

USA Underwater Hockey Nationals Proposal

By:

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Executive Summary

The USA underwater hockey community has grown in leaps and bounds over the last 10 years causing many newly established teams wanting to attend the national tournament. With 18-24 teams in attendance at a tournament causes many issues with the level of play, club members vs. composite team issues and other organizational and logistic problems. This proposal will show that many of the issues created by the number of growing teams and players can be solved by this solution which supports the (3) areas of underwater hockey that most people fit into. The three levels of Underwater Hockey are:

1. Club Level Players
2. University/College/H.S. Players (rookie players on rookie teams)
3. Elite Level Players – Worlds Level and Developing Worlds Players (all grades)

The proposal consist of taking the current USA Nationals format and adopting some of the lessons learned by other countries in underwater hockey, then applying them to USA Underwater Hockey. Nationals as we know it, would be broken down into (3) separate national tournaments throughout the course of a calendar year:

1. College/University/H.S. Nationals
2. Club Nationals
3. Regional Based Nationals

The adoption of this proposal will have the effect of supporting each of these three groups of underwater hockey players in the USA. Currently, our nationals do not support any of the three groups as needed, hence the need for change to help grow, support and nurture underwater hockey in the USA.

Current Nationals Issue

The National Tournament (Nats) has many issues now surrounding the organizational and logistics of hosting, but as well as competition level issues. I have listed many of the issues below:

- ⌚ Too many teams attending making only 2 court pool venues possible tournament hosts
- ⌚ Pool Quality, pools with slower/concrete floors are not favorable for nationals
- ⌚ East, Midwest or West Coast hosting (regional rotation)
- ⌚ Tournament has to be three days (3) to allow for enough playing time due to the number of teams in attendance
- ⌚ Skill Levels of Teams are widely mixed from very strong to rookie level
- ⌚ Cost of travel to remote areas of the USA
- ⌚ Small number of Able and Qualified referees
- ⌚ Pod System used as some Nationals leads to a first day of poor match ups

Proposed National Tournaments

Contained below are the arguments for switching to the three national tournament format vs. the single nationals. Each of the three tournaments are listed and what the reasoning behind each of these levels and what is the benefit for them.

College/University/H.S. Nationals

The facts say that the largest growth in underwater hockey (50-70%) comes from the 10 + educational institutions which play underwater hockey. I would estimate that between 75-100 new players per year are introduced to underwater hockey at these schools, with many of them staying with the sport for their school careers and then going off to other clubs around the country or starting their own uwh club where ever they land a job after graduation. It's time to support this key group of players with their own tournament, at the time of year when school is in session (to maximize participation), with the best possible venue and event geared for the age of the player and skill level.

Highlights

- ⌚ Have Educational Nationals during school year (preferably in Jan-March Time frame as most recruiting is done in the fall and new players are not ready to attend a tournament yet).
- ⌚ Only single court venues would be required due to the lower number of teams, and it will help keep the cost lower. Centrally locate it geographically between the teams if possible.
- ⌚ USAUWH Provide qualified referee's to the tournament, give a complete level 1 referee clinics (mandatory) during the tournament, so that players are exposed to the rules and regulations of the game early in their playing career at no cost to the player.
- ⌚ USAUWH subsidize the tournament pool fee's with development monies to lower costs.
- ⌚ Establish trophies for this tournament, also to include individual awards for best player, team spirit etc.

Club Nationals

Club Nationals is the tournament that is geared for solely club teams. Having your club team prepare to try and win the Club Nationals is the focus of this tournament. Currently, we have many regional based, or mixed together teams from all over come to play in the national tournament which is causing anxiety amongst teams which are truly a club team. Now we can put into place rules and regulations made to limit team and player entries into this tournament due to it's pure nature of supporting the true clubs. So no mixed teams, no composite teams etc. This tournament will also be smaller in size, but not entirely sure it would need a 2 court venue or not. Timing of this tournament can be kept in the early summer as the current nationals time frame is being held. Educational Teams which are sole clubs are also welcome to play in the Club Nationals if they so choose, but they must play as a team in the Educational Nationals.

Highlights

- ⌚ Have Club Nationals during early summer months (June preferably).
- ⌚ Single court venues might be able to be utilized, but maybe 2 court venues might be better to contain the tournament into 2 days, number of teams dependent.
- ⌚ USAUWH Provide qualified referee's to the tournament, give a complete level 1 & level 2 referee clinics during the tournament, so that players are exposed to the rules and regulations of the game.
- ⌚ Rules and Regulations to limit the players/teams to ensure total club only participation

Regional Based Nationals

The regional nationals is the tournament that supports the sole development of the higher level players in the country. The elite level players or players wanting to play at the elite level (in all grades) can be assured that the process would start early for the regional nationals to build teams, coaches and players skills sets across the board in the group to get them ready for the Worlds trialing. Here is the general scope of the process for regional nationals:

Our country is divided up into 5 or 6 regions which have any number of underwater hockey clubs in these regions. Each of these regions would be welcomed to field teams in the Elite, Masters and U19/U23 categories in both men's and women's grades. These teams would have to have regional tryouts/clinics and coaching to bring these teams to the regional nationals. Coaching shall be appointed by the USAUWH and will have to attend a uwh coaching seminar put on by the national team coaches. A minimum of 3 teams would be required to have that division at the Regional Nationals.

The overall goal is to have higher level competition amongst the regions of the USA in order to play for the National Championship. This tournament and what it requires, promotes and supports the international teams, the preparation of these teams, and the coaches that represent the USA across all of the grades of play. Overall impact is improved level of play at the World level across the grade of play.

Highlights

- ⌚ Have Regional Nationals during fall or early winter (Nov/early Dec), good kick off time for Worlds level preparation.
- ⌚ Two court venues will have to be utilized, 2-3 day tournament depending on # of teams.
- ⌚ USAUWH Provide qualified referee's to the tournament, give a complete level 1 & level 2 referee clinics during the tournament, so that players are exposed to the rules and regulations of the game.
- ⌚ Regionally based teams, with tryouts, clinics, coaching across all grades.
- ⌚ Supports the international players and game.
- ⌚ Tournament will have all High level referring and referee mentoring.

Implemented Solution & Conclusions

The implemented solution of these (3) national tournaments can be done with in a few years. The first year (2014) you can have the Educational Nationals and Club National events. The Regional Nationals will take a group of people, on the same page, to implement. A competition committee should be formed from a representative from each region, along with the national team coaches, to help develop this tournament and the direction of the teams.

The overall impact of this proposal can be felt in all aspects of underwater hockey in the USA. Supporting the 3 distinct areas of underwater hockey should be the goal of USA UWH moving forward if they want to grow and develop new players, club players and international players alike. However this proposal is not a firm document, it can be a living document which will grow and transform to the needs of UWH in the USA.