



Is the goalkeeper in the picture above in violation of any rule?

#### A short film

History of the sport

The rules

#### Links

Schedule of the competition

The 9<sup>th</sup> CMAS UWR Championships Helsinki 2011 official website

## Is it a goal when the referee cannot see the ball go in the basket?

**At the highest levels of competition underwater rugby matches are often decided by razor thin margins. The top referees are used to dealing with intense pressure.**

"We have to be sure when awarding a penalty shot, for at the top level the better team often only wins by a single goal," says Janne Lindell, one of 10 referees selected to work the upcoming World Championships in Helsinki, Finland.

The nightmare situation for the referee beneath the surface in scuba gear is a skirmish round the basket which blocks his view of the ball and basket. To score a goal the entire ball must cross through the imaginary plane over the top of the basket. Sometimes the ball only goes beyond the imaginary plane for a fraction of a second before the defenders force it back.



One of the biggest challenges for a referee is to determine whether a goal was scored when there are several players in front of the basket in a tight game, says International referee Janne Lindell  
Photo: Bent Larsen

"Sometimes we are unlucky enough to have our view of the goal blocked off and that is the toughest call for a referee in my opinion," says Lindell.

#### The advantage rule

Another critical judgment call for referees is the application of the so-called advantage rule.

"If an infraction by the defending team is not a flagrant personal foul that calls for a penalty shot or expulsion, an experienced referee may allow play to continue," says Lindell, "because the awarding of a free ball may allow the defenders to recover from a bad situation."

The advantage rule also helps to preserve the flow of play, something that both teams generally appreciate. Referees should sign advantage but since play is not stopped by the buzzer these calls may go completely unnoticed. In Lindell's view not all players fully understand the rule and can be irritated when an infraction is not called.

"If a player comes to ask that situation where the advantage rule came into play I will explain it more detail," he adds.

#### Two referees underwater

In club play it is not uncommon that there is only one referee, sometimes

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without scuba equipment. However, at the World Championships there will be two referees beneath the surface and one above.

"It is common that if referee misses a foul that he or she only sees the foul in revenge that follows, but that's why there will be two of us in Helsinki."

Lindell, who refereed the German women's victory over Sweden in the finals at the last World Championships in 2007, does not consider working the



The player in white has an illegal grip on the blue goalkeeper's snorkel.  
Photo: Suzette Støvring

women's matches to be much different. "For the referee the pattern of fouls is the same, the only difference is that men's play is much faster and the women have a slightly smaller ball," he says.

### Long experience as referee and player

All of the referees at the upcoming World Championships come from the Nordic countries or Germany, a reflection of the general shortage of international referees. Too few retiring players decide to continue the sport as referees, according to Lindell, who played the game himself between 1984 and 2005. He has one Silver medal and one Bronze from Finnish National Championships. He became a national referee in the late 90s and started his international umpiring career in 2005.

National and international rules can differ slightly. Finland, for example, allows one timeout per team per period while international play permits just one timeout

per team over the entire game.

"At this level of play we referees are very similar in approach, though there are some who are more into the letter of the rules and some are more pragmatic," he observes.

### The physical challenge

There is no danger of the bends diving in swimming pools with scuba tanks, but referees must avoid dehydration by drinking a lot of water. Even though Lindell and his colleagues will wear wetsuits, they will burn more calories than normal to maintain body heat. The referees lie relatively still in water that is cooler than body temperature.

"How much and when a referee eats is very individual thing, some eat little snacks between games some eat a normal lunch and dinner when they have longer breaks," says Lindell, prefers pasta as the fuel of choice.

### Rule changes

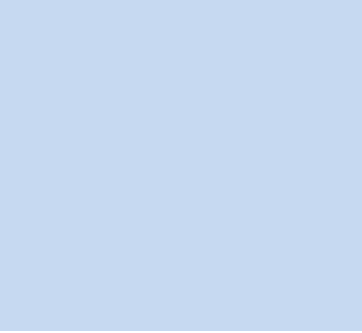
Shortly before a match the referee checks finger nails and equipment for sharp edges. Even at Championship level play players sometimes must hurry to tape their mask or cut their nails. There is some discussion about fins and suits now, according to Lindell.



International referee  
Janne Lindell

"If there are any changes to relate, we will provide a collective briefing before the Championships begin," he says.

**Davrell Tien**



**Correction to press release nr 1: The text incorrectly stated that the German women took Silver and Sweden Gold. It was in fact the opposite. The German women are defending World Champions.**