

Water Skyball Referee Handbook

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WSB in EU - ToT

ERASMUS+ Sport



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1. Introduction

This handbook has been created as part of the **WSB-EU-ToT (Water Skyball in Europe – Training of Trainers)** project, which aims to modernize and innovate sport education across Europe by introducing and promoting **Water Skyball (WSB)** — a new-generation, inclusive, and strategically rich water sport.

As lifestyles and physical activity patterns continue to change, traditional sports often fail to meet the evolving needs of modern individuals. The WSB-EU-ToT project responds to this challenge by developing high-quality educational materials, training coaches and referees, and introducing Water Skyball in five partner countries: Hungary, Germany, Greece, Poland, and Romania.

This **Handbook on the Referee Activities of Water Skyball** is one of the deliverables of the project. It is intended to serve as a practical and accessible guide for referees at all levels — from beginners learning the basics of officiating to experienced referees seeking to deepen their knowledge and improve their performance.

Referees play a vital role in ensuring the smooth operation, fairness, and integrity of Water Skyball matches. Their responsibilities go far beyond enforcing rules; they must also foster a safe and inclusive playing environment, maintain the flow of the game, and manage communication with players in a calm and constructive manner.

By clearly outlining the role, positioning, responsibilities, and best practices of referees, this handbook supports the development of a **shared officiating standard** across countries and organizations. It also contributes to the broader mission of the WSB-EU-ToT project: equipping sports professionals with innovative tools and methods that respond to the real needs of 21st-century sport and society.



2. The Role and Responsibilities of a Water Skyball Referee

In Water Skyball, the referee is not only a rule enforcer but also a key facilitator of fair, respectful, and enjoyable gameplay. The role requires both attentiveness and integrity, as the referee is responsible for maintaining the rhythm of the match, ensuring safety, and upholding the sport's core values of non-contact, inclusion, and fairplay.

2.1 Key Responsibilities

Water Skyball referees are expected to:

- Enforce the official rules consistently and impartially throughout the match.
- Oversee the flow of the game, including restarts, scoring, and timekeeping.
- Ensure player safety, especially in maintaining the non-contact nature of the sport.
- Observe fair play and sportsmanship, intervening when necessary to address unsporting behavior.
- Manage communication with players in a clear, calm, and respectful manner.
- Make confident decisions under pressure, even in fast-paced or unclear situations.
- Check player equipment and uniforms before the game begins.

2.2 Match Official Team Composition

The size and composition of the refereeing team vary depending on the type and level of the match:

- **Amateur matches:** A single referee is sufficient to oversee the game.
- **Professional matches:** Two referees are required. One of them is designated as the **head referee**, who holds full authority and makes the final decision in case of disagreement between the two officials.
- In addition to the field referees, the officiating team may include a **scorer** and a **timekeeper**, who may be the same person if necessary.
- For high-level or professional matches, **one or two statisticians** may also be part of the referee team, assisting in collecting and recording performance and gameplay data.

All members of the officiating team must collaborate closely to ensure the fairness and smooth execution of the match.



2.3 Pre-Match Checks

Before the match starts, the referee must inspect all players to ensure they wear the appropriate Water Skyball attire:

- Shorts are mandatory for all players.
- Women must wear a two-layered, closed upper outfit.
- All players must wear a cap that matches their team's colors.
- The two teams cannot play in similar-colored caps.
- Footwear (clean indoor, wrestling, or beach shoes) is recommended but not required.
- Players must not wear metal objects (e.g., jewelry, piercings, watches, metal-framed sunglasses) for safety reasons.

The referee may prevent a player from entering the water if their equipment or appearance does not comply with the rules. Verbal warnings can be given for inadequate or missing uniform elements. If the issue is not resolved, the team may forfeit the match.

Additionally, the referee must ensure that all players are in a suitable physical and hygienic condition to participate.

Water Skyball Player



Cap with a number



long sleeve
compression
shirts



Aquatic shoes



Short with a number
and team logo



2.4 Promoting the Spirit of the Game

Referees in Water Skyball are ambassadors of the sport's philosophy, which emphasizes mutual respect, inclusivity, and personal development through sport. Beyond the technical aspects, referees help shape the overall tone of the match by:

- Setting an example of composure and professionalism
- Fostering a safe and welcoming environment for all participants
- Encouraging a constructive approach to competition

2.5 Flexibility and Educational Approach in Amateur Matches

In friendly or amateur-level Water Skyball matches—especially those involving beginner players—it is important that referees adopt an educational and supportive approach to officiating. While the integrity of the game must always be maintained, the referee's role also includes fostering a positive environment that encourages learning and enjoyment.

Referees may choose to be more flexible with certain minor infractions when it is clear that the player is still learning the rules. For example:

- If a beginner momentarily uses two hands to catch the ball in the midfield zone
- If a player's arm slightly crosses into the defender zone while throwing
- If movement patterns are imprecise but not disruptive or unfair

In such cases, the referee may allow play to continue, accompanied by a **verbal warning or brief explanation**, helping players learn without constant interruption. This flexibility contributes to a more enjoyable experience and builds confidence for new participants.

However, **fundamental rules that define the identity and safety of Water Skyball must always be enforced**, regardless of the players' experience level. These include:

- The **non-contact rule**, which ensures safety and fairness
- The **one-handed throwing requirement**, which is essential to the game's dynamics

By balancing rule enforcement with constructive tolerance, referees help nurture a welcoming atmosphere that supports skill development and sustained player engagement.

2.5 Acting with Integrity and Neutrality

Referees must remain neutral and unbiased at all times. They should:

- Avoid any conflicts of interest (e.g., officiating a match involving a team they are affiliated with)
- Apply the same standards to all players and teams, regardless of skill level or experience

In doing so, referees not only maintain the credibility of the match, but also reinforce trust in the sport as a whole.

3. Referee Positioning and Movement

Proper positioning and movement are essential for effective refereeing in Water Skyball. A well-positioned referee has a clear view of the game's critical areas, can make accurate decisions, and maintains a strong presence on the field. Positioning also helps prevent conflicts by ensuring transparency and fairness in decision-making.

3.1 General Positioning Principles

Referees should position themselves so that they always have an unobstructed view of:

- The ball
- The players in possession
- The defending and midfield zones
- The goal structure and goal line

Referees must maintain **constant visual contact** with the ball and **anticipate gameplay** to adjust their position proactively. Sudden movements or poor anticipation may lead to missed infractions or poor judgment.

3.2 Positioning in Single-Referee Matches

In amateur or friendly matches with only one referee:

- The referee typically positions themselves at the side of the field, near midfield, moving parallel to the play.
- Since they must monitor the entire field alone, strategic positioning is critical—balancing proximity with perspective.

3.3 Positioning in Two-Referee Matches

In professional matches, two referees work together to cover the entire field more effectively. Their roles are as follows:

- One referee positions to the meeting point of one defensive zone and the midfield zone, while the other referee between the other defensive zone and midfield.
- The two referees must **communicate continuously** and avoid overlapping responsibilities or obstructing each other's view.

In case of disagreement, the head referee's decision prevails.



4. The Rules of Water Skyball – Referee Perspective

Understanding the rules of Water Skyball from the referee's perspective is crucial for ensuring fair play and smooth game flow. This chapter highlights the most important rules referees must monitor and enforce, including how they are applied during different phases of the game.

4.1 Starting and Restarting the Game

- The match begins with a **throw-out** by the goalkeeper of the starting team.
- The referee ensures the starting players are in their correct zones (one in defender zone, one in midfield zone) and that the game begins only after the whistle.
- Every **restart** during the match is also done via throw-out, and **goals cannot be scored directly** from it.

4.2 Time Management

- A standard match lasts **10 minutes**, though longer durations (12, 15, or 20 minutes) may be agreed upon beforehand.
- The game uses a **running clock**, except during:
 - **Timeouts**, requested or enforced (e.g., for injury or weather)
 - **Penalty execution in the last minute** of the match (the clock stops from the whistle until play resumes)
- The referee must clearly indicate any **time stop** using a "T" shape with their hands.

4.3 Ball Out of Play

Referees must determine which team gains possession when the ball leaves the field:

- **Side exit**: the opposing team restarts with a throw-out
- **Baseline exit by attacker**: defending team restarts with a throw-out
- **Baseline exit by defending goalkeeper**: defending team retains possession
- **Baseline exit by defending midfielder** (excluding goal situations): defending team retains possession

4.4 Scoring and Goal Recognition

- A goal is awarded when the ball legally enters the goal structure.

- The referee signals a goal by raising one outstretched arm and showing the score with fingers:
 - **1 point:** index finger
 - **2 points:** index and middle fingers
 - **4 points:** index, middle, ring, and little fingers (thumb is never used)

4.5 Fouls and Penalties

- After a foul is called, the referee:
 - Blows the whistle
 - Points to the midfield zone where the penalty is taken
 - Indicates with fingers how many penalties can be thrown by the team on the corresponding side
 - If both arms are raised, both teams may throw the given number of penalties
- Penalties may be executed even after regular match time ends, but only those committed before the whistle are valid.

4.6 Use of Whistle and Signals

Referees use distinct whistle patterns:

- **One short whistle:** to start, restart, or interrupt play
- **Dashed whistle:** to draw attention to specific events
- **Three dashed whistles (last one longer):** indicates end of game

In addition, referees rely on standardized **hand and arm signals** to indicate:

- **Goal:** raised arm + fingers indicating score
- **Throw-out:** arm extended sideways, pointing to team in possession
- **Foul/Penalty:** point to midfield zone, show number of penalty throws
- **Time stop:** both hands forming a “T” shape

Referees do not use body language to explain decisions but to **maintain presence and control** during the match.



5. Signaling and Communication

Clear and consistent communication is a cornerstone of effective refereeing in Water Skyball. Referees must convey decisions quickly and unambiguously to players, co-referees, and spectators, using a standardized set of signals and controlled verbal communication.

5.1 Whistle Signals

Whistle signals are used to indicate all official game interruptions and transitions:

- **One short whistle:** Start, restart, or regular interruption of play
- **Dashed whistle:** Draws attention to specific in-game events (e.g., foul committed)
- **Three dashed whistles, with the final one longer:** Signals the end of match time

Referees should blow the whistle firmly and clearly so it is audible above surrounding noise, especially in outdoor or tournament settings.

5.2 Hand and Arm Signals

Hand signals ensure transparency and support player understanding, especially in fast-paced or noisy environments. The following gestures are standardized in Water Skyball:

- **Goal:** One arm raised vertically; fingers indicate point value (1, 2, or 4 — thumb is never used)
- **Throw-out:** Arm extended sideways, pointing to the team entitled to restart play
- **Foul / Penalty:** Point to midfield zone (penalty location), then raise fingers to show the number of penalties; both arms raised means both teams may throw
- **Time stop:** Arms form the letter "T"

Referees should use deliberate and confident movements, holding signals long enough to be seen and understood by all participants.

5.3 Body Language and Presence

While not used to explain decisions, body language plays a vital role in match control. A composed, firm posture communicates authority and helps maintain order. Referees should:

- Avoid exaggerated or aggressive gestures
- Maintain eye contact with players when appropriate
- Use positioning and calm movement to stay connected with the game without becoming a distraction

5.4 Verbal Communication

Verbal interactions with players should be minimal, clear, and respectful. Referees may:

- Issue warnings or instructions in a calm tone (e.g., for uniform issues, minor beginner errors)
- Briefly explain a decision if it supports learning in an amateur context
- Address unsporting conduct swiftly and assertively without engaging in debate

In general, players are **not permitted to speak to the referee**, question decisions, argue, or engage in discussions during the match. This is a core rule of Water Skyball that protects the authority and neutrality of the referee. If a player repeatedly violates this rule:

- The referee may issue a verbal warning
- In case of persistent behavior, appropriate **sanctions** may be applied, depending on the severity

In **amateur or beginner matches**, some flexibility is allowed — especially when a player clearly does not yet understand a rule or action. In such cases:

- The referee may offer **short, informative instructions** during the game
- **Longer explanations or questions** should be reserved for **after the match**, when players can receive full clarification without disrupting the flow of play

Consistent and professional communication helps build trust in the referee's role and reinforces the values of Water Skyball.

6. Refereeing During Different Match Types

Water Skyball matches may vary significantly depending on the setting, competition level, and player experience. Referees must adjust their approach accordingly, while still upholding the rules and the core values of the sport.

6.1 Amateur and Friendly Matches

In grassroots, recreational, or beginner settings:

- **One referee** is typically sufficient.
- The referee may adopt a more **educational and flexible style** (as detailed in Section 2.5).
- **Minor infractions** (e.g., slight hand misplacement, unfamiliarity with zones) may be met with verbal reminders rather than immediate penalties.
- The referee should remain approachable but still maintain authority and structure.

In these matches, it's especially important to ensure players feel safe, respected, and encouraged to learn. Referees can contribute by offering short clarifications after the match or giving constructive feedback in a supportive tone.



6.2 Youth Matches

When officiating games with younger players (under 18):

- Safety must be the top priority.
- Communication should be clear, encouraging, and adapted to the age group.
- Allowing time for players to correct behavior after a warning is encouraged.
- Physical contact or aggressive behavior must be addressed immediately, even if unintentional.

6.3 Competitive and Professional Matches

In tournament or league settings:

- **Two referees** are required: one of whom acts as the **head referee**.
- The refereeing style should be **strictly rule-based and neutral**.
- Clear coordination with the scorer, timekeeper, and (if present) statisticians is necessary.
- No tolerance should be shown for persistent infractions, disrespect, or interference with officiating.

The referee's conduct and consistency directly impact the credibility of the match. Professionalism and impartiality are essential throughout.



6.4 Exhibition or Promotional Matches

In matches designed for public demonstrations or outreach:

- The referee should maintain the rules but also contribute to a **positive audience experience**.
- Explanatory comments or short pauses for demonstration purposes may be appropriate if agreed upon beforehand.
- Maintaining a friendly and inclusive tone helps promote the sport while still preserving its structure.

Regardless of the match type, referees must adapt without compromising the essential rules of Water Skyball — particularly those related to **non-contact play, one-handed throwing, and respectful conduct**.



7. Pre-Match and Post-Match Responsibilities

A Water Skyball referee's duties extend beyond the active match time. Proper preparation before the game and responsible follow-up afterward help ensure a smooth, fair, and professional match experience for all participants.

7.1 Pre-Match Responsibilities

Before the game begins, the referee must:

- **Arrive early** to check the field setup and safety conditions
- Verify the **field dimensions, markings, and goal structures** are correct and in place
- Confirm the presence and readiness of the **scorer, timekeeper, and other officials** if applicable
- **Inspect players' uniforms and equipment** in accordance with Section 2.3
- Ensure all players are in a suitable state of **health and hygiene**
- Clarify any organizational issues with team captains or event coordinators
- Establish communication methods with co-referees (if any) and supporting staff

Optional but recommended:

- Offer a **brief introduction or rules reminder** to players, especially if the match involves beginners

7.2 Post-Match Responsibilities

After the game ends, referees should:

- Signal the end of the match clearly with the correct whistle pattern
- Thank the teams and officiating staff for their participation and cooperation
- Record the final score in collaboration with the scorer
- Note any **major incidents, infractions, or unsporting conduct**
- If needed, submit a **match report** or communicate issues to event organizers
- Be available for brief **clarifications or feedback**, especially in amateur contexts where players are still learning

Although the official match ends with the final whistle, a referee's calm and professional conduct in the closing minutes reinforces respect and sets a positive tone for future games.

8. Common Mistakes and How to Avoid Them

Even experienced referees can occasionally make mistakes, especially in fast-paced or high-pressure situations. Recognizing and proactively avoiding common errors is key to maintaining control, fairness, and credibility throughout the match.

8.1 Poor Positioning

- **Problem:** Standing too far from the action or at an improper angle can lead to missed calls or misjudgments.
- **Solution:** Anticipate gameplay, adjust positioning constantly, and always maintain a clear view of the ball and key zones.

8.2 Inconsistent Rule Enforcement

- **Problem:** Applying rules differently for different teams or situations undermines fairness.
- **Solution:** Stick to the rules consistently, regardless of the score, team reputation, or game context.

8.3 Over-Officiating or Under-Officiating

- **Problem:** Too many interruptions can disrupt game flow; too few can cause chaos or risk player safety.
- **Solution:** Use your judgment to find the right balance—intervene when necessary, but let the game play out naturally when possible.

8.4 Lack of Communication or Clarity

- **Problem:** Confusing signals or poor communication with players and co-referees may result in disputes or misunderstandings.
- **Solution:** Use standardized signals confidently and communicate clearly with your team and the players.

8.5 Engaging in Arguments or Debates

- **Problem:** Allowing conversations with players about decisions can escalate tension and undermine the referee's authority.
- **Solution:** Politely but firmly remind players that decisions are final, and defer longer discussions until after the match if needed (see Section 5.4).

8.6 Losing Neutrality or Composure

- **Problem:** Emotional reactions, favoritism, or visibly showing frustration can damage credibility.
- **Solution:** Remain calm, objective, and professional at all times, even under pressure.

By staying aware of these pitfalls and adopting preventive strategies, referees can continuously improve their performance and better serve the game of Water Skyball.

9. Conclusion / Closing Remarks

Referees are essential to the integrity, safety, and spirit of Water Skyball. Their role goes beyond enforcing rules—they serve as guardians of fairness, facilitators of learning, and ambassadors of the sport's values.

This handbook has aimed to provide a comprehensive yet practical guide to supporting referees in their work, whether they are overseeing a local friendly match or a professional tournament. By combining technical knowledge, clear communication, and a respectful approach to players of all levels, referees contribute significantly to the growth and success of Water Skyball.

As the sport continues to expand across Europe and beyond, the commitment to quality officiating will help ensure that every match is played with integrity, inclusion, and enjoyment. With continued training, collaboration, and passion for the game, referees will remain a driving force in making Water Skyball a modern, meaningful, and accessible sport for all.

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