



# Water polo balls

**T**he South African water polo establishment is a small, intimate, brand conscious community that does not suffer mediocrity gladly, rarely experiments with inferior products and are prepared to invest to secure quality products, say local distributors.

Water polo is becoming increasingly popular at school level, especially amongst girls.

Selling water polo balls to this growing, discerning market therefore requires a solid understanding of the features of the ball and the customer's needs.

## Size

As in many other sporting codes, it is vital that water polo players use the correct size game balls for their respective age groups and gender. FINA (the international governing body of aquatics and water polo) stipulate the following sizes:

- The weight must be between 400-450gm.
- Men's water polo balls (size 5) should be 68-71cm in circumference and the pressure should be 90-97kPa (kilo Pascal's, 13-14lb per square inch atmospheric).
- The standard size for women's water polo balls is 4. It should be 65-67cm in circumference and its pressure shall be 83-90kPa (kilo Pascal's or 12-13lb per square inch atmospheric).
- The size of the smaller balls used by juniors is not stipulated by FINA. These balls are often green and their circumference 58-60cm with a weight of 300-320 grams.
- Training water polo balls are often much heavier than match balls as the extra weight in the balls strengthens your arms.

## Outer

- The outer rubber cover of the water polo ball is by far the most important factor when it comes to performance and control. A sponge rubber cushioned fabric makes the ball easier to grip so that it could be held with one hand despite its large size.
- The game is based on hand control and passing skills and this is greatly improved by game balls that have superior grip, which is essential in a ball that would otherwise become slippery when wet.
- Deep channelled seams make it easier to grip and pass the wet ball.
- Some of the high quality balls have a treated

## A cut-out-and-keep feature providing step-by-step information on features of water polo balls.

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- or buffed rubber cover with a ribbed texture, which improves grip on the ball when it is wet.
- If a ball has little grip and is of inferior quality, SA water polo players won't use it, as they won't support inferior products. They are prepared to invest money to secure the use of a product that would guarantee player satisfaction.
- A precision nylon-wound carcass further improves performance and grip.

## Cosmetics

- The appearance of the 18-panel yellow water polo ball remained consistent for many years but since 2005, FINA allowed a coloured middle stripe (blue, green, red, black, or yellow) with the normal yellow stripes flanking the coloured stripe.
- MIKASA Japan, in association with FINA, launched a new multi-coloured official W6000W and W6009W game ball in 2009. The new design has caught on very quickly.
- This was in line with FINA's vision for improved visibility of the ball – not only in the pool but for spectators at pool side and watching on TV. The benefits of these multi-coloured balls are that the colours make it easier to differentiate between men's

and women's balls, and for spectators and players to see the rotation of the ball. It also teaches proper rotation on the ball.

## Bladder

- The inner construction of the ball is equally important as this ultimately defines the ball's pressure and shape retention properties. A good bladder is essential, as it prevents the ball from becoming deflated.
- High quality floating bladders used in match quality balls are made of butyl, an airtight synthetic rubber, which retain their shape and correct match pressure far longer than latex rubber bladders.
- Latex (natural rubber) bladders provide better surface tension and flexibility that improves bounce – which is not a benefit in water polo – but the micro pores slowly let air escape and they therefore lose shape faster.
- The higher the butyl rubber component, the better the air-retention ability of the ball. The Taiwan Butyl Co classify their 100% butyl bladders as OB, BB = 80% butyl and 20% rubber, BR = 50% butyl and 50% rubber, B30 = 30% butyl and 70% rubber. They recommend OB and BB bladders for balls that are put on display on store shelves because of the very high air retention capability, which means that balls will maintain their shape for a long time. Read more at [www.taiwanbutyl.com/eng/products\\_2.htm](http://www.taiwanbutyl.com/eng/products_2.htm).
- Most balls use butyl valves for air-retention, with higher end balls using a silicone-treated valve that enables smooth insertion of the inflating needle and offers added protection from air loss. A tip is to advise customers to put a few drops of silicon oil in the valve, which will improve air retention.

## Official product

- Mikasa is the official Fina game ball for use in all Fina sanctioned events.
- The MIKASA W6000W and W6009W are the only official Olympic game balls, as well as the official game ball for the Ligue Européenne de Natation (LEN) for use in all LEN sanctioned events in Europe.
- Mikasa is used in South African inter-provincial water polo tournaments.
- Epsan balls are used at the King Edward tournament, the premier school boy tournament in SA.