

IT'S A FRINGE SPORT IN CANADA, BUT WATER POLO IS GAINING RECOGNITION AS THE NATIONAL MEN'S WATER POLO TEAM MOVES UP THE LADDER IN WORLD RANKINGS

**For Noah Miller** water polo is a way of life, a passion that the captain of the Canadian Men's Water Polo Team lives and breathes. With 35 hours of training a week, and 11 months of training a year, he doesn't have a lot of time to do anything else, but that's fine by him. Ever since the Regina native moved to Calgary eight years ago he has committed himself to the sport, and to his goal of leading the team into the next Olympics.

After the 2005 World Championships in Montreal, Canada stood 13th in the world in men's water polo, but by 2008 the team hopes to be in the top 10. An achievable goal, according to Miller. "We won gold in the 2002 World Commonwealth Championships in Manchester, and this year silver in Sydney," he says. "Our goal is gold at the PanAm Championships in Rio de Janeiro in 2007." If they do make the top of the podium there, they are guaranteed an Olympic spot in Beijing.

Their preparation for PanAm and the Olympics continues this month when the team competes in the FINA World League, a series of tournaments, where two groups of six teams compete with the top three from each group, progressing to the super final in Greece later on this summer. Canada is in the North American group consisting of China,

"It's an intense game and emotions do run high, and it is very physical—the only thing you have for protection is a Speedo."

The team is in the pool training 11 times a week, complemented by dry land training—four weight-training sessions, yoga, and a weekly video session. Jason Poole is the team's strength coach and his focus is training the whole body. "We do a lot of shoulder maintenance for injury prevention and also exercises to increase size, strength, and explosive power." It's intense, but the whole team has made a conscientious decision that for the next two years water polo will be their focus.

While the team is obviously physically fit, their big challenge is to stay in shape mentally. Dragan Jovanovic, national team head coach, is responsible for overall training and conditioning. He says the problem is the lack of game time. "They have all the skills, but if they don't play enough games then it is hard for them to keep the mental side up."

Facing a variety of teams is crucial for them to gain experience. "They should be playing regular competition in Europe, but we need the funding for that to happen," explains Harry Zarins, CEO of Water Polo Canada. "We have adequate pool time and we have

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# The Real Boys of Summer

by LOUISE HODGSON-JONES

photography by EWAN NICHOLSON

Venezuela, Brazil, U.S.A., and Australia. Europe is the other competing group.

On the world stage their main opposition is from the Eastern European countries—Serbia Montenegro, Hungary, Greece, and Croatia—where water polo takes precedence over swimming. "It's a different attitude there. Swimmers make way for water polo, whereas here it is the opposite."

The national team has been based in Calgary since 1998. They train at the Talisman Centre, the University of Calgary, SAIT, and Mount Royal College—"anywhere where we can get pool time," says Miller. To be a competitive water polo player you need to have a strong upper body, cardiovascular and aerobic endurance, and intelligence. "It's often like a chess match; there are tactics involved, and when your heart is racing at 190 beats a minute, you have to be alert. It's not about what size you are—the best players range from five foot eight to six foot six—but how smart you are."

There are 13 in the team. Six and a goal-tender are in the water, and there are six substitutes on the bench including a back-up goalie. They play four eight-minute quarters with stop time, the total play being an hour.

## 2006 Senior Men's National Water Polo Team:

(final 13 were selected June 30)

Nic Youngblud	Hamilton, ON
Robin Randall	Drinkwater, SK
Justin Beitel	Regina, SK
Kevin Graham	Regina, SK
Noah Miller	Regina, SK
Jean Sayegh	Ste. Foy, PQ
Thomas Marks	Vancouver, BC
Aaron Feltham	Lindsay, ON
Islam Touni	Montreal, PQ
Kevin Mitchell	Maple Ridge, BC
Brandon Jung	Burnaby, BC
Con Kudaba	Port Coquitlam, BC
Nathaniel Miller	Kirkland, PQ
Daniel Stein	North Vancouver, BC
Benjamin Brunner	Dollard des Ormeaux, PQ
Matt Potter	Dollard des Ormeaux, PQ
Andrew Robinson	Lachine, PQ
Jon Ruse	Dollard des Ormeaux, PQ

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**2006  
2007**  
**MEN'S SENIOR  
NATIONAL TEAM**  
**WATER  
POLO  
SCHEDULE**

<b>July 14–16</b>	<b>FINA World Water Polo League Preliminary Round</b> Brazil, Venezuela, United States, and Canada <i>Victoria, British Columbia at Saanich Commonwealth Pool</i>
<b>July 19–23</b>	<b>FINA World Water Polo League Semi Final Round</b> Top three teams from Canada and China Preliminary Rounds <i>Los Alamitos, California</i>
<b>August 2–6</b>	<b>FINA World Water Polo League Super Finals</b> Top three teams from U.S. and Spain Semi-Finals <i>Athens, Greece</i>
<b>September 14</b>	<b>Men's National Team Fund Raising Golf Tournament</b> at The Links of Glen Eagles <i>Cochrane, Alberta, Call (613) 748-5682 Ext: 222</i>
<b>November 4–10</b>	<b>Qualification Tournament for World Championship (ASUA Cup)</b> <i>Rio de Janeiro</i>
<b>December 26–31</b>	<b>Under 20s Pan Pacific International Tournament</b> <i>Talisman Centre, Calgary, Alberta</i>
<b>March 18–April 1 2007</b>	<b>12th FINA World Championships 2007</b> <i>Melbourne, Australia</i>
<b>July 13–29 2007</b>	<b>PanAmerican Games,</b> <i>Rio de Janeiro, Brazil</i>

<http://www.fina.org/waterpolo/wp.htm>, [http://www.waterpolo.ca/english/new\\_main.htm](http://www.waterpolo.ca/english/new_main.htm)

the coaches; all we need is to increase the number of games. The bottom line is, we need \$250,000 to \$300,000 to be able to be competitive and improve internationally.” The ironic situation is that corporations won’t support a team that is ranked 13th, yet the only way to increase their ranking is to win tournaments; but if they can’t get to them, then they won’t move up.

Miller was invited to play in the pro league in Australia for a year and found the experience invaluable. “I came back a better player—we played every weekend, which is just not possible here.” At 26 he is the second oldest on the team. He played in the juniors from 1997 to 2000 and then moved to the senior men’s team. He was appointed captain in 2002, a responsibility he takes very seriously. But being with the team is like being with friends. “We are with each other 35 hours a week—it’s like being with 12 best friends.”

With a B.A. in geography from the University of Calgary, Miller has put any further education or career aspirations on hold. “Water polo has been my life for eight years, and I am totally committed to the next two years.” With such dedication and perseverance from the captain, our boys in Beijing are sure to podium. **f**