

# Underwater - what? Underwater Hockey!

*What is not so well-known in Switzerland is intensively played in neighbouring lands such as France, Italy, or Germany: underwater hockey (UWH). The sport was invented by divers in the '50s to enrich their training. Since then underwater hockey has developed into a dynamic sport, with European and World Championships. Underwater hockey can be played by all water lovers in all age groups with only a few materials. Could it also be a bit of fresh air for your club?*

## In the Water, Ready? Go!

Each team has six players in the water and up to four substitute players. Positions are chosen before play starts. There are many possible options, but generally a team has three forwards and three backs, to the left, right, and centre. There is no goalkeeper.



*You can play underwater hockey with little equipment and in practically any pool.*

The forwards stay a bit ahead of the puck and the backs behind. Underwater hockey is played with no direct body contact. The only legal contact is the stick against the puck. Through quick passes and clever tricks you have a fast and dynamic game.

At the start of each match the puck is placed in the middle of the playing area. Each team starts at its own goal.

Somebody calls, "Ready? Go!" across the pool and the forwards dash to snatch the puck for their team. The backs follow close behind. There are



*Each play starts with the players at their own goal, the puck in the centre of the playing area.*

often many goals scored in a match. Those who have mastered the handling of the puck and are able to fool their opponents have a clear advantage in getting past them. In training you practise different skills to move or



*Steal the puck and swim away? Your opponents are right on your heels ... I mean fins!*

secure the puck, or to go as far as possible on one breath. The warm-up, the exercises, and of course the match itself build up muscles without straining anything and - last but not least - improve your physical and mental fitness.



*Skills can be practised underwater with simple materials.*

### The Dry Rules

Underwater hockey can be played with simple tools in practically any indoor or outdoor pool. In the international rules of CMAS the playing area is 21 - 25 metres long, 12 - 15 metres wide and 2 - 3.65 metres deep. The goals are 3 metres wide and at first each can be marked with two items, for example with two lead-weighted plastic containers. Then you need an 80 mm diameter puck which weighs 1.3 kg. This is made of metal, coated in plastic. The players each need basic snorkeling gear: fins,



*The goals are 3m wide.*



*You can play underwater hockey with little equipment and in practically any pool.*

diving mask, and snorkel. A silicon glove protects the playing hand from the floor tiles and the puck but to start gardening gloves can do the trick. Water polo caps show which team you're on and protect your ears. Of course you need a stick as well, also in two colours, 30 - 35 cm in length. According to the rules a stick needs to fit within an imaginary box of 350 mm x 100 mm x 50 mm. Since skilled players can use their stick to lift the puck from the pool floor and send it far, called "flicking", players also need a mouthguard.



*Information and decisions are delivered in training and tournaments by hand signals.*

Official tournament matches have two halves of 15 minutes, with a three minute break. Two referees in the water



*The chief referee starts a tournament on land.*

watch to ensure that the puck is only played with the sticks and that nobody is hindered from playing by grabbing, blocking, removing gear, or other fouls. The third referee stands on the edge of the pool and directs the match. Underwater hockey also has the normal punishments such as warnings, free pucks, and penalties.

### **Something for your club?**

Even back in the '80s Switzerland had the "Blöterli-Cup", an underwater hockey tournament organised by the SRLG Kloten. In 1984 a total of 10 teams from SRLG Rafzerfeld, SRLG Horgen, SRLG Höngg, DRLG Friedrichshafen, Tauchclub (diving club) Swissair, Sporttauchergruppe (sport diving group) Nautilus Höri, Rettungsdienst (rescue service) Bielersee and the USZ Zürich. All of these clubs recognised early on how much underwater hockey can enrich the training of all water sports clubs.



*A short introduction to underwater hockey is enough to allow you to join in the game.*

### **Want to try it out?**

The best idea is to contact a club which already plays underwater hockey, enjoy the dynamic game and take part right away. You can find contacts, movies, and further information here:

[www.susv.ch/de/sports/unterwasserhockey](http://www.susv.ch/de/sports/unterwasserhockey)



*In this film about our juniors the flow of play is easy to see:  
[www.bern-ost.ch](http://www.bern-ost.ch)  
search term: „Unterwasserhockey“*

Text and photos: Beat Strathmann  
June 2020  
Translation to English: Jeremy Scrimmes  
August 2020