

# Bike Polo guidance for officers

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## Introduction

This document has been put together to guide Sustrans officers in delivering Bike Polo activities, with advice on the following:

- 1) Benefits of Bike Polo
  - 2) Who and when
  - 3) Things to consider
  - 4) Planning a session
  - 5) Example session
  - 6) Appendices
    - a. History of Bike Polo
    - b. Rules and variations
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## 1. Benefits of Bike Polo

- Appealing to play, people can get hooked and want to keep playing
- Harder to reach groups (such as teenagers) are often willing to give it a try when other bike related activities don't appeal
- Skill can be taught progressively to build confidence of bike handling, slow speed control, controlled braking, quick acceleration and deceleration
- Playing within a game situation promotes awareness of other riders whilst cycling
- It can be surprising who is good at it, it's not always those that are most confident at the beginning
- Appealing to watch, a good spectacle to draw in the crowds at an event or festival.



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## 2. Who and when

Before delivering Bike Polo activities, officers should consider the following:

- Does the activity have benefits for the programme as a whole?
- Is the activity appropriate for the skills and interests of the participants?
- Do the benefits of the activity outweigh the risks (risk:benefit analysis carried out)?

**Sustrans staff or representatives** planning to deliver Bike Polo activities **must first discuss with their line manager or coordinator to ensure the activity fits into the overall aims of the programme.** As with all such activities, the line manager/coordinator must be satisfied that the individual planning to lead the activity is sufficiently competent and may require an assessment of competence by an identified expert or evidence of prior experience.

The following are potential opportunities to deliver Bike Polo activities, along with some further considerations for each:

### a) Series of sessions with the same beneficiaries

- An opportunity to **build the skills** of a group of participants over a number of sessions. It could be delivered in a school **PE lesson or after-school or lunchtime club**. In a **work place or community** it could be a series of sessions leading to the establishment of a club.

### b) One-off activity with project beneficiaries

- Can be used as an **incentive** to promote active travel (i.e. bring a bike to school/work and you will have the opportunity to play)
- Can be included as **part of a series** of related skills activities
- Could be used as a **fun and exciting event** that might appeal to get people to a Champion or Volunteer training event.

### c) A public event

- Ensure you have an understanding of the participant's skill levels before allowing them to take part in the activity. You could offer '**skills sessions sign-up slots**' to allow you the opportunity to assess skills
- If participants are using their own bikes then you **should check its suitability and safety**
- All **activities should take place on a clearly defined area** with at least one strong **referee** and ideally two, with an additional person available to monitor the area, deal with queries from spectators and sign up potential participants
- If the activities are taking place in a public area, **have a system for storing and distributing equipment** to avoid any going missing
- As these types of event can be the most complex to **run it should not be the organiser's first bike polo event**
- For under 16s, participants will need to **complete the standard consent forms** or for there to be a responsible adult in loco parentis. Younger age participants should play in a game of similar-sized children – like-for-like players

- You must **exclude people** from participating **if you feel that they or their bike is unsuitable** for participation.

#### d) Sustrans staff development/meeting

- Activity should be delivered in the style of how it would be delivered to beneficiaries. No assumptions should be made about confidence or ability of participants.

#### f) Competition

- Competitions can be a valuable **motivating tool**, but they can take up a lot of time and resources. It is important to consider carefully the benefits for the programme as a whole. They are best used as the culmination of a programme of skills development
- Competitive environments can make it **more challenging to referee** and manage the safety of participants and so should only be delivered by experienced members of staff
- When organising a game, **3v3 is recommended** and it is useful to have both a referee to focus on the game and a marshal to focus on spectators
- There needs to be alternatives to what a game means, **end point does not need to be a competitive game**, could be a game of penalty shoot outs.



### 3. Health and safety

The H&S guidance offered in this document is based on a consideration of significant generic risks associated with running a Bike Polo event. When planning a Bike Polo event, **you will need to carry out a specific risk assessment that considers all of the specific risks** associated with the activity, location, participants, equipment etc.

Sustrans is currently developing a generic **Bike Polo Event risk assessment** that you will be able to use as a starting point for your specific risk assessment and which will be available soon on Susnet.

[www.sustrans.org.uk](http://www.sustrans.org.uk)

### Selecting a location

- **Hard court surface ideal.** It is possible to play on grass, however it will need to be dry and cut short as the ball will not roll on long grass and participants will get frustrated. The activity may also damage the grass meaning you have an annoyed grounds person
- The size of the area will be influenced by the activities being offered. For a game of 3v3, a suggested area is **20m by 10m** (roughly one tennis court) with an outer cordon around the outside of the court – there may already be in-situ fencing on a tennis court or orange safety netting is a good option on grass. The inner barrier (the actual court) can be marked out with flat half cones; these are good because they do not act as a collision risk.
- **Lighting needs to be adequate** so bear in mind if the activity is taking place over an evening
- **A hard brush is useful** to clear site of glass etc before play starts.

### Bikes

- **Most bikes are suitable** and in many cases it is more beneficial for a participant to use a bike they are comfortable with than a bike polo specific bike. Ideally the bike will be robust, have a **good working brake** on the side of the handlebars that will be used to steer, **have a nice low gear** and be comfortable.
- Bar ends must be plugged and bar ends that protrude upwards are not good, take off bike
- **Wheel covers** can offer protection to bikes, particularly useful if using a fleet of bikes
- **BMX bikes** do not usually make good bike polo bikes due to the saddle height or sometimes absence of a saddle.
- **Remove anything that is sharp** from bike. Absolutely no stunt pegs
- SPD type, **clip-in pedals** are **not** advisable. If a participant wants to play with cleats, recommend playing unclipped
- Advise **setting seat** to comfortable height for putting feet on the floor.
- **Removable bags** (panniers, bar bags, etc) and some mud guards can get caught up during play.

### Other equipment

- **Bibs are useful** to highlight teams
- **Solid, small and heavy balls to be avoided.** A good ball would be a foam ball as it doesn't matter if you roll over it
- **Mallets need to be checked** regularly, check for sharp bits or breakages
- For goals just **use flat cones.**

### Clothing

- Participants may wish to **remove glasses and jewellery**, glasses leashes may be useful.
- **Gloves** are recommended.

### Other considerations

- **Pump and tools** are likely to be required to fix simple problems with bike
- **Weather conditions** can effect the playing surface, function of the bikes and comfort of the participants.

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## 4. Planning a session

Various interconnected skills are needed to safely play bike polo. The basic skills involved are:

- Cycling with one hand
- Stopping with one hand (using only one brake)
- Holding a mallet whilst riding
- Avoiding obstacles and other players
- Concentrating on a ball/obstacles/court whilst riding.

When delivering the activities **you should always have a good awareness of participant rider skill level and confidence** to enable you to design appropriate activities.

A standard structure would be to start with a **bike check**, then a **warm-up activity**, then a **skills development** followed by some sort of **game**.

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## 5. Example session

**Who:** Secondary school pupils, 11-year-old upwards

**Time:** 2 hours

**Equipment:** Bikes – Cones – Mallets – Balls – Whistle – Tools – Gloves

**Numbers:** Maximum of 12 participants

### Preparation

Ensure **risk assessment** undertaken. Immediately before the session **check the court** for glass or rubbish and **remove in-situ obstacles** such as tennis nets, etc

### Introduction (5 minutes)

Introduce the concept of Bike Polo to the participants, **showing pictures or a video can help**. Explain that skills will be built up progressively, so they don't expect to be playing a game straight away.

### Checks (10 minutes)

- Carry out the basic '**M-check**'
- Ensure the **back brake** (the left hand brake lever) works well – this will be the brake used in Bike Polo
- **Remove** anything that may be knocked off bikes easily such as lights or clip on mud guards
- **Remove** stunt pegs and bar ends

- Participants must be able to sit on the **saddle** whilst playing, so adjust as necessary
- Ensure **baggy trouser legs** are tucked in away from the chain and shoe laces are tucked in
- Distribute **gloves** if required
- Follow agreed **helmet policy** for establishment.

### **Starter activities (30 minutes)**

1. Participants ride around **simple course**, all in the same direction, leaving a good gap of two bike lengths between themselves and the rider in front. The course can be a circular or box shape, roughly the size of half a tennis court (3 mins)
2. One whistle blow means **speed up**, two whistle blows means **slow down** (only using left/back brake) (5 mins)
3. Participants to ride around the course with **right hand off** the handlebars (5 mins)
4. One whistle blow means speed up, two whistle blows means slow down (only using left brake) (5 mins)
5. 3 whistle blows means everyone to **change direction** (5 mins)
6. **Combine all the above** (5 mins).

**Note** - if the participants are struggling with the above skills they are not ready to progress to the next level safely and further practice is required.

### **Introduce the mallets (20 minutes)**

1. Introduce **how to hold one** – the mallets may be slightly different lengths, ensure taller players have the longer mallets. If any player is struggling to hold a mallet comfortably because it is too big they may not be tall enough to play safely
2. Explain the **mallet shouldn't be raised above handlebar** height. The mallet is to be **held in the right hand**. If you have left handed pupils they may want to play that way – explain how this is not good because it will necessitate using the right/front brake and can cause the participant to go over the front of the handlebars. If the participant cannot play right-handed you can switch cables round, **but it must be corrected at the end of the session**. If you are changing the brakes you should be competent to do so!
3. Participants ride around course with mallet in right hand **controlling speed** with back brake
4. Participants line up single file. First participant starts to ride, ball is rolled slowly towards them, **participant to tap ball back**. Participant turns and rides to the back of the line. Next person then sets off, and so on
5. **Add in a goal with cones** for participants to aim the ball at

**Note** – the above skills will take some time to become competent in, if the participants can't do the above without wobbling and needing to stop regularly do not progress.

### **Progressive skills (20 minutes)**

1. Teach participants to **balance using mallet** by leaning through the mallet. It is not an essential skill but a very useful one
2. Progress to teaching **slowing down**, coming to a stop using a mallet to balance then pushing off again without feet touching the floor
3. Add a defender in goal

4. Defender able to come out of the goal and defend
5. Two attackers **work together** to score a goal
6. **Practice the beginning of a game** by placing ball in the middle of the court, when whistle blows one participant from each side of the court rides towards the ball. The first participant who hits the ball wins a point

**Note** – If the participants can complete the above tasks reasonably well and safely you can progress to short games. “**Reasonably well**” would equate to being able to carry out the skills above without wobbling and falling off or repeatedly needing to put feet on the ground.

#### **Rules for short games:**

1. **Three on a team**
  2. **Set up the court** with side lines and goals
  3. Explain what is **good play** and what is **bad play**, explain the **consequences** of bad play (i.e. ‘Sin Bin’)
  4. Explain the **tap-out zones** for foot down
  5. Play **first to five goals** or for a short time period (10 minutes is ideal)
  6. **If the whistle is blown twice quickly**, play is to **stop** immediately.
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## **6. Appendices**

### **History of Bike Polo**

**1891** Richard J. Mecredy (Ireland) invents bike polo

**1897** Polo club in the USA & The Bicycle Polo Association (BPA) of Great Britain are formed

**1908** Bike polo is featured as a demonstration sport in the London Olympics

#### **WWI stops polo**

**1938** The BPA of Great Britain has 170 teams in 100 clubs with 1000+ players (read an interesting article from 1938 here)

#### **WWII stops polo**

**1946** Bike polo has a new start in Aquitaine, Paris area, Normandy and Pyrénées

**1994** Creation of the Bicycle Polo Association of America

**1996** First International Championship of bike polo (USA): India, Canada and USA compete

**1999** Hardcourt bike polo is played for the first time in Seattle (“Hardcourt polo was invented by Jay Grisham in an office building in Seattle in the late 1990s. Then it was brought and taught to the Portland messengers who organized the world’s first hardcourt polo at the West Side Invite.” Matt Case. [View the Seattle Bike Polo video for more.](#))

**2000** Hardcourt specific mallets were made out of bamboo and a street hockey ball was used

**2002** Hardcourt bike polo spreads to Portland

**2003** Tournaments pop up all over the West and Midwest

**2004** Hardcourt bike polo spreads to New York

**2006** Hardcourt bike polo spreads to London

**2009** European championships started in London

**2009** LHBPA forms

**2010** LO2010 held (48 teams)

**2011** LO2011 (55 teams), London International Invitational and Hell's Belles Vol. 1 held

**2012** LO2012 (82 teams) and Hell's Belles Vol. 2 held, bike polo taken into London schools

**2013** LO2013 (68 teams), London's first dedicated Bike Polo court built at Herne Hill Velodrome. London Team Mondial wins first international tournament.

### **Present day**

Bike polo has moved on from its grass roots and is now spreading rapidly. **In June 2008 there were around 50 cities playing hardcourt bike polo** as we now know it. In June 2010 this figure rose to 220 cities.

**In June 2012 there were 380 cities playing hardcourt bike polo** with an average of two new cities registering a new scene each week.

We estimate there are currently over 8,000 dedicated bike polo players globally with around a further 20,000 players that play bike polo less frequently.

## **Rules and variations**

### **The basic rules**

- Teams are made up of three players.
- To score you have to use the end of your mallet (hitting with the side is called a shuffle)
- Don't put your foot down (if you do, you must tap out at the side of the court)
- Any contact must be 'like-to-like' (mallet to mallet, bike to bike, body to body)
- First to five points wins (or whoever has the most goals when the time runs out)
- The basic rule-set can be adapted to allow a flowing game for all abilities. For example the 'foot down' rule can be replaced by a rule that simply prohibits playing the ball whilst a foot is on the ground.

**For the full rule-set see:**

**LHBPA** [http://www.lhbpa.org/resources/LHBPA\\_Bike\\_Polo\\_Rules.pdf](http://www.lhbpa.org/resources/LHBPA_Bike_Polo_Rules.pdf)

**NAH** [http://www.nahardcourt.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/nah\\_ruleset\\_v3\\_3.pdf](http://www.nahardcourt.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/nah_ruleset_v3_3.pdf)