

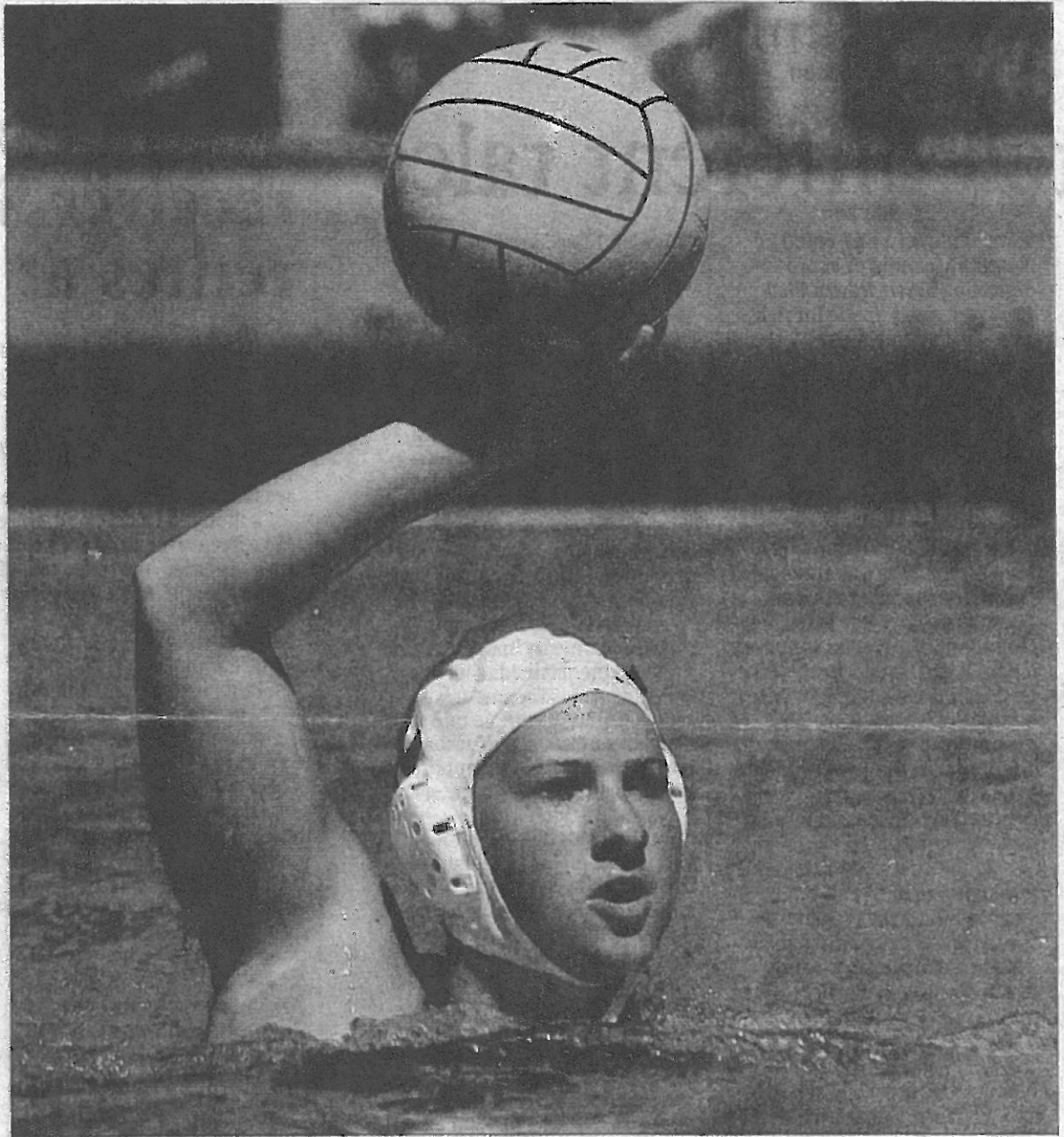
# Below the surface ...

## Water polo 101

Water polo is not exactly mainstream. But with UC Davis hosting the NCAA women's water polo championships this weekend, here is what you need to know to get the most out of the tournament.

### RULES:

- Seven players per team in the pool at one time, including one goaltender.
- Excluding the goalie, players can touch the ball with only one hand at a time.
- Excluding goalie, everyone plays offense and defense.
- Players can't touch bottom of pool.
- Four quarters, seven minutes apiece. Clock is stopped after fouls, goals, ejections and turnovers.
- Two-minute intervals between quarters; five-minute halftime.
- Teams switch ends at halftime.
- If tied at end of regulation, there's a five-minute break and then two three-minute periods with teams changing ends between periods. Two-minute interval between periods.
- If tied after two overtime periods, there's a two-minute interval followed by a coin toss to determine the ends for a sudden death, two-minute



Sacramento Bee/Randall Benton

UC Davis' Cassie Schaefer winds up. Scoring in water polo is straightforward – the dirty work goes on underwater.

... it's about toughness, fitness, discipline

period

- If tied at end of first sudden death, there are additional three-minute sudden-death periods until a team scores
- There's a 35-second shot clock.
- Substitutions are permitted anytime, but a player must be out of the water before another player can enter. Usually, substitutions occur only after goals, between quarters or after a player is ejected.
- A goal is worth one.
- Teams are allowed three two-minute timeouts. In overtime a team has one timeout. Teams also have one 20-second timeout that can be used during regulation or overtime.

Sources: NCAA, UC Davis

**By Tim Casey**  
BEE STAFF WRITER

She's kidding. Sort of. Well, not really.

Whenever someone asks UC Davis water polo star Katherine O'Rourke about her favorite sport, she provides an analogy any novice would understand.

"I joke, 'Football isn't tough,'" said O'Rourke, the Aggies' leader with 46 goals. "They have pads. They have helmets. Water polo isn't for the weak. If you're like, 'I'm hurt,' you're not going to make it."

No, water polo isn't just a leisurely dip in the pool. Head out to UCD this weekend for the women's NCAA Championships, and you'll be amazed at the physicality.

There's clutching. And grabbing. And holding. And scratching. And pinching.

Basically, it's survival of the fittest.

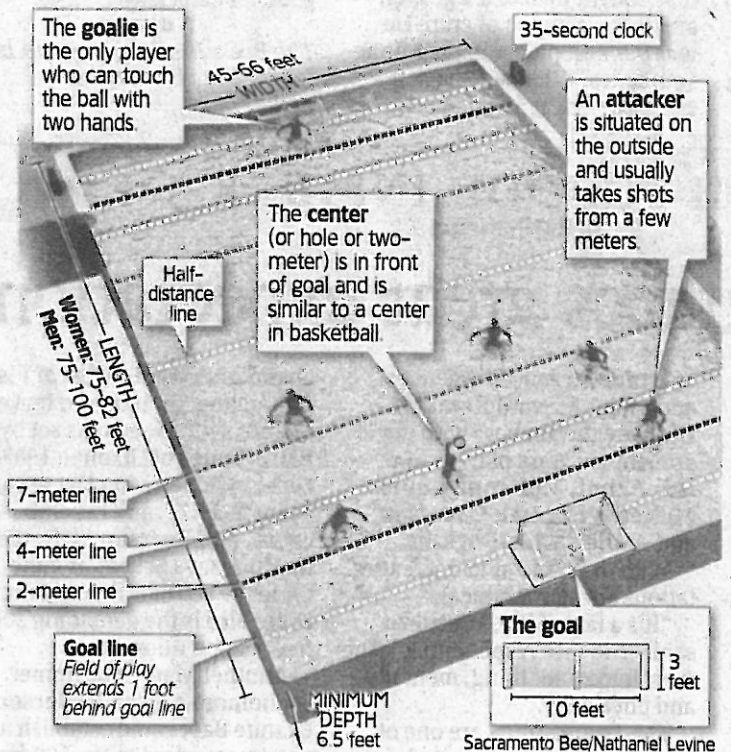
And toughest.

"It's a lot like wrestling," Davis High School girls coach Doug Wright said.

Said UC Davis women's coach Jamey Wright: "It's very aggressive, borderline violent."

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## The field of play



Sacramento Bee/Nathaniel Levine

# Water polo: Players always seeking an edge

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That's not to say any strong man or woman can excel at water polo. It's not that simple.

The sport demands coordination to swim and toss a yellow ball to teammates and at the net. Or, for a goalie, to move sideways and jump to deflect shots fired at top speeds.

And the conditioning needed rivals any sport. After all, players can't touch the bottom of the pool and must tread water for several minutes at a time. So, most teams spend a few days per week running and lifting weights.

Plus, players must exhibit a controlled aggression and be smart about when to attack. Yes, there are plenty of cheap shots that officials don't see. But those without discipline are destined to fail. They'll get assessed a major foul. Or, they'll get so upset that it distracts them.

"Everything goes on below the water," Jamey Wright said. "Feet are flying. A lot of the contact is incidental. It just happens.

"You do the best you can. It's easy to get mad. But you look for (players with) self-control. If you've got a short fuse, water polo isn't for you. So much stuff happens."

The rules allow for contact.

The game features a lot of whistles from referees indicating either minor (or ordinary) fouls or major (or exclusion) fouls.

Players are allowed unlimited minor fouls, which include such infractions as touching the bottom of the pool, taking the ball underwater while getting tackled, using two hands on the ball (except for goalies) and pushing an opponent who's not holding the ball.

When a major foul is called, the culprit sits out for 20 seconds, prompting a 6-on-5 situation similar to a power play in hockey. Players are ejected after committing three majors. Examples of major fouls: kicking an opponent intentionally, pulling back an opponent who doesn't have the ball and using obscene gestures or language.

In recent years, college coaches

said officials have been more lenient in calling fouls, particularly when a player has the ball.

"You can do anything to them except rip their head off," Tim Settem said.

Settem coaches the men's and women's teams at Claremont-Mudd-Scripps, a collection of three small colleges in Claremont. The women earned an automatic berth in the NCAA Championships and play top-seeded USC at 6 p.m. today.

Settem and others said the women's game might be even more physical because their suits cover the upper body while the men's cover only below their midsection. And thus, there's more material to grab.

And before matches, an official checks players' fingernails. If too long or sharp, they get trimmed.

Everyone's always looking for an edge.

"It's a matter of surviving," Doug Wright said. "You have to be physical. Or else you'll get burned."

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