

WHAT IS PETANQUE?

What is Pétanque and what is the difference between boules and Pétanque?

Pétanque is a game played on hard surfaces such as sand or gravel, where teams of 2 or 3, or singles, try to place as many of their metal balls, or 'boules', closer to the jack than the nearest boule of the opposition. This is achieved either by 'pointing' close to the jack, or to a selected position, or by shooting the opposition. The winning team is the first to score 13 points. A team of triples plays with 2 boules each and doubles/singles are played with 3 boules per player.

Many bowls players can adapt readily to playing Pétanque but, to do so effectively, they need to be aware of some major differences. After each team has played their first boule, the team that is furthest away plays again until they take the point (or run out of boules). There is no order of play within the team; it depends on the skills of the players and the choice of shot.

There is no 'skip' or captain, with the emphasis being on team decisions. The tactics required can change with each boule thrown.

As the game is usually played on a gravel surface, the most effective technique is to use height rather than rolling a boule. The landing point can be within visual range, making adjustment of length more precise.

Usually, in the UK, the terms 'Pétanque' and 'Boules' are often interchangeable. However, in France where it all originated, the term 'Boules' is generic; there are many different games or sports that come under this general heading, Pétanque being just one, although the most widely played. Others include Jeu Provençale (from which Pétanque is derived), Jeu Lyonnaise, Boule de Sable, Boules Carrés, Boules de Fort, Boule Bretonne. The name of our sport derives from old French meaning "feet tied together."

The story goes that, in 1905, a game of Jeu Provençal was under way at la Ciotat near Marseilles. This is an energetic game where a shooter runs to throw at a target boule which may be up to 25 metres distant. However, one of their champions, Jules le Noir, had developed arthritis and was no longer able to play. One of his former team mates, Ernest le Pitiot, saw his frustration and said (in Provençal French), 'tell you what, old chum, while I am waiting my turn to play, you and I will play a modified game. You sit in your wheelchair and, to make things fair, I will draw a circle and stand with my feet in the circle as if they are tied together. We will play a shorter game that you can manage, between 5 and 8 metres.' And thus started something that is played by half a million French people in France alone, is played in over 50 countries and can be a challenge at many different levels of ability. Many towns in France hold annual competitions where perhaps three hundred teams will take part and these are national, European, Asian, and World Championships for singles, doubles, triples, mixed doubles, veterans, juniors, shooting and other categories.