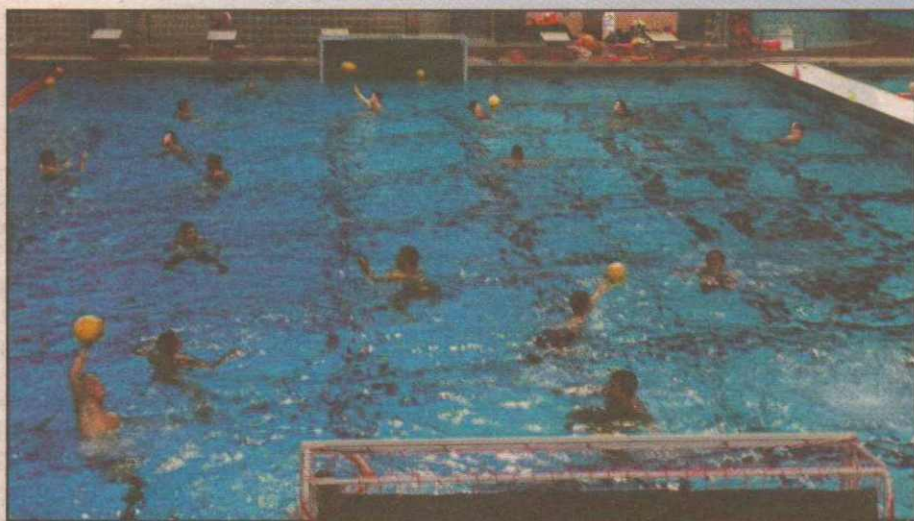


Water Polo: Intensely Challenging Intensely Enjoyable

By Michael Vandenberg



Try this: tread water for 20 minutes, take a short break, and then tread for 20 more. Kept yourself afloat? Great. Now try doing that while sporadically moving back and forth across the pool. Then try playing a contact sport on top of all that. It may be tough, but to Rutgers Water Polo Club Treasurer Daniel Kats and President Isaiah Del Rios, it's a great sport that they wouldn't have any other way.

The Rutgers Water Polo Club was started in 2005 and meets at the Sonny A. Werblin Recreation Center right on Busch Campus in Piscataway. Not only are all the school's current students (boys and girls) encouraged to try it out, but professors and alumni too! Indeed, the inclusive club has even seen international players with experience in Europe, Asia, and Africa. Don't let that turn you away though; Dan points out that skill levels can range, "from players who have been practicing the sport since before high school to those who have never touched a water polo ball and barely know the rules".

While having plenty of competitive swimming experience throughout his childhood and even being captain of his Montville High School swim team, Dan had no previous water polo experience before last year. However, "since we have older and more experienced players, I was able to pick up the skills quickly." A year after joining, he's well-adjusted and was happy to volunteer for the treasurer position.

Isaiah is yet another RU Water Polo Club success story. He has ten years of experience starting as a seventh grader at St. Benedicts Prep in Newark. His reasoning for starting in water polo is actually the same as a lot of athletes I've interviewed: his sibling was doing it. "It was fun to watch and I wanted to follow in his footsteps," said Isaiah. The current college senior's love for water polo really picked up when he joined the varsity team as a high school freshman. He now enjoys being president of the RU team, saying, "it is nothing I can't handle".

Isaiah and Dan are continuously working towards RU Water Polo's ongoing success. The team joined the American Water Polo annual league in the spring. (Although NCAA water polo does exist, more institutional varsity programs are found heavier on the west coast.) Their league has eight dates for tournaments in a season, and each of the nine teams plays around two matches per tournament. Games themselves contain two 20-minute halves with a break in between. The winning team is the one that is able to get past the goalie and score the most points in the net during the game.

Water polo players can find it difficult to move up past the college level in this area, but a few professional leagues do exist out west. Dan pointed out that, "water polo is an extremely popular international sport, and its biggest stage is the Summer Olympics". Many people, including myself, first learn of the sport by watching it there.

However they first hear about it, water polo players fall in love with this unique sport with ease. Dan describes it to outsiders as, "soccer with the hands" and also likes how it borrows skills from handball and rugby. Isaiah admits how water polo isn't exactly a common sport in his hometown of Newark and feels lucky enough to be given the opportunity at both his high school and college. Isaiah believes it has been a very accessible sport on both levels. The Rutgers Water Polo Club doesn't require any prior experience, and at his high school, "we would constantly get large numbers of inner city kids with no prior swimming experience as freshmen and by the time they become seniors they could compete with some of the best teams in our area".

So if you're a student at Rutgers, a professor, or an alumnus that still lives in the area, why not give water polo a try? The Rutgers Water Polo Club meets at the Werblin Recreation Center in Piscataway during the fall and spring on Sundays 4pm-6pm and on Mondays and Wednesdays 8:30pm-10pm. For more information contact the president Isaiah Del Rios at ruwaterpolo@gmail.com or the treasurer Daniel Kats at dkats1@yahoo.com.