

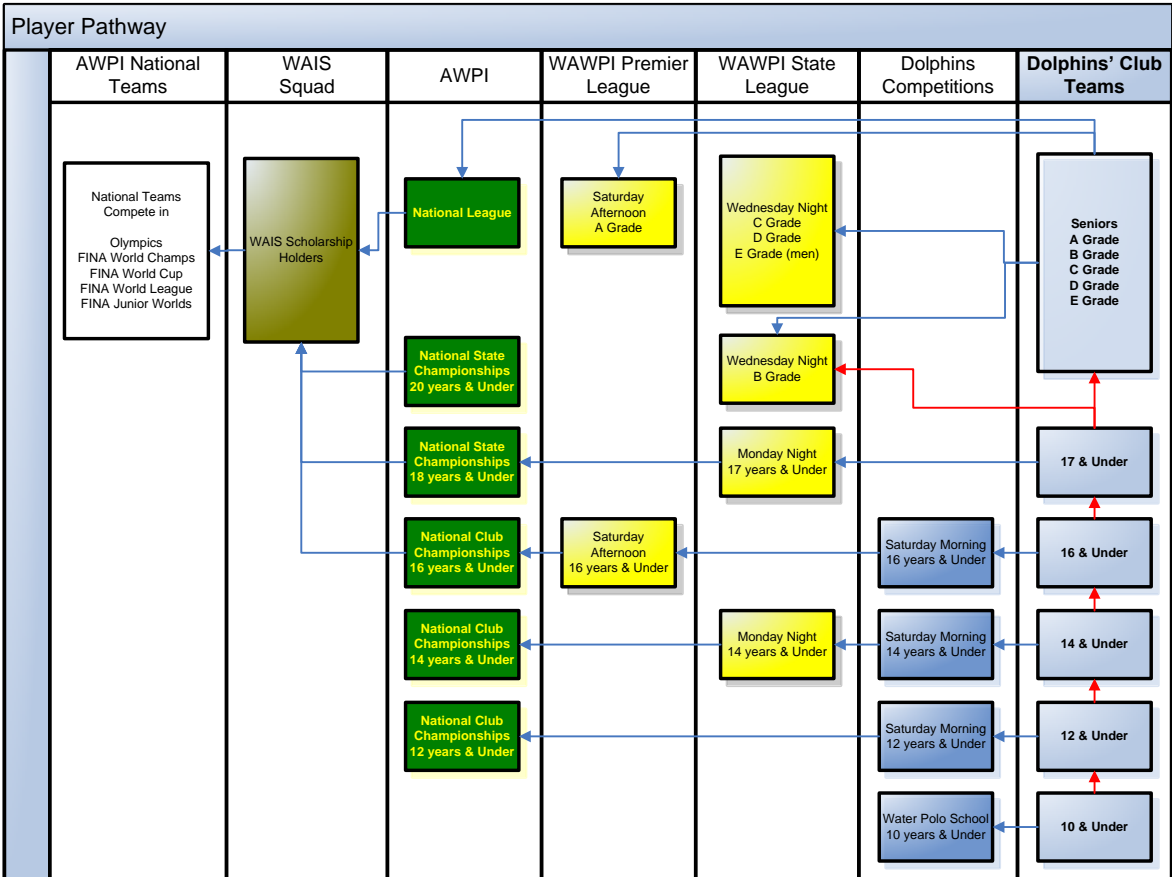


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Junior Player Pathway

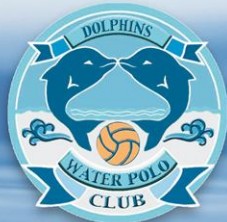
Context

The diagram below depicts the teams Dolphins runs (on the right side) and the competitions that the teams and players can play on the left. As you move from right to left the competitions range from internal competitions run by Dolphins through to the competitions run by WA Water Polo (WAWPI) then Australian Water Polo (AWPI) and finally those run by the sport’s world governing body FINA. WAIS has been shown, not because they run competitions, but WAIS does form an important part of the player pathway which will be explained in more detail later.



The Role of Dolphins Water Polo Club

Dolphins provides for the development of players from under 10 years old through to providing opportunities for players well past their fifties to continue to play water polo to their best ability.



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10 & Under - Water Polo School

Dolphins is the only WA club catering for kids under 10 years old and developed the Dolphin Ball concept to teach young children the basics of the game before they start to play in the 12 & under competitions. The 10 & under program is called the Water Polo School and runs over 4th term and 1st term.

In 4th term the emphasis is on learning the basics in the following areas:-

- pool mobility - swimming including swimming with the ball
- leg work - frog kick and eggbeater
- ball handling - throwing and catching with one hand.

In 1st term we start to use some of the skills that have been learnt in term 4 and we start to apply them in game situations. There is an introduction to the rules and the dynamics of the game. The referee operates as a coach and provides direction against game situations during stoppages.

12 & Under

Dolphins runs a Saturday morning program for kids in this age group. Boys and girls play in separate competitions which run over 4th term and 1st term with finals played before the April school holidays.

Australian Water Polo is hoping to introduce a 12 & under national club championships which will mean Dolphins will need to run trials and add extra training times to the program if they are to send competitive teams.

Players would normally play two seasons at this level before moving up to the 14 & under age group.

14 & Under

Dolphins runs the same program on Saturdays for 14 & under plus teams are entered into the WA Water Polo junior competition which is held on Monday nights. Apart from the games played on Saturday mornings and Monday nights the players are expected to train in the afternoon during the week.

Australian Water Polo holds a 14 & under National Club Championships over the Easter break and Dolphins competed successfully in 2009, with one of the girls teams winning the gold medal. This success and the very good showing of the boys' team will no doubt be the catalyst for future Dolphins teams to compete.

16 & Under

The 16 & under program copies the 14 & under program with one difference. The 16 & under teams



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do not compete on Monday nights, although all the players would be expected to play in the 17 & under WA Water Polo Monday night competition. The 16 & under age group compete in the Premier League competition which is held on Saturday afternoons and clubs may enter only one team. Australian Water Polo also hold a 16 & under National Club Competition during the school holidays between 3rd term and 4th term.

With the 16 & under age group we now see a significant jump in the commitment required by the young player. If selected to play in the Premier League team the young player will play on Saturday afternoon, Monday night (in 17 & under team) will train during the week and will continue to train during the winter months in preparation for the National Championships.

Of great significance to the young player with aspirations to represent Australia, is that following the National Championships an Australian Squad is selected. This squad is the building block to competing in the FINA World Junior Championships which is an 18 & under age group and is held every 2 years. Members of the squad may become WAIS athletes and are therefore expected to fulfil these added training commitments.

The WAIS program delivers Australian Water Polo's decentralised elite athlete program. Again for those young players with aspirations to represent Australia, Dolphins would encourage them to try out for the 18 & under State Team even if you don't make it at this young age it will be a good learning opportunity.

17 & Under

The 17 & under players play in the WA Water Polo Monday night competition. This competition has 2 divisions with Division A generally being for the older and/or better players. Players in this age group are expected to play on Monday nights and train during the week.

Dolphins will also be playing the 17 & under A division team in the senior competition which is held on Wednesday nights. The A division team will play at the B grade level and will be expected to train with the senior Premier League players (A Grade). The older players in the 17 & under B division teams are also encouraged to compete on Wednesday nights in any of the other senior teams with and supported by the club's senior players. Playing in the senior competition is seen as a vital step in assisting the player to make the transition from juniors to seniors, it is widely accepted that this age group represents the pivotal point where young people start to drift away from sport and pursue less healthy lifestyle options.

Dolphins also encourages players to try out for the 18 & under State Team that competes at the 18 & under National Championships run by Australian Water Polo. The championships will be run in



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January in the future and is a stepping stone to the National 18 & under Squad. The National 18 & under team compete at the FINA Junior World Championships. National Squad members also gain entry into WAIS.

Post Juniors

Once a player is too old for the 17 & under competition they are no longer considered a junior and they will play in the Wednesday night (State League) or Saturday afternoon (Premier League) competitions. The development path would see the talented player playing in the Premier League A Grade competition and then hopefully the National Water Polo League. For those players who may not be as talented then there are many years of playing the sport ahead of them through to playing in the masters' competition well into their 60s.

The players with the ability, can play in the 20 & under State Team at the National Championship and there are national squads announced following those championships. Again selection in the national squad will earn a place in the AWPI decentralised program run at WAIS. There is hope that FINA will re-introduce a World Championships for this age group in the near future.

The Role of WAIS

As was previously stated, WAIS delivers the decentralised program of Australian Water Polo. The program is overseen by a management committee with representatives from WAIS, Australian Water Polo and WA Water Polo. The WAIS coaches are in constant communication with the Australian Senior team coaches, the senior men's coach is John Fox and the senior women's coach is Greg McFadden. The WAIS coaches are Paul Oberman for the men and Peter Szilagyi for the women.

Players become eligible for inclusion in the WAIS program when they make national squads. The coaches may also invite players to attend training sessions through a talent identification program they may run.

The squads are divided into two groups:

- Athletes who are current national team and/or squad members in their respective age groups at the time of squad selection – these athletes receive priority in terms of competition funding.
- Athletes who are recognised as high potential for national team and/or squad selection in their respective age groups. These athletes receive a reduced level of funding for competition expenses.



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End Note

As can be seen from the summary above looking after young players with aspirations to one day play for Australia and win Olympic glory or a more mature adult that simply wants to get fit or stay fit is a very involved process that takes many years and requires many people's hours of effort, not just from the athlete.

Dolphins has been in business since 1948 and has produced many Olympians, Emma Knox (Bronze Medallist) and James Stanton being the most recent. However, just because we have been around for over 60 years doesn't mean we are doing the same old things.

Dolphins is the first club in WA to have a dedicated 10 & under program and started the Dolphin Ball game, which is now played in Geraldton. In the coming season Dolphins will again lead the way by offering an under 8 year program. This program will involve both the young potential player (they call them hopefuls in Europe) and a parent and will centre on fun and water confidence plus of course some leg work and ball handling.

We hope this summary will assist both young players and parents gain an awareness of the depth and breadth of the journey a player can choose and the options they have. . . but mostly we hope they play and enjoy the game.

Regards

Phil Scales

Just to compare

Having spent 3 months in Europe last year with a fair bit of that time in Hungary, Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia, I believe that I have gained a good perspective on why these nations are at the top of World Water Polo.

Firstly I didn't see as many pools as we have here in Perth, I didn't see young European players that could swim better than our young players and I didn't see remarkably different training drills being run.

What I did see was young players training every day of the week and twice a day every day of the week in their holidays. Their training sessions are more intense and the young players worked hard and listened to their coaches. Yes they had fun and chattered and laughed but not during the training session. The young European players know they can become World and Olympic Champions if they work hard and they have great role models and champions to emulate. But they all start by learning the basic skills and work hard to perfect them to the point that they are second nature.