

The Game of Pétanque

Pétanque, or boule, is a game in which teams play against each other using so-called boules, which are balls made of metal. A game consists of several ends. It can be played by

- 1 player against 1 player (singles)
- 2 players against 2 players (doubles),
- 3 players against 3 players (triples)

In singles and doubles each player uses three boules, while in triples each player uses only two boules. Pétanque can be played on any terrain, but surfaces covered by grit or a moderate layer of sand are preferred. Before the game, the players must toss up to decide which team will choose the terrain and be the first to throw the jack, a small wooden ball. Let's say team A starts the game. A player of this team chooses the starting point and draws a circle on the ground (35-50 cm in diameter), and then throws the jack forward so that it lands within a distance from 6 to 10 meter from the circle. When throwing the jack or boule the player's feet must be entirely within the circle and must not leave it or be lifted off the ground until the thrown jack or boule has touched the ground. The position of the jack may change during the game but it must not be more than 20 m away from the circle. The first player of team A then throws his first boule trying to place it as close as possible to the jack in order to bar the way to the jack for the opposing team. Then it is team B's turn to throw their first boule. They have to throw boules until they are closer to the jack as team A's first (or best) boule or have no boules left. Of course a team is allowed to distance boules of the opposing team by shooting, i.e. hitting, or pushing them with their own boules. If team B can place a better boule than the best of team A, it is team A's turn to play a boule. If both teams have no boules left, the end is completed, and the points are counted. The team whose boule is closest to the jack wins the end and gets a point. For any other boule that is closer to the jack than the best of the opposing team, the winning team gets one more point. That means that in a double a team can score a maximum of 6 points in an end. The winner of the end draws a new circle where the jack finally lay at the end of the preceding end and starts a new end by throwing the jack. The team that scores 13 points first wins the game on condition that the opposing team has no boules left in that end.

It's all that simple. While playing, you have to take decisions on how to throw the boule and on what you want to achieve: Do you want to point (i.e. throw or roll your boule into a desired position), shoot or push? This depends on the tactical situation your team is in, on the surface of the terrain, and the position of the thrown boules. Another factor is the composition of your team: Does it have a real good shooter or only good pointers? All these decisions and variables add spice to pétanque and make it a fascinating game.

The complete official rules in English can be found here: <http://www.fipjp.com/>
Allez les boules!