

Playing The Game Of Petanque An Introduction For Beginners

Petanque is a simple game. The object of the game is to throw your boules so that they come to rest close to the cochonnet. A player or team scores points by having one or more of their boules closer to the cochonnet than the opposition after all boules have been thrown. The winner is the first player or team to reach 13 points.

This brief introduction to the game of petanque explains the basic rules of play, throwing techniques, tactics and the equipment needed to play



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Playing a Game of Petanque

Introduction

This section describes how to play a game of petanque. It is ideal for beginners as it is simple but provides a bit more important detail than the average set of instructions provided in recreational boules sets. The section on tactics will be of use to beginners and more experienced players alike.

Selecting the teams

Petanque can be played one on one (if you have 2 or 3 participants), but is generally played in pairs (doublettes) or triples (triplettes).

Teams generally have:

- a specialist 'opener' (pointeur) who throws the teams first boule,
- a specialist 'shooter' (tireur) who throws when an opponents boules must be removed
- an all-rounder who can point and if necessary, shoot.

If you are a beginner you will probably start as a pointer, usually in the 'opener' position. If you are all beginners, you may just take turns.

The number of boules for each player

In competition, participants in singles or doubles use 3 boules each and in triples, 2 boules each. Socially however you may vary this.

Tossing the coin

Once teams have been selected there should be a toss of the coin. The team that wins the toss (we'll call them Team 1) has the right to:

- Select the terrain
- Draw the starting circle
- Throw out the jack (cochonnet)
- Throw the first boule

Selecting the terrain

The team selects a terrain that it feels will give it an advantage by playing to its strengths or if familiar with the opposition, playing to their weakness.

Drawing the circle

The circle is drawn as the starting point of the first end. It must be no less than 35 cm and no more than 50 cm in diameter. All boules are thrown from the circle. Players feet must be fully in the circle when the boule is thrown.

Throwing the cochonnet

- The cochonnet must be thrown to a distance of between 6 and 10 metres from the circle.
- Team (1) is allowed 3 attempts to achieve a throw between the legal distance. If they fail, the throw goes to Team (2) but team (1) still throws the first boule of the end.
- Where there are marked playing areas the cochonnet is thrown within the confines of the marked space. In unmarked areas it can be thrown in any direction.
- During the course of the match there is no penalty for hitting or moving the cochonnet, indeed it can be an important tactic, particularly if you move it closer to your own boules.

The Game

The game begins - the first end

After team (1) has thrown the first boule, team (2) must reply. The pointer may try to out-point the opposition boules or if it is a particularly well placed effort, the shooter may decide to try to shoot it out of the way.

Once each team has played a boule, the next team to play is the one whose boule is furthest from the cochonnet. A team must keep playing until they beat the 'holding' boule of the other team, or until they run out of boules.

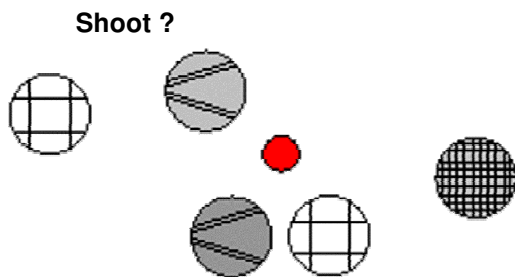
If the opposition has thrown all their boules, the other team then attempts to get more boules closer to the jack than any of the opposing team's boules.

Important:

Often it may be very obvious which of the boules are closest to the cochonnet, but on occasions the distances may be deceptive or difficult to judge. On these occasions use a tape measure or special petanque measuring device. When in doubt, check !

Measuring

You may measure the distance of any boules from the cochonnet during the course of an end. This may have an important bearing on your actions. You may want to check who actually has the point for example, or you may want to know which boules are second and third, as this may influence you on whether to shoot or not. When in doubt, check !

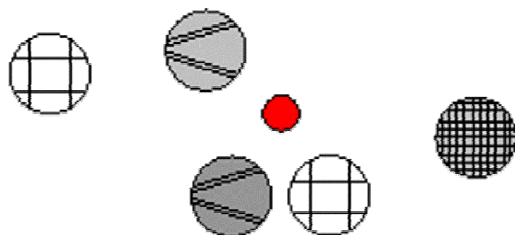


Which is the closest ? Will I get a point if I shoot the other boule ?

You may also need to measure when an end is finished to verify the number of points gained.

Scoring the end

The number of boules a team has closer to the cochonnet than the opposition is the number of points they gain for the end. These are added to the previous total.



Example:

In this case, the grey boules belong to Team (1) and the white boules to Team (2). Team (1) gains one point only because Team (2) has the second closest boule. Team (2) gains no points.

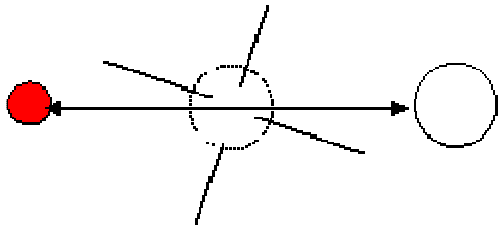
The game continues - the following end

The team that wins the end must draw the circle for the next one, usually around the resting place of the jack on the just completed end. They also throw out the jack and the first boule of the end. Play continues until one of the teams reaches 13 points.

Marking the boules and cochonnet

'Marking' refers to drawing 4 lines of approximately 5 cms at right angles to each other forming a cross, meeting at the cochonnet or boules using a stick or finger. This may be done during the game in case boules or the cochonnet are accidentally moved, for example, by a boule from another game. If not marked, they must remain where they end up.

A boule should also be marked if it is in the way when measuring the distance between the cochonnet and another boule so that it can be removed and replaced after measuring.



Throwing Techniques

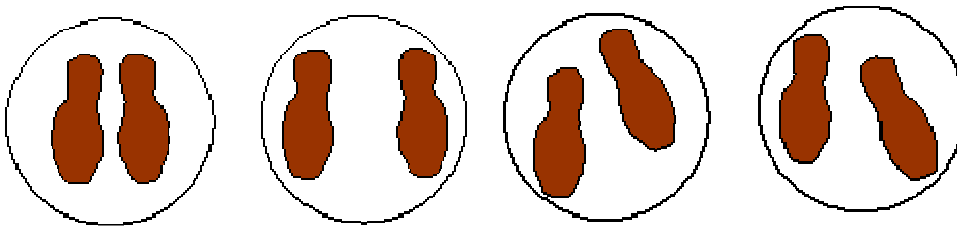
Throwing techniques vary greatly between individuals and what works for one may not work for someone else. There are certain principles that apply but after that it's up to you.

You must:

- be comfortable - if you are comfortable the position is probably right for you
- be well balanced
- be relaxed
- throw with a smooth action
- be within the rules

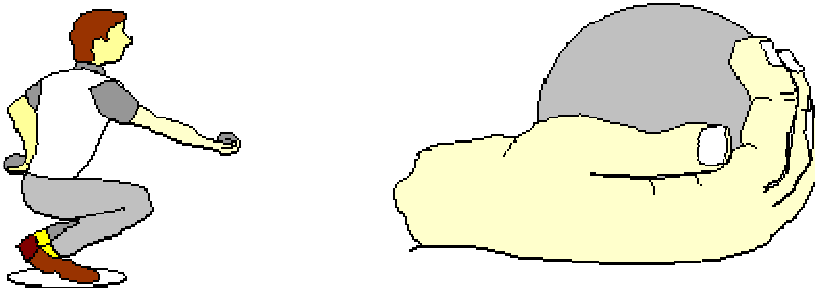
Standing in the circle

When you throw your boules both feet must be fully in the throwing circle. The feet do not have to be together but should be on the ground.

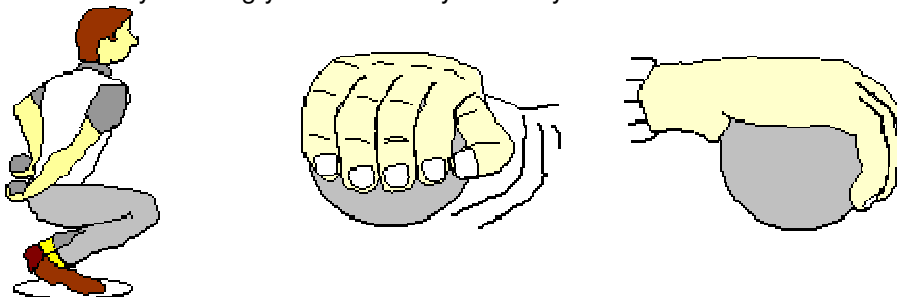


Holding the boules

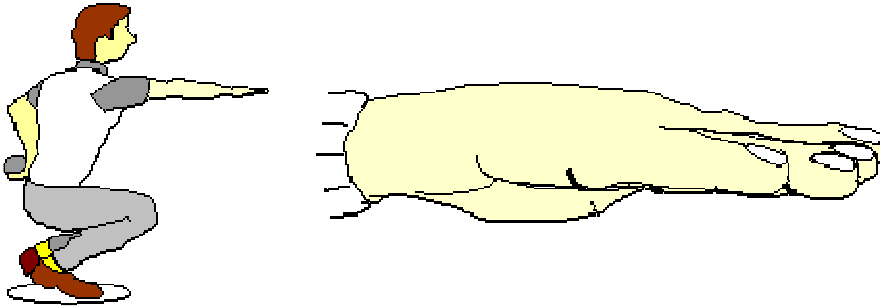
Whether you are a pointer or a shooter and whichever technique you use to throw the boule, either standing or squatting, the most widely used method of throwing is with the palm of the hand facing down. There is no rule to say you must throw this way but is better for control as it imparts backspin. The most common (and considered best) method of holding the boules is described below.



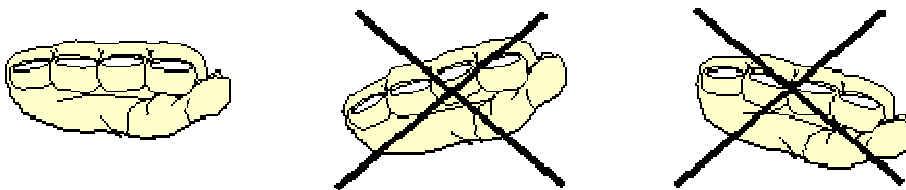
- Hold the boule loosely in the palm of the hand with the palm facing up as you 'take aim'.
- The boule should not be 'gripped'.
- The fingers should be close together with the hand facing towards the intended target.
- As you swing your arm back you twist your arm so that the boule is facing down.



- Swing your arm forward straightening the fingers at the top of the arc to release the boule.



- Keep the hand flat so as not to impart unwanted spin on the boules which can change its direction upon landing or when rolling. Tilting the hand is a common fault, imparting unwanted spin and offline shooting !



Note:

You can of course tilt the hand deliberately to impart spin to go around obstacles. Initially, however concentrate on keeping your hand flat until your technique is solid. It is hard to break a habit once it is set in !

The arm swing

There are two main factors affecting the arm swing and subsequently the speed and distance that the boules is thrown. These are:

- the speed of the return.
- the height that the arm is raised when the boule is released.

By throwing high after a good arm swing you can achieve a good distance with less strain. During the swing the elbow should be close to your body.

Imparting extra backspin

Backspin on the boule is desirable both when shooting and pointing.

- When pointing, it adds more control, keeping the boule on a straighter trajectory and preventing it from going too far.
- When shooting it prevents your boule from rolling too far and can often bring it back a distance. Back swing can be accentuated by bending your wrist back on the backswing. As you swing your arm forward, your wrist naturally straightens and causes the boule to spin backward.

Squatting or standing ?

Whether you squat or stand depends partially on the terrain and the distance, usually squatting when playing short (6 to 8 metres), standing after 8 metres. Shooters nearly always stand.

Pointing Techniques

The art of pointing

Pointing is a skill that requires observation, assessment, accuracy, improvisation and memory. You have to contend with your opponent and the terrain. You must :

- Observe and assess the terrain for slopes and undulations and whether the surface is hard, soft, smooth, bumpy. You are looking for the 'right spot' to land your boule, the right line and the 'speed' of the ground.
- Observe and assess your opponents pointing so that you benefit from their experience as well as your own.
- Accurately throw the boule to land in the 'right spot'. This spot may be metres away from the place that you want the boule to come to rest.
- Remember where the 'right spots' are.
- Accurately throw the boule to either :
 - avoid the opposition boules, (if it means knocking them closer to the cochonnet)
 - hit the opposition boules (if it knocks them out of the way)
 - or hit your own boules to knock it closer to the cochonnet

You must also decide the appropriate technique for the surface; whether to roll or lob the boule.

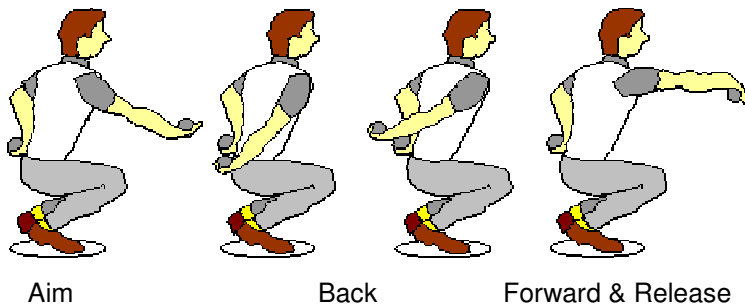
Note:

If you are a beginner you will generally start off as a pointer but you should practice your shooting until you are confident to do it in matches. Then you may choose to specialise in either roll.

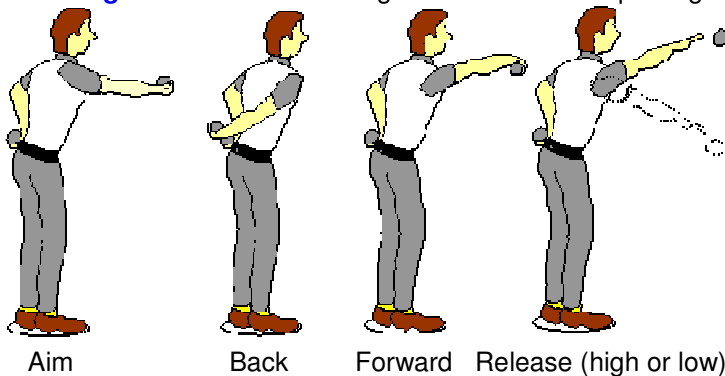
Pointing is a skill that is sometimes undervalued, with shooters attracting the glory, but pointing is really the essence of the game and a skilled practitioner is highly prized.

Squatting :

Some players squat down so they can see the undulations of the terrain and either 'roll' or gently 'lob' the boules. This is best for smoother surfaces and shorter distances.

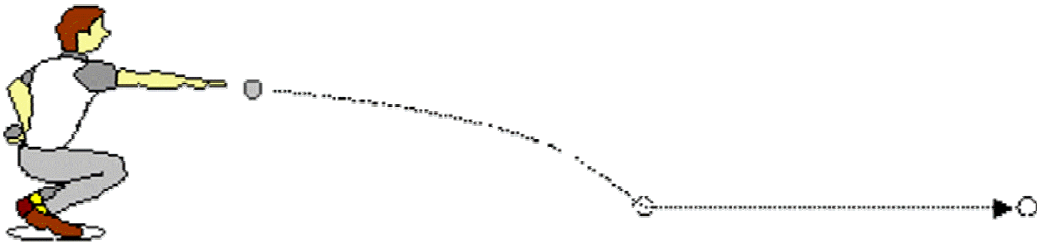


Standing : This is better for longer distances or if squatting is uncomfortable.



Note :

In both styles the non throwing arm is used for balance, often with un-thrown boule in the hand.



Rolling your boules in a manner not unlike lawn bowls requires a smooth surface without undulations and bumps and as such is often unreliable. The most common technique is a low lob that lands the boule a few metres short of the cochonnet (on the 'right spot') and allowing it to roll into the desired resting place. This reduces the risk of the boule deviating. This can be done in a squatting or standing position.

A more difficult, but highly effective technique is a high lob with extra backspin, dropping closer to the cochonnet with minimal roll on. This requires a lot of backspin and is usually performed standing. It is effective on all surfaces. It requires considerable practice !

Shooting Techniques

Why shoot ?

Depending on the surface and your ability, it is sometimes better to try to remove the opposition boule rather than trying to beat a good point.

On other occasions you may wish to shoot a boule that does not have the point but may be preventing your team from gaining more points.

The ultimate shooting shot is called a 'carreau' whereby you hit the opposition ball on the full such that their ball is removed and your ball takes its place and thereby retains the point as well.

Types of shooting

There are a number of different shooting techniques. They are as follows:

- Shooting along the ground (raspaille)
- Shooting part of the way in the air landing up to 1 metre in front of the boule
- Shooting 'on the full' (boule on boule)

The first two can be effective on some surfaces and in certain circumstances but in the long term it is best to shoot on the full.

Shooting techniques

When shooting remember to:

- Take aim, concentrating only on the boule you want to hit
- Get a good back swing - shooting should be a smooth relaxed throw
- Let the boule do the work, not your arm

Lift your arm through an arc that ends slightly above shoulder height if you are shooting short or au fer, lower if you raspaille. Make sure that as your wrist straightens up to release the boule that it is in-line with the rest of your arm.

The techniques described in this document are based on the observations of many shooters. However there are distinct variations and there is no one technique. Shooting requires the correct technique for you. This requires experimentation to find what works. It then requires practice to make this technique absolutely consistent.

Practice does not necessarily make perfect, but it can make permanent, so practice the right technique, not the wrong one! These techniques are a good starting point.

Stance

Some shooters throw with their feet together and their chest at right angles to the line of projection. Most shooters however advance the foot on the throwing side of the body slightly. This turns the chest slightly and effectively narrows the hips allowing the arm-swing to be closer to the body.

Ultimately there is no 'one true way'. The position of the feet in the circle is a matter of comfort and balance.

The position of the feet can have a considerable bearing on the accuracy of your shooting.

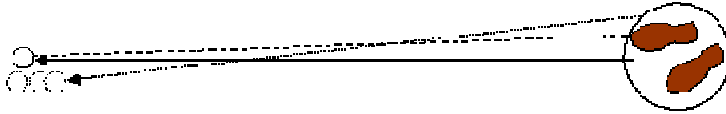
Whether you have your feet together or one advanced, they generally should be facing the target boule. If however you find that you are consistently missing to one particular side, adjusting the position of your feet slightly can correct this.

Example:

If your misses are mostly on the left, then pointing your feet slightly to the right or left can correct this. The opposite also applies.

Note:

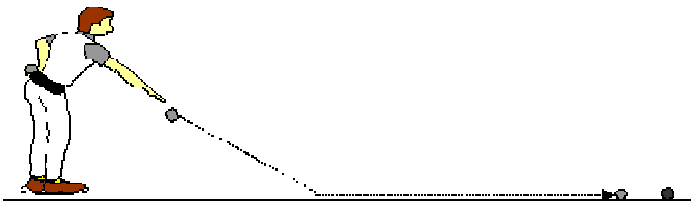
Consider also the straightness of your hand as well. Inaccuracy is not just about feet position.



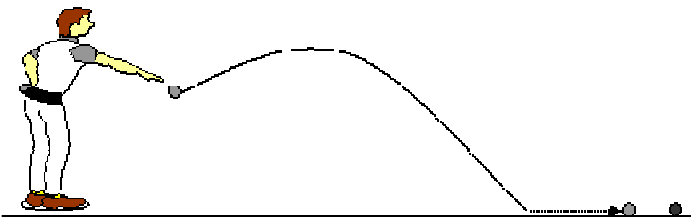
Missed shots



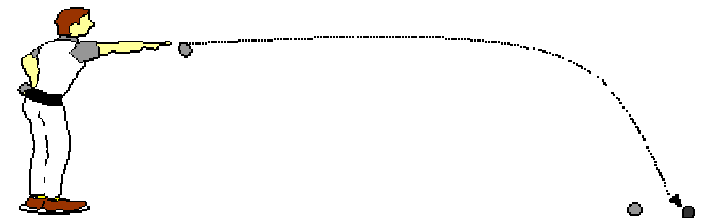
Many beginners try shooting along the ground. This is fine for very smooth surfaces or when there are no obstacles, ie other boules. This has obvious limitations and is probably not worth practicing too much.



Shooting part of the way in the air (short) is good on softer surfaces and very hard surfaces with little bounce. There is a good chance that your boule will stay close to the point of impact if you hit the target. There is the chance of hitting a stone or other boules.



Shooting on the full requires practice and courage but is well worth the extra effort. It is best to practice hitting on the full. In games, have the courage to try and hit on the full as well, particularly while you are still mastering the art, even at the expense of results ! What you lose in the short term you will make up for in the long term. Shoot with conviction.



Practicing shooting with conviction

In order to become a successful shooter you must practice. It is important that you practice with conviction. For example, some people advocate using blocks of wood placed in front of your target boules to force you to shoot 'on the full' or au fer. Many players can hit the boules well when doing this.

The problem arises that when players shoot without the barrier they opt for safety and shoot in front as they believe it will increase their chances of a hit. They lose conviction.

By practicing without the barrier you must use will power to always try to shoot 'au fer'. This will stay with you when the pressure is on. Will power is what makes champions.

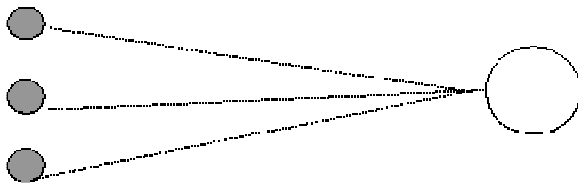
A suggestion which may help is to practice with the target boules on an old carpet. When shooting you must hit the target or your boule will bounce over. You can then practice in your drive way or car park.

Practice exercises

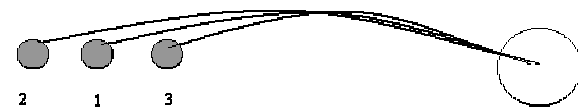
When you are starting out as a shooter, you should practice over short distances i.e. 5 - 6 metres (less for children) and as you become more successful, gradually increase the distance.

To start, try these exercises:

Line the boules up in a row at right angles to your shooting line, about 200mm apart. Shoot right to left and then left to right. As you improve gradually close the gap between the boules.



Line the boules up in a row parallel to your shooting line, about 300mm apart. Shoot the middle boule then the back boule and finally the front boule. As you improve gradually close the gap between the boules.



Tactics

Introduction

Tactics play a large part in a game of petanque. Here are a few examples.

Throwing the cochonnet

Throwing the cochonnet gives you the chance to dictate the tactics of the end taking into account the relative playing strengths and weaknesses' of both teams.

You can select:

- the ground or part of the ground and surface that suits you
- the distance that you want to play

Watching the opposition and where they throw the cochonnet may give you some clues as to their preferences. Watching the cochonnet and how it rolls may indicate how the terrain will play.

Selecting the ground

When choosing a terrain to play, you should try to choose one that either suits you or/and does not suit the opposition.

Example:

You may be comfortable playing on any surface but if your opponent, pointer or shooter, is a 'roller' and not effective unless the ground is smooth. You may choose a rough ground.

Selecting the distance

When you are throwing out the cochonnet, you must take into account the relative playing strengths of the teams.

One team may have a fantastic shooter who is less effective beyond 8 metres. You may choose to throw to 9.9 metres to negate their effectiveness. If your team has an effective shooter also up to 8 metres, you may not care.

You may have a great long distance pointer, so you could choose a long end to take advantage of that.

The 'ideal' opening point

If you are your teams 'opener' for the first throw of the game, the 'ideal' point is approximately 30 cm in front of the cochonnet. In this position your boule is a great distraction to the opposition. They will be forced to avoid your boule (they won't want to "promote" it) and may be tempted to shoot it. Either way you are applying pressure that can force mistakes.

A boule behind the cochonnet can be used by the opposition to rest against, which is not an ideal target for your shooter, but it also gives the opposition the chance to block the front and exert pressure on you.

Promoting your boules

Some times the best way to take the point is to promote your boules by knocking or "nudging" them with another boule. In this way you may end up with two points. This is another reason why you should keep your boules in front of the cochonnet.

Moving the cochonnet

If you have a number of boules behind the cochonnet, you should try and move it toward them with one of your throws. If the cochonnet is hit and leaves the playing area (where there is one) or moves beyond 20 metres from the circle, the cochonnet is dead. If one team has boules still to be thrown they get a point for each of these boules. If both teams have boules, then the end is void.

This tactic can save or win an end or even a game.

Playing a stronger team

If you are playing a stronger team (and this often means they have one or two good shooters) you may choose to point every ball and not shoot at all. In other words, keep the game tight, force the other team to shoot often and try to capitalise on their misses.

Crowding the cochonnet

If the opposition makes a good point early and your shooter misses the boule (or you don't have a shooter), you may choose to crowd the cochonnet by getting as many of your boules as possible close to it and limit the number of points the opposition can gain.

This particularly applies when the opposition has most of their boules still to play.

Shooting

Shooting can be attacking or defensive. You may be shooting to remove a well placed opposition boule that holds the point and force your opponents to point again, or to clear the way for your own team.

You may shoot an opposition boule that does not hold the point but is preventing your team from scoring more.

When and how often you shoot depends on your teams shooting capabilities.

If you have one good shooter you will shoot more cautiously and shoot as more or less a last resort, but with two good shooters you can be aggressive and shoot often

Some teams will try to out-point a good initial boule from the opposition, or at least get close whilst others will immediately shoot to remove it, particularly if it is in front. If you try to point first you may then make it more difficult for your shooter.

Ultimately you must choose the method most likely to succeed.

Shooting the cochonnet

This is a difficult shot but can be devastatingly effective in a number of ways.

If the opposition has established a good point early in the end and your team has wasted a number of boules trying to out-point or remove it, you may attempt to shoot the cochonnet out of bounds and void the end to prevent conceding too many points.

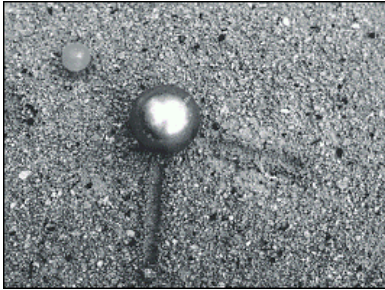
If the opposition team have thrown all their boules and your team has a few left, you may choose to shoot the cochonnet. You would do this if scoring points looks difficult (due to blocking boules, for example). If successful you score a point for each boule your team still has 'in the hand'.

Marking and Measuring

Marking the Boules and Cochonnet

Marking is essential for replacing the boules and cochonnet. This marking plays a part in governing how precisely a boule or cochonnet can be replaced after they have been lifted out or moved. If they have not been marked they have to be left where they ended up.

In the absence of a pointed stick, a finger can be used to trace two lines about 10 cm long. At right angles to each other and which meet at the base of the object being marked. The lines should be straight.



Mark two lines with a finger or stick

Measuring a Point

There are two sorts of points that require measuring:

Close points - generally less than 110mm, the length of an 'umpire's measure' - where a single player carries out the measure.

Distant points, where two players are needed to carry out the measure; one uses the left hand to hold the measure to the boule, the other uses the right hand and their eye to the edge or centre of the cochonnet.

For all forms of measuring, the player/s should be squatting between the boule and the cochonnet.

There are also two sorts of measures:

The 'approximate' measure, which, if properly carried out, allows comparison to about 1 mm. It is carried out with a rigid metal measure.

The 'precise measure' which allow comparison up to fractions of a millimetre. It is carried out by using callipers or extending the end section of an 'umpire's measure'.



Measure with calipers.

These are very useful when the boule is very close to the cochonnet.



Measure with a folding ruler and extending the end for accurate measuring.

Note: The small metal rod rests next to the cochonnet



Measure with a tape.

Equipment to Play Petanque

Buying boules to suit you

You may have never played petanque before and do not own a set of boules or you may already own a set of boules. It is also very likely that you will eventually want to buy a set you consider more suitable to you personally as your game develops. If you have the opportunity, try using boules of different sizes and weights and get a 'feel' for what is suitable for you.

There are two categories of boules :

Competition boules

These vary in size from 70.5 mm to 80 mm in diameter and between 680 gms and 800 gms in weight and are sold in sets of 3. (These must be identical). They must be made by manufacturers recognised by the Federation Internationale de Petanque et Jeu Provencale (F.I.P.J.P.).

Leisure boules

These are boules without weight or identification code markings and vary in size and weight from manufacturer to manufacturer. They cannot be used in Petanque New Zealand tournaments.

Boule patterns

Both leisure and competition boules have different types of patterns, although some boules have no pattern at all. The striation pattern (stripes or grooves) affects your grip on the boule, the spin as you throw, and the way it rolls on impact. It also differentiates your boules from other players.

In general, the smoother the surface, the smoother it leaves the hand; the more striations, the easier it is to grip and the more it grips the ground. If you roll the boule or are a pointer, choose one with more striation; if you throw the boule, choose a smoother surface.



The striation pattern assists in distinguishing which boules belong to which players when it is time to add up the score. For this reason most leisure sets are sold in groups, 8 or 6 boules each with 1, 2, 3 or 4 striations.

Boule marks

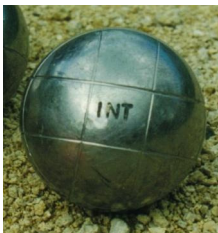
If you want to play in tournaments the boules must have specific marks clearly visible, including :

the manufacturer's trademark (eg JB, Obut, Boule Bleu, Integrale,etc)

identification number, eg E9

weight, eg 700.

optional engravings of a player or team's initials, name, or logo, all of which help in identifying your own boules during a match.



As potentially you could have all competitors in a match using boules that have the same pattern, these markings are very important in distinguishing each players boules. Leisure boules do not have these markings.

Steel types and hardness

Competition boules are also made from different types of steel. Some are stainless steel or steel alloy, which don't rust, others are normal steel, often chromed. Leisure boules are usually mild steel and will rust.

Both types of steel are tempered to different degrees of hardness, which is measured in kilogram per millimetre (kg/mm). The softer the steel the less rebound when your boule is hit by another boule.

Hard boules (130-140 kg/mm)

the most durable and will last for many years of constant use, making them excellent as a practice boule.

good for pointing on smooth and softer surfaces.

not generally used for shooting.

very 'lively', as they do not absorb shock as well as softer boules and tend to rebound easily.

Semi-soft boules (120-125 kg/mm).

reasonably durable, having a lifespan of between 2-5 years.

good for most surfaces.

good for shooting as they absorb shock well.

Soft boules (110-115 kg/mm).

not durable and may need replacing on a yearly basis. Can also give off splinters when used on terrains with large, rough stones.

good for most terrains.

good for shooting and pointing on hard stony grounds, when pointing using a high "lob", as they absorb shock very well.

Note:

The lifespan of the boule is dictated by its ability to retain its shape, and by taking proper care particularly with regard to rust.

Selecting the right boules for you

When choosing the boules for yourself to use you must consider :

Your strength and the weight of the ball

The weight of a boule affects how accurately you throw, how tired you get, and how the boule reacts on impact. In general, the heavier the boule, the less it moves after impact; the lighter the boule, the easier it is to throw. A boule that is too heavy for you will tire your arm out faster and cause you to throw short of your target; a boule that is too light, may cause you to overthrow your target. If you roll the boule, you should choose a heavier one since they take a straighter path.

The size of your hands and the diameter of the boule

The diameter of a boule affects how much control you have and how comfortable you feel throwing it. If the boule is too small or too large you will have less control when throwing it and your hand will tire out more quickly. In general, the smaller your hand, the smaller the boule.

Whether you are a shooter or a pointer

Pointers prefer hard boules with a heavy weight, a small diameter and more patterns to ensure good grip on difficult surfaces. Shooters prefer generally soft boules for their own special quality to sustain the impacts. A low weight (<720gm) with a minimum pattern and a larger diameter (>74mm) ensures a bigger striking surface. Whether you are a pointer or shooter you should be able to hold the boule comfortably with the fingers and the palm of your hand.

The surface you usually play on

If you play on a hard, rocky surface for example, you may choose a soft boule for less rebound.

Caring for the boules

After playing near beach or putting them away for a few weeks, wash in fresh water, dry and wipe with light oil (unless the boules are rustproof).

If you are putting the boules away for longer, wash in fresh water, dry and wipe with light oil then wrap in a dry material. Store in a dry place.

The cochonnet

The cochonnet must be entirely made of wood (or the newly approved MS resin) and with a diameter in the 25 mm – 35 mm range. It can be painted any colour. The bright fluorescent colours work very well as they are easily seen at a distance, even in low light conditions.

Measuring devices

Measuring the distance between the cochonnet and the boules is an important part of the game.

There are a number of devices that can be used :

Tape measure.

Folding Ruler with extending end.

Telescopic measure.

Calipers.