



## Original Research Article

## Water Polo in Georgia: Current State and Development Prospects

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### Abstract

Preparation is underway in Georgian water polo for 2028. By decision of the European Swimming Federation, the Water Polo Championship will be held in Tbilisi in two years. The best teams of the continent will gather in the country's capital. In this article we discuss the results of the Georgian water polo champion team "Apollo" in the Euro League round in Montpellier, France held in 2026 and show that our sportsmen can successfully compete against Europe's best teams. But despite the progress, Georgian water polo still faces challenges. The number of Olympic-size pools remains limited, and financial support is smaller compared with leading European countries such as Hungary, Serbia, Croatia, and Italy. Water polo has strategic importance for Georgian sports because it increases the country's visibility in aquatic disciplines beyond swimming. Participation in European and world championships strengthens Georgia's sporting reputation and creates opportunities for international cooperation. Compared with traditional water polo powers such as Hungary, Serbia, and Croatia, Georgia is still developing. However, its steady improvement during the last decade demonstrates significant potential for future success. In this context, it is obvious that more financial support is needed to create a stable and reliable basis for further development of water polo in Georgia. We also point out the need for more active use of scientific research methods to optimize the training process and improve the physical and technical preparation of athletes.

**Keywords:** Water polo, Water Polo Champions League – Euro 2026, Results of "Apollo" in the French tour, Georgian Aquatic Sports Federation.



## Introduction

Water polo is one of the developing aquatic sports in Georgia. Although the country is more internationally recognized for sports such as rugby, wrestling, and judo, Georgian water polo has experienced significant progress during the last two decades. The establishment of professional clubs, improvements in youth development, and repeated participation in European and world competitions have helped Georgia become a competitive nation in international water polo.

The men's national team of Georgia has become increasingly competitive in European water polo. The team first appeared in the European Championship in 2014 and has continued to participate regularly in major tournaments. Georgia achieved one of its best results at the 2022 European Championship, finishing eighth. The country also participated in the 2022 World Championship, where it placed tenth.

The national team is managed by the Georgian Aquatic Sports Federation and includes many athletes who compete professionally in European leagues. The squad combines physical strength with tactical discipline, characteristics often associated with Georgian sports culture.

In 2019, the Georgian national water polo team received the title of "Best National Team of Georgia" after successful international performances and repeated qualification for the European Championship finals.

Last year, in 2025, at the meeting of the Georgian Water Polo Federation, a new president was elected - veteran water polo player and currently businessman D. Abdushelishvili. Before that, Mr. Dimitri had appeared before the public as the president of the water polo team "Apollo".

This year two Georgian teams are competing in the European Champions League: the Tbilisi teams "Dinamo" and "Apollo".

The Georgian water polo champion team, "Apollo," participated in the Euro Cup round in Montpellier, France, this year. In this article, we discuss the tournament results and demonstrate that Georgian sportsmen have made significant progress over the last 10 years, allowing them to compete successfully with the best European teams. We also analyze the current state of water polo in Georgia and provide recommendations on how to improve management, performance, and training within the sport.

**Research objective:** analysis of team results; analysis of the current state of water polo in Georgia; presentation of recommendations to the team staff.

**Research methods:** monitoring of the competitive activity of water polo players was carried out according to the methodology developed by us [1, 2]. This methodology enables the collection of data regarding various player and team parameters, specifically individual, group, and collective tactics for both defense and attack. Additionally, it allows for the retrieval of diverse information on technical-tactical maneuvers during play, tailored to the coach's specific objectives.

**Results.** Research methods are essential for the scientific development of water polo [1-9]. Physiological testing, biomechanical analysis, tactical observation, psychological assessment, and experimental studies all contribute to improving athlete performance and team success. Advances in technology continue to provide more accurate and detailed information about the sport.



The integration of sports science into water polo allows coaches and athletes to train more efficiently, prevent injuries, optimize tactics, and better understand the demands of elite competition. As scientific methods continue to evolve, research will remain a fundamental part of the future development of water polo.

Using our established methodology [1, 2], we analyzed 'Apollo's' performance at the Euro Cup round in Montpellier, France.

The team roster included 15 water polo players aged 18–33. In Montpellier, the Georgian water polo players played 4 matches over 4 competition days. Opponents: Honved (Hungary), Primorje (Croatia), Bologna (Italy), Montpellier (France).

D. Giorgadze did not participate; he was replaced by Serbian legionnaire S. Vuksanovich. Moldovan Malishau missed one match due to injury; in the other three, he played 2–4 minutes. Second goalkeeper Kapanadze played in the penalty shootout.

### Apollo Playing in Defense

Georgian players used help defense (1:5), shifting to zone defense; pressing was

rare. Goalkeeper Razmadze saved 3 penalties but needs more team support.

Central defenders Jakhaya and Rogach were excluded 8 and 6 times for rough play and conceded penalties twice each.

### Apollo Playing in Attack

In 4 matches, the team scored 59 goals; 33 (56%) from play: 6 counterattacks; 13 flank-to-flank transfers; 10 positional play goals.

Only 2 goals from center forward; none from free play. Counterattack use: 34 times.

Table 1 shows the results of the “Apollo” team in matches with opponents. GK Stability – goalkeeper’s stability: the percentage of the goalkeeper’s wins; Shots on Goal – the number of shots on goal; GK Wins - the number of shots on goal blocked by the goalkeeper; Num. Adv. Realization – the number of numerical advantage realizations; Num. Disadv. – the number of failures to realize a numerical advantage; Active CA – active counter-attacks; Goal CA - counterattacks with goal scoring; Team Efficiency – the ratio of goals scored to the total number of shots.

Table 1. The results of the “Apollo” team in matches with opponents

N	Teams	GK Stabi- lity	Shots on Goal	GK Wins	Num. Adv. Realization	Num. Disadv.	Counter- attacks	Active CA	Goal CA	Team Efficiency
1	Apollo– Honved	32.1	28	9	3–7 (42.8%)	58.4%	7	3	–	44%
2	Apollo– Primorje	41	22	9	4–9 (44.4%)	33.4%	7	4	–	
3	Apollo– Bologna	30.4	23	7	5–9 (55.5%)	55.6%	7	2	1	
4	Apollo– Montpellier	41	22	9	7–14 (50%)	50%	13	4	5	
	Apollo Average	35.7	95	34	19–39 (48.7%)	50%	34	13	6	40.4%



Table 2. The results of the opponents of the "Apollo" team

N	Teams	GK Stability	Shots on Goal	GK Wins	Num. Adv. Realization	Num. Disadv.	Counter-attacks	Active CA	Goal CA	Team Efficiency
1	Honved–Apollo	40%	30	12	5–12 (41.6%)	57.2%	7	2	2	50%
2	Primorje–Apollo	58%	31	18	6–9 (66.6%)	55.6%	7	1	1	43.3%
3	Bologna–Apollo	48.2	29	14	4–9 (44.4%)	44.6%	6	1	–	
4	Montpellier–Apollo	37.5	32	12	3–6 (50%)	50%	7	1	2	
	Opponents Average	45.9	122	56	18–36 (50%)	51.3%	27	5	5	41%

Table 2 shows the results of the opponents of the "Apollo" team.

#### Playing with Numerical Advantage

Average realization: 48.7%. Against Hungary 42.8%. Against France 50%, but it should have been higher. Team must prepare 3–4 ideal combinations and transform systems to 3:3 or 4:2.

#### Defense in Numerical Disadvantage

Average in 4 matches: 50%. Against Croatia: 33.4%. Georgian players compensated with goals from play; same vs France – 50%. The team must improve blocking, zone control and correct tactical positioning.

The analysis of the matches of the Georgian water polo team "Apollo" at the competition in France presented in this article shows that Georgian water polo players are quite capable of competing against the best European teams.

The Georgia men's national water polo team has improved a lot over the last decade, but it is still clearly a "second-tier" European side rather than a true continental powerhouse.

At club/national infrastructure level, Georgia is still behind the traditional water polo cultures:

- Hungary and Serbia have enormous domestic traditions and talent pipelines.
- Croatia and Spain have elite professional clubs and youth systems.
- Georgia's domestic ecosystem is much smaller, although its European club ranking has improved to around 11th–14th range recently.

#### Conclusion

The management of sports development in Georgian water polo needs to be re-evaluated. The material and technical base must be developed, and new swimming complexes should be built. Today, water polo is an expensive sport - revitalizing sports schools will help us address this issue. Maximum attention must be paid to the preparation of reserves.

For the first time in 35 years, Georgian players showed stable play against Europe's best teams. Three matches ended in draws, and two were lost in penalty shootouts. Wins against Primorje and Montpellier in regular



time. The team scored 59 goals (56 % from play). Average age 30 - generational change expected in 1–2 years.

Although challenges related to infrastructure and funding remain, Georgia's achievements in European and world competitions indicate a promising future. More attention should be paid to statistical and analytical analysis of athletes' physical, technical, and tactical training. Furthermore,

it is necessary to periodically monitor and evaluate athletes' key physiological parameters.

Continued investment in youth training, coaching, and international cooperation may allow Georgian water polo to become even more competitive on the global stage.

### წყალბურთი საქართველოში: მიმდინარე მდგომარეობა და განვითარების პერსპექტივები

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**აბსტრაქტი.** საქართველოს წყალბურთში მიმდინარეობს მზადება 2028 წლისთვის. ევროპის ცურვის ფედერაციის გადაწყვეტილებით, ორ წელიწადში თბილისში ჩატარდება წყალბურთელთა ჩემპიონატი. კონტინენტის საუკეთესო გუნდები მოიყრიან თავს ქვეყნის დედაქალაქში. წინამდებარე სტატიაში განვიხილავთ საქართველოს წყალბურთის ჩემპიონი გუნდის - „აპოლოს“ შედეგებს 2026 წელს საფრანგეთის ქალაქ მონპელიეში გამართულ ევროთასის (Euro Cup) ტურში და ვაჩვენებთ, რომ ჩვენს სპორტსმენებს შეუძლიათ წარმატებით გაუწიონ კონკურენცია ევროპის საუკეთესო გუნდებს. მიუხედავად პროგრესისა, ქართული წყალბურთი კვლავ დგას გარკვეული გამოწვევების წინაშე. ოლიმპიური სტანდარტების აუზების რაოდენობა შეზღუდულია, ხოლო ფინანსური მხარდაჭერა ჩამოუვარდება ევროპის ისეთ წამყვან ქვეყნებს, როგორცაა უნგრეთი, სერბეთი, ხორვატია და იტალია. წყალბურთის სტრატეგიული მნიშვნელობა აქვს ქართული სპორტისთვის, რადგან იგი ზრდის ქვეყნის ცნობადობას საწყალოსნო დისციპლინებში. ევროპისა და მსოფლიო ჩემპიონატებში მონაწილეობა აძლიერებს საქართველოს სპორტულ რეპუტაციას და ქმნის საერთაშორისო თანამშრომლობის შესაძლებლობებს. ტრადიციულ წყალბურთის სახელმწიფოებთან შედარებით (უნგრეთი, სერბეთი, ხორვატია), საქართველო ჯერ კიდევ განვითარების პროცესშია, თუმცა ბოლო ათწლეულის სტაბილური გაუმჯობესება, სამომავლო წარმატების დიდ პოტენციალზე მეტყველებს. ამ კონტექსტში აშკარაა, რომ მეტი ფინანსური მხარდაჭერა საჭირო ქართული წყალბურთის შემდგომი განვითარებისთვის სტაბილური ბაზის შესაქმნელად. ჩვენ, ასევე, ხაზს ვუსვამთ სამეცნიერო კვლევის მეთოდების უფრო აქტიური გამოყენების



აუცილებლობას საწვრთნელი პროცესის ოპტიმიზაციისა და სპორტსმენების ფიზიკური და ტექნიკური მომზადების გასაუმჯობესებლად.

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