an official is needed. If you feel you need assistance ask for someone to shadow you. Don't let lack of experience be an excuse for you to miss out on refereeing. The more games you get under your belt the better you will get at it, and it won't be long before you're regarded as a seasoned and reliable referee.