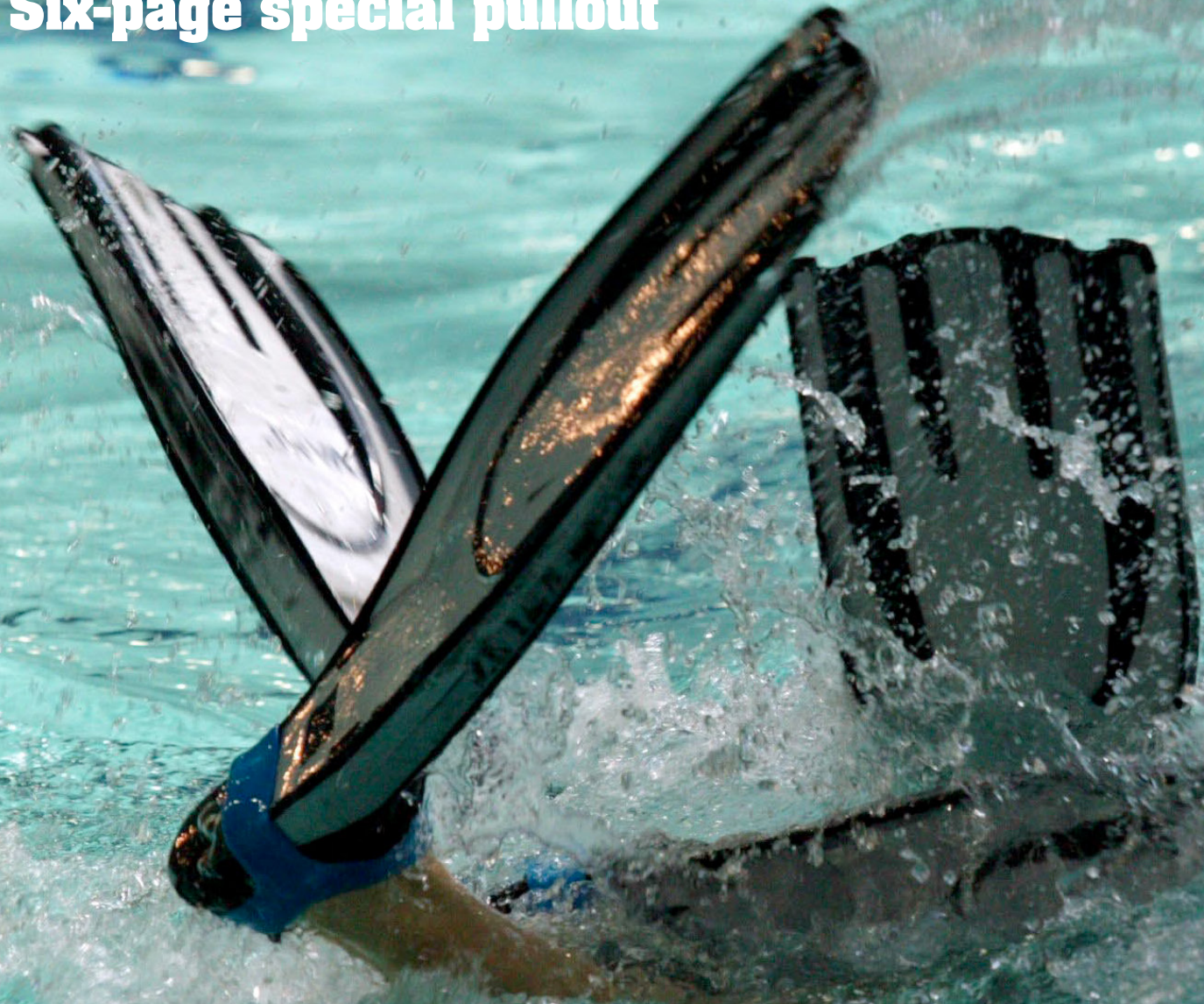




WHAT ON EARTH IS 'OCTOPUSH'?

Six-page special pullout



Try something different

19th CMAS 
Underwater Hockey Worlds
2016
SOUTH AFRICA - STELLENBOSCH 



How did it all start?

Underwater Hockey (UWH), or 'Octopush' (mainly in the United Kingdom) is a limited-contact sport in which two teams compete to manoeuvre a puck across the bottom of a swimming pool into the opposing team's goal by propelling it with a pusher. It originated in England in 1954 when Alan Blake, the founder of the newly formed Southsea Sub-Aqua Club, invented the game he called Octopush as a means of keeping the club's members interested and active over the cold winter months when open-water diving lost its appeal.

The story told is that when the divers were out of season, during the Winter months, a diving weight was dropped into the pool, whereby a diver then went into the pool and knocked the weight across the bottom of the pool with a snorkel - Underwater Hockey was born.

Since that day this sport has grown in popularity, particularly through the 70's, 80's and is now played in over 80 clubs up and down the country with the leading clubs being Southsea, Southport, and West London. Many clubs host their own tournaments, but the national championships are the 'Nautilus' in November and 'The National Championship' in July (not forgetting the many other European tournaments).

Octopush, played by two teams of 6 players with up to 4 substitutes per team. Like Ice Hockey, you can substitute as often as you like which makes the game very fast, explosive and not for the faint hearted. One team has dark hats with dark sticks or 'pushers', and the other team has white hats with white pushers. Yellow is worn by all the referees. The aim of the game consists of trying to get a puck into the opponent's 'gully' or goal by flicking or 'pushing' the puck along the floor of the swimming pool from player to player towards the goal. Each game is 30 minutes long; two halves of 15 minutes with a 2 minute half

1959, the British Navy playing Octopush



1954, Alan Blake with members of Southsea Sub-Aqua Club

time. And a typical score is 4-2, though a dominant team playing a much weaker team can achieve as much as a 16-0 score.

Underwater Hockey is a supreme aerobic game and it is now played worldwide, with the Confédération Mondiale des Activités Subaquatiques (CMAS) as the world governing body. Historically, the first Underwater Hockey World Championship was held in Canada in 1980. World Championships have been held every two years since. At the CMAS 14th World Underwater Hockey Championship held in August 2006 in Sheffield, England, a record 44 teams from 17 countries competed in six age and gender categories. Participating countries were Australia, Belgium, Canada, Colombia, Hungary, France, Italy, Japan, Jersey C.I., the Netherlands, New Zealand, South Africa, Spain, Turkey, the United Kingdom, Ireland, and the United States. Subsequent world championships have been less well-attended, including the WAA World Championship held in 2008 in Durban, South Africa, until the 18th CMAS World Championship was held in Eger, Hungary in August 2013. This event once again saw all age and gender divisions, now including men and women in U19, U23, Masters and Elite categories compete. There were 68 teams competing across the eight age/gender divisions from 19 participating countries, making this World Championship the largest competition in the history of the sport to date. During 18th World Championships in 2015, a decision was made by the federations to split the competition into two events with Junior Grades (U19, U23) to be accommodated in a separate.

At Elite level France are the current Men's World Champions, and New Zealand are the current Women's World Champions. Teams representing Australia, Colombia, France, Great Britain, Netherlands, New Zealand and South Africa shared all 24 medal positions in the 8 age/gender divisions between them. Octopush enjoys popularity in the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, France, the Netherlands, New Zealand, South Africa and the United States, as well as to a lesser extent in other countries such as Argentina, Belgium, Brazil, Colombia, the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Ireland, Japan, the Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Serbia, Singapore, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, Turkey and Zimbabwe, and is gaining a foothold in numerous additional countries.

Swimwear

There are usually no restrictions on swimwear, however baggy style trunks or shorts reduce speed and increase drag in the water. Typical swimwear is swim briefs for male players and one-piece swimsuits for female players.

Fins

Fins allow the player to swim faster through the water. A wide range of fins are used in the sport, but large plastic/rubber composite fins or smaller, stiffer fibreglass or carbon fibre fins are commonplace at competitions. Once again they must have no unnecessarily acute or sharp edges, nor buckles.

Hat

Safety gear includes ear protection, usually in the form of a water polo cap to protect the eardrums and as a secondary indicator of the player's team (coloured black/blue/dark or white/pale as appropriate). Water referees should wear red hats.

Mask

A diving mask improves underwater visibility, players can equalise their ears (using the Valsalva manoeuvre) as the nose is covered, and unlike the swim goggles, a mask sits outside the eye's orbit, reducing the effects of any impact on the mask. A low-volume mask with minimal protrusion from

Equipment

the face reduces the likelihood of the mask being knocked, causing it to leak or flood and temporarily blind the player. In line with the rules any masks must have two lenses since a single lens mask poses a significant safety hazard in the event that an unfortunately placed puck should hit (and possibly pass through) the lens.

A variety of webbing strap designs are available to replace the original head strap with a non-elastic strap that further reduces the chances of the player being de-masked.

Snorkel

A snorkel enables players to watch the progress of the game without having to remove their head from the water to breathe. This allows them to keep their correct position on the surface, ready to resume play once they have recovered.

In order to maximise the efficiency of breathing and reduce drag underwater, they are often short and wide bore, with or without a drain valve. They must not be rigid or have any unnecessarily acute edges or points. The snorkel may accommodate an external mouth guard which may be worn in conjunction with, or instead of, an internal mouth guard.

Puck

The puck is approximately the size of an ice hockey puck, but is made of lead or similar material (Adult size weighs 3 lb (1.3-1.5 kg), Junior 1¾ lb (800-850 g) and is encapsulated or surrounded by a plastic covering which is usually matched to the pool bottom to facilitate good grip on the stick face while preventing excessive friction on the pool bottom. The puck's weight brings it to rest on the pool bottom, though can be lifted during passes.

Glove

A glove should be worn on the playing hand to protect against pool-bottom abrasion and, in some designs, for protection against puck impact on knuckles and other vulnerable areas; however, no rigid protection is permitted. Players may choose to wear a protective glove on both hands, either as additional protection from the pool bottom or, for ambidextrous players, to switch the stick between hands mid-play. A glove used in competition must be a contrasting colour to the wearer's stick, but not orange which is reserved for referees' gloves.

Stick

The stick (also referred to as a 'bat' or 'pusher') is relatively short (no more than 350mm including the handle) and is coloured white or black to indicate the player's team. The stick may only be held in one hand, which is determined by the player's handedness, although players may swap hands during play.

The shape of the stick may affect playing style and is often a very personal choice. A wide variety of stick designs are allowed within the constraints of the rules of the game, the principal rules being that the stick must fit into a box of 100x50x350mm and that the stick must not be capable of surrounding the puck or any part of the hand. A rule concerning the minimum radius of edges tries to address the risk that the stick might become more of a weapon than a playing tool.

Construction materials may be of wood or plastics and current rules now supersede those that previously required sticks to be homogeneous. Many players manufacture their own sticks to their preferred shape and style, although there are increasingly more mass-produced designs to suit the majority.

Goal

The goals (or 'gulleys') are three metres wide and are sited at opposite ends of the playing area on the pool bottom. They consist of a shallow slope leading up to a trough into which the puck may be pushed or flicked. Goals are commonly constructed from aluminium, galvanised or stainless steel. This helps to ensure that they are negatively buoyant and are durable in the chlorinated water of swimming pools.





2016, Kim Moakes and Henry Ing-Simmons at Gurnell Leisure Centre (Ealing, London)

'We do not like **BREATHING**'

West London Underwater Hockey Club ladies' coach, Kim Moakes, and its male's team captain, Henry Ing-Simmon, put us in the big picture of what it is like to be part of the strongest team in the UK

West London Underwater Hockey Club, ranked amongst the Top 3 UK teams, is home to several Team GB players, and the ladies' team is the strongest women's team in the UK. It regularly takes two teams to all the major domestic BOA competitions. Kim Moakes (West London ladies coach): "I have been playing the sport for 16 years. When we train for one hour and a half, we mix

different levels. It is more fun and we exercise harder. But next week, when we go to the World Championships, there will be a man and the women's division. Last year ladies had silver, and two years ago a gold. The GB ladies are very strong. We are definitely stronger than men - last time they were fourth, so they are on their way up. They need to catch up!"

Males captain, Henry Ing-Simmons, said that Octopush is a sport that it is building and building, and hopefully it is on his way up. Henry said: "When I started to play at the age of 11, it was hard because people did not know about it and it was difficult to find clubs, but now the refereeing is better and it is becoming more professional."

From the 25 mixtures of players, between eight and ten will go to South Africa between March 23 and April 2 to the 19th CMAS Underwater Hockey

World Championship. Kim said: "We are a friendly club with a good reputation of high level players, being also a good place for new people to join us."

What is the feeling before going to South Africa, Kim has been asked: "The aim is always the gold.

Women really want to look at the gold again, especially because it has been two years of training hard, and the last three weeks it was constant. But the feeling is positive because we feel prepared as we wanted to be."

Last time Kim played was in Hungary 2013. She said

"The game is 3D, how you play is only limited by your imagination."

Referees

There are refereeing the game two or three water referees (i.e. in the pool with full snorkelling gear, and preferably wearing a distinctive red cap, orange gloves and golden yellow shirt) to observe and referee play at the pool bottom, and one or more poolside deck referees to track time (both in the period and for each ejected player), maintain the score, and call fouls (such as excessive number of players in play, failure to start a point from the end of the playing area, or another foul capable of being committed at or noticed at the surface). The deck (chief) referee responds to hand signals given by the water referees to start and stop play, including after an interruption such as a foul or time-out.

Spectators

At a club or training level, Underwater Hockey is not particularly spectator friendly. Very few pools have underwater viewing ports, and since the action is all below the surface, one usually has to enter the water to see the skill and the complexities of the game. Spectators may either put on mask, fins and snorkel and enter the pool for a view of the playing area, or possibly take advantage of the work of underwater videographers who have recorded

major tournaments. Such tournaments often have live footage on large screens for the spectators which makes it a very exciting spectator sport. The 2006 (Sheffield, England) and 2010 (Durban, South Africa) Underwater Hockey World Championships were screened poolside and simultaneously webcast live to spectators around the world, while the 2008 European Championship in Istanbul, Turkey had excellent video coverage but no live streaming. Filming the games is challenging even for the experienced videographer, as the players' movements are fast and there are few places on the surface or beneath it which are free from their seemingly frenzied movements.

Games are often played width-wise across a 50-metre pool to provide spaces in between simultaneous games for player substitutes, penalty boxes, coaches and camera crews. However, research and development of filming techniques is ongoing. Organizers of major tournaments are usually the point of contact for acquiring footage of underwater hockey matches. Although no official worldwide repository exists for recorded games, there are many websites and instructional DVDs. A wide variety of related footage can be found on video sharing sites.

that it was a lot of pressure, although it is amazing. "You feel a pressure for two weeks, where everybody there has been training really hard, and other players that you know come and support you," she said.

"But it is tremendously hard work because you play two or maybe three games a day. Last time we did not, but this

time we will be having sport therapists and chefs coming with us. We have time to eat, to play and to sleep. You feel like you are well taken care of for a week or two. It is intense. I have been working towards it for two years, so I try to enjoy every single minute of it."

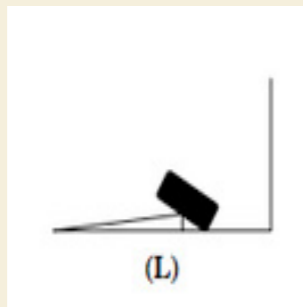
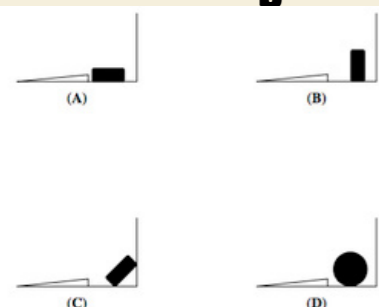
Henry said: "Kim's strength as a player is that she is very determined and she keeps the possession the whole time." Kim added: "But the strength of our GB ladies team is that we are a team.

You cannot have one amazing player and another fabulous one and hope that they will work together. We are a real team."



Successful goals

Unsuccessful



2016, GB Elite Ladies

OCTOPUSH | Special pullout

Henry said: "People have a lot of individual skill. Because you are holding your breath and everyone is down in the water, there is no way to communicate, so when you are playing at a higher level, it is very important to play as a team. You cannot really work with your own. You cannot stay forever within the water. And there is no resting on the surface. We do not like breathing." So, is there any particular prototype of a perfect player?

Kim said: "Different builds have different qualities. One of our best back players normally has to be someone strong and big, but she is tiny and little and she can take out two massive guys, so sometimes it does not matter the body. What is vital is the speed and skill. Anything else is a plus that counts as an extra. It is all about the mentality. A mentality that you are prepared to get in, to go for it and when you think you need to breath, do not."

But how do players guide under water?

Henry said: "Practising and practising is the key to success. You just play with those players and it becomes a second nature. If they are not where you expect them to be, then you experiment. Time is fundamental. You have to keep doing it until you find yourselves comfortable. The game is 3D, how you play is only limited by your imagination."

Also, they both stated that Octopush is a three dimensional sport and you have to bear in mind breathing, passing, and you have to have an awareness of who is next to you.

Henry said: "You have to hold your breath as much as you can but not like Stig Severinsen.

He is the holder of multiple records in diving using his state of 'Zen Technique' to control his breathing. He holds his breath underwater for 22 minutes!"

Kim added: "We spend a lot of time as a team out of the water talking about what are we going to do when we get in and who is going to be where, and we will work through it under water," "We have discussions after our training sessions because it is all about communication. People stay on the bottom as much as possible and apart from the back player, the idea is to be

down as much as one can be. If you see one of your players being down for a while you can probably guess that they will go up, so you are not going to go back in that direction again."

Nobody advertises them, nor supports the team economically and they both agreed that that is an area they really need support. Hendry said: "The problem within the UK is that everybody wants to play with the highest levels so that they can fill their pockets."

Kim believes this is a shame because in France it is very well sponsored and the elite players are being paid for their whole time spent playing. She said: "Because it is not an Olympic sport, people tend to support others, whereas the ones that really need the support is us - we need it!" Henry explains that the main issue is that for the Olympics you need a spectatorship and because it is under water, without enough money you cannot get cameras. He said: "The only spectators are watching the game on the TV screens. A lot of the competition is being filmed now so they have big screens on the side of the pool and people can watch live on the stream.

"At least we travel to other teams and we play against them and vice versa,"

"It allows you to get to know players from New Zealand, for example. A couple of years ago I went there and they were more than happy to receive me. They told me 'Ah, look, someone from the other side of the world - come and play with us!'. Then I played in a couple of teams, similar to people that come for a holiday to London and end up playing with us. It is just fantastic. I am not sure, but is maybe the friendliest sport developing ever!"

In London, apart from West London Club, the other strong and famous team is West Wickham. Teams like Islington or St Albans are still growing.

In short - is this sport hazardous?

According to both, it is very difficult to make an injury or hurt someone while playing. Henry said: "Although you do get kicked a lot, I have never heard of broken bones.

It is pretty rare. This sport is everything but dangerous."

"He holds his breath underwater for 22 minutes!"



2016, GB Elite Ladies preparing for the World Championships in South Africa