

Tweed Valley Pétanque Club
Hydro Hotel
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History of boules (Pétanque)



Roman and Greek times. The ancient Greeks and Romans played a game resembling pétanque. The Greeks used round stones ("spheristics") and the Romans used wooden balls covered with iron. The Greeks favoured brute strength throwing their balls as far as possible, while the Romans preferred skill. Thus, the Romans were, in a way, the inventors of the jack or "cochonnet".

Barbarian and Middle Ages. With the barbarian invasions, boules disappeared... to reappear more popular than ever in the Middle Ages. During this period, boules players were called "bouleurs". The game became so popular, that in the 14th century, first Charles IV, then Charles V forbade it, preferring that their subjects spend their time in more useful pursuits such as archery. Later however, in the early 16th century, boules players found favour in the eyes of Pope Julius II.

Seeking to turn the Holy See into an Italian power, he brought together the best bouleurs of his state to form a redoubtable company of rock throwers. They shone in play against the French, the Venetians and the Spaniards.



Return of boules from Italy. Boules returned to France with the Franco-Italian wars. Rabelais himself said: "Neither rheumatism nor any other malady can prevent anyone from playing this game: it is suitable for all ages, from the very young to old age".

Boules continued to grow in popularity, especially in France and Italy. Already, differences in play were appearing: the French studded the traditional wooden boules with nails, whereas the Italians varnished theirs.

In 1629, boules were outlawed again: angered by the competition they faced from boules, the manufacturers of paumes (the precursor of tennis) conspired together and succeeded in having the game forbidden.

The ban on the game was flouted, however, and people met to play boules in secret, especially in monasteries. In fact, the monks were the first to build covered pétanque pitches!



The ban was finally lifted a few years later.

Boules in Marseille

In 1792, a game of boules in Marseille left... 38 dead! This is no fisherman's tale, nor was there a brawl over a point!



In fact, the game was held in a convent where kegs of gunpowder were being stored and the soldiers used cannon balls as boules!

André-Marie Ampère, an eminent physicist and mathematician, also played boules, although he used regular boules, that is, studded ones. The game he played resembled the jeu Provençal, which is played in southern France. In this version, players take a run-up of one or two paces gaining momentum before letting fly with their boule.

Birth of pétanque

It was only in 1907 that pétanque as we know it was born. Its name comes from the Provençal "pèd tanco", which means "feet together". It is played on a shorter terrain and players throw their boule from a rough circle scratched in the dirt, taking no run-up at all.

The new version became very popular and in 1908, the first official competition was held in the town of La Ciotat, a port east of Marseille.

A few years earlier, in 1904, an Alsatian named Félix Rofritsch began making his own studded boules in his workshop on rue des Fabres, in downtown Marseille. This was the beginning of the great La Boule Bleue adventure.



There are many versions of boules played in France and around the world. Over the centuries, many games of skill have been invented using stone, clay or wooden balls and based on variations on the rules of pétanque, such as boule lyonnaise, bocce, lawn bowling, etc.

Please visit our website

www.tweedvalleypetanque.org

Or visit us at the piste, Sundays and Wednesdays 1.15 pm