

THE SPLASH

ARLINGTON BATHS CLUB

AQUATIC FOOTBALL'S COMING HOME!

Water polo returns to its roots today as the Arlington Baths Club hosts its first water polo match of the 21st Century.

Battling it out in the Baths today are teams from Western Baths and Glasgow University in a demonstration match of the sport that developed right here 150 years ago.

The Arlington's first baths master, William Wilson, claims the crown for coming up with rules for what was then called 'aquatic football'.

Wilson, swimming instructor, journalist, author and tireless proponent of the art of natation, took on the challenge



MR. W. WILSON

to create a team game to enliven the annual race day of the Bon Accord Swimming Club in Aberdeen. Learning from trials at the Arlington during the 1870s, the new game was publicly showcased at the 1877 Bon Accord race day in the River Dee.

Later that year an aquatic football match graced the opening ceremony of the new Victoria Baths in Glasgow's southside, where, by then, Wilson was the baths master, supported by his wife, Ruth.

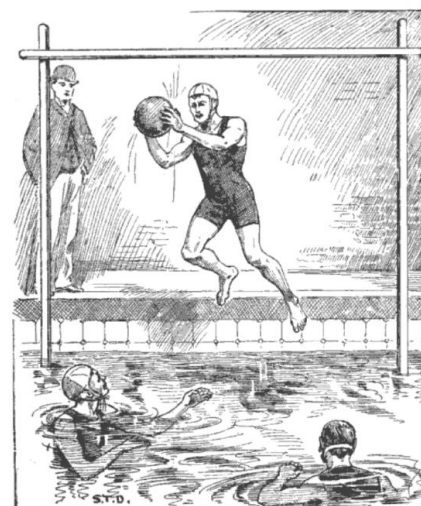
By our Sporting Correspondent

It caught on quickly, with the first all-Scotland championship taking place in 1886. This was played to Wilson's rules, including the goalkeeper standing on the pond side, ready to dive bomb to defend the goal.

English swimming clubs developed a similar game and the very first water polo international saw England take on the Scots on 28 July 1890 in Kensington Baths, London. This match was played under the English Rules but, despite that, experience won out and Scotland triumphed 4-0. Re-played under the Scotch Rules in Glasgow in 1891, England lost again.

With such enthusiasm for the new sport on both sides of the border, it was time for a common set of rules. In 1892 the English and Scottish governing bodies held an international conference in Liverpool and adopted almost all the Scottish rules of play. Only the design and use of the goals came from the English rules, but that meant the goalkeeper lost his pondside post as all players now took the plunge to make the game fully aquatic.

Next came the Olympics! In Paris 1900 matches were played in the Seine, returning to the sport to its open water roots. Though women had to wait until Sydney 2000 to be able to compete at Olympic level.



WATER-POLO - SCOTCH STYLE

It's now a truly international sport, governed by the Fédération internationale de natation (FINA), with almost 500,000 registered water polo players worldwide.

Meanwhile back at the Arlington, the water polo teams competed across Scotland, including regular contests against other baths clubs in the city, with champions' photos hung on the Club walls.

By the start of this century the sport was no longer played at the Arlington but today will make new water polo memories for the Club.

We also remember one more of William Wilson's rules that didn't stand the test of the time but shows that the game belongs to Glasgow: those first players were permitted to submerge an opponent to gain possession of the ball!

An introduction to water polo

Water polo can be played in a pond between 20-30m long and 10-20m wide. The early ponds such as the Arlington and Victoria being 21m by 11m (70ft by 35ft).

There are goals at each end of the pond and the winner of the game is the team that scores the most goals by getting the ball between the posts.

Players can move the ball by throwing it to a teammate or swimming while pushing the ball in front of them. They can only hold the ball with one hand, other than the goalkeeper who can use both hands.

Players are not allowed to touch the bottom of the pond and have to tread water the whole time. Water polo players use a movement called the *eggbeater* which is more efficient than the normal action of treading water.

The match starts with a swim-off. The ball is released in the middle of the pitch with the players lined up along their own goal lines. The first team to reach the ball has the first possession of the game.

Each team is only allowed to hold on to the ball for a maximum of 30 seconds before shooting for the goal. If they haven't done this then possession passes to the other team. After each goal, the team who conceded resume the match with the ball. All players for each team must be in their own half at the resumption of play.

In senior water polo and most junior games, water polo teams consist of 13 players. Each team is allowed to have seven in the water at one time – six outfield players and one goalkeeper.

Except for the goalkeeper, players move continuously around the pond during a game. Most teams structure their outfield players with one centre back, one centre forward, two drivers and two wingers.

Water polo players need remarkable stamina because of the considerable amount of holding and pushing that occurs during the game. As it's such a fast game and can be quite draining, each team is also allowed a maximum of six substitutes (one goalkeeper and five outfield players).

Players can be substituted in and out of the game at any time although the goalkeeper can only be replaced by the substitute goalkeeper and the outfield players by designated outfield substitutes.

The player coming into the game can only enter the match at the following times:

- during the intervals between periods of play
- after a goal has been scored
- during a timeout

Water polo matches have two referees with one stood on either side of the pond. The referees are in control of the game and are the only officials who can award fouls. Fouls are indicated by use of a whistle and goals by a bell.

Under FINA rules, a water polo match is divided into four quarters of eight minutes.

However, because the clock is stopped when the ball is not in play, the average quarter lasts around 12 minutes.

