

# LAMORINDA SPORTS

## Why Lamorinda girls love water polo

By Jon Kingdon



Photo Gint Federas

Some sports have contradictory qualities. Football is a truly violent game and yet it has its graceful and acrobatic aspects. Football players require intelligence, speed and discipline – many of the same characteristics water polo players need to be successful.

Developed in England in the 19th century, and originally called “water rugby,” water polo began as a very physical sport.

Possibly the most famous water polo match was in 1956 when Hungary played the USSR at the Melbourne Olympics in Australia. This game became known as “The Blood in the Water Match” due to the fair amount of blood left in the pool after Hungary’s 4-0 win.

Though violence like this is rare, water polo is far more physical and demanding than the average spectator realizes.

So what is it that attracts Lamorinda girls to the sport?

According to Acalanes Girls Water Polo Coach Misha Buchel, the girls who go out for water polo have to bring a wide range of physical and mental skills to the game. They know that there is the potential for injury to the head, shoulders, elbows and legs. “It is not a sport for anyone that cannot handle contact. It can be a wrestling match in the water.”

The sport also demands the players have endurance. Players may have to go an entire quarter without touching the bottom of the pool. The game rewards the strongest and the fittest.

Yet as physical as the game is, Buchel says the players must understand the tactical side of the sport.

According to Miramonte Girls Water Polo Coach Lance Morrison many of the players come from families where their parents played water polo in college and passed down their love of the sport to them. Morrison notes, “Water polo has become a prominent way of life in the Lamorinda area.” Numerous colleges have taken notice of the talent in the area and he feels the area has become a hotbed of college recruiting.

Those interested in Lamorinda swimming programs can start as early as 4 years old and continue on through high school. This more than anything explains the success of the swim teams at the high school level. It also explains the continued success of the water polo teams at Acalanes, Campolindo and Miramonte. Bushel points to the long history of water polo in the area and also the proximity to UC Berkeley, which boasts a top water polo program. Campolindo Girls Water Polo

Coach Kim Everist, once a Member of the USA Junior National Women’s Water Polo Team, certainly understands the requirements asked of the players and its demands: “Currently, all types come out for water polo. In order to be successful at our sport, you definitely have to be mentally tough and, like any sport, it helps to be athletic. The training is demanding and there is constant physical contact.”

Everist believes the best water polo players are those kids who have played basketball, soccer and volleyball. “There are elements of these games that are very similar and teach necessary skills that transfer to water polo,” she says. “Water polo is a fun, social sport and I think in high school many girls come out because it is no-cut sport and fosters a fun atmosphere. Those that play the most minutes are physically strong, swim well, have a competitive spirit, enjoy the physical and mental challenge and have a general awareness of the flow of offensive and defensive concepts.

“Our sport welcomes all body types. Some are more conducive for certain positions in the game and for different levels of play, but there is a success story for every body type that exists. It is a tough game, but fun and very rewarding.”

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