Water polo

When athletes come together from around the world to compete in the Olympic and Paralympic Games, they are fulfilling their dreams and competing at the highest level. Billions of people across the globe join in: watching, listening to and reading about the greatest global celebration of sport. To celebrate the London 2012 Games, the British Council is making a wide range of classroom resources available for learners of English worldwide.

Water polo was first played in the 19th century as a type of rugby played in water. It developed differently in Europe and the USA, though it is the European version that is now played all around the world. Water polo has been on the Olympic programme since 1908. It is a tough sport which requires great stamina – athletes are not allowed to touch the sides or bottom of the pool during the whole game! Have you ever played water polo or seen a game?
1. Vocabulary

A. Write the correct words in the spaces provided.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A. foul kick</th>
<th>B. ear guards</th>
<th>C. goal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>D. referee</td>
<td>E. cap</td>
<td>F. goal judge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. foul punch</td>
<td>H. pull</td>
<td>I. pool</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To find out more visit www.britishcouncil.org/learnenglish
2. The rules of Water Polo

What is it?
Water polo is played in a pool. In water polo, the pool is called a pitch. Two teams play and there are seven players in each team.

There’s a goal at each end of the pitch. The goal is 3m wide and 90 cm high. The players try to put the ball in the other team’s goal. They can touch the ball with one hand at a time only. (The goalkeeper can use both hands.) Players must not touch the sides or bottom of the pool.

A match lasts eight minutes and is divided into four quarters. At the start of each quarter the referee blows the whistle and throws the ball into the water. The teams try to get the ball and score a goal. They move the ball by swimming, dribbling or passing it.

After a goal is scored the non-scoring team gets the ball.

If a player touches the ball with both hands, it’s an ordinary foul and a free throw is given to the other team.

For more serious fouls, such as kicking, hitting, holding or sinking an opponent, a player may have to leave the pitch for 20 seconds.

A. Match the words in the table with their definitions below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>a. hold</th>
<th>b. kicking</th>
<th>c. goalkeeper</th>
<th>d. quarter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>e.</td>
<td>free throw</td>
<td>f. goal</td>
<td>g. referee</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. If athletes get the ball into here they score.
2. This is awarded for ordinary fouls.
3. When an athlete grabs another player to stop him moving.
4. This player tries to stop the ball from going into the goal.
5. A person who is in charge of the game and makes sure everyone follows the rules.
6. An athlete can be sent out for this.
7. One of the four periods of a game.
3. Questions and Answers

**Polo, eh? Played in water? Any connection with Marco Polo?**
You mean Marco Polo, 1254-1324, the famous traveller and merchant? No, nothing. Though there is a game played by children, in water, called Marco Polo.

*I see. Is that a form of polo, then?*
No – just a game of chase.

**So is Water Polo like polo played on land? You know, with horses, helmets, mallets, and so on?**
Yes, similar. Players do have to try and hit a ball through their opponent's goal. But they don't use mallets - just their hands. And there are no helmets, just caps. No horses either, I'm afraid - it would take too long to get them into and out of the pool! But originally players in the US rode on floating barrels and used sticks to hit the ball, so it was called water polo.

**Didn't they ride on barrels in Europe, then?**
No, there was a different version over here, originally called water rugby.

**When was all this?**
Back in the 1870s. Actually, both versions of the sport were quite violent, with a lot of fighting and wrestling.

**What happened to that, then?**
The sport got formal rules and became more disciplined - no hitting or rough stuff. It got more popular after that, particularly the European version.

**And when did they start playing it in the Olympics?**
The first time was at the 1900 Paris games, and then regularly from 1908.

**Do women play, too?**
Yes, but there was no women's Water Polo in the Olympics until 2000.

**Which country is the best at it?**
The Hungarians won medals at every games from 1928 to 1980. They got a ninth gold in 2008 (making 15 medals in total).

**Why are they so good?**
Mm...you might have to ask a Hungarian about that...
A. Decide if the following sentences about the text are true or false.

1. There is a version of Water Polo named after Marco Polo.
2. Early American versions of the sport used different equipment from the European version.
3. Since the 19th century the sport has become increasingly violent.
4. Water Polo has featured in most modern Olympics.
5. Women's Water Polo became an Olympic sport at the start of the 20th century.
6. The US have won more medals than anyone else.

B. Use the best word from the table to fill the gaps in the sentences below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>a. time</th>
<th>b. medals</th>
<th>c. barrels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>d. chase</td>
<td>e. violent</td>
<td>f. mallets</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Marco Polo is a game of __________ played by children, in water.
2. Nowadays players hit the ball with their hands, not with __________
3. In some early versions of the game, players rode on __________
4. In the 19th century the game was quite __________, with a lot of fighting.
5. The sport was featured in the Olympics for the first __________ in 1900.
6. Hungary have won more Olympic __________ than any other country to date.
4. Solution

**Exercise 1a**
1. b; 2. e; 3. g; 4. a; 5. h; 6. f; 7. d; 8. c; 9. i

**Exercise 2a**
1. f; 2. e; 3. a; 4. c; 5. g; 6. b; 7. d;

**Exercise 3a**
1. False (F); 2. True (T); 3. F; 4. T; 5. F; 6. F

**Exercise 3b**
1. chase (d); 2. mallets (f); 3. barrels (c); 4. violent (e); 5. time (a); 6. medals (b)