

Let the games begin!

By Maré Mouton



Pétanque balls, or boules, are 7–8 cm in diameter and weigh 650–800 grams. The balls are marked with sets of lines for identification



Silly dress is optional: Pétanque players Bob Orford, Maré Mouton and Keppies Swanepoel ready for a village game

There's a lot to be said for the game of pétanque, the French version of bowls. First of all one gets all the walking, bending and arm movement exercise offered by golf, but without the need for a course that takes up hectares of land, costs millions, and soaks up vast volumes of scarce water. In fact, pétanque requires no built facility at all, just an open space with a fairly hard, level surface (for competitions, international rules require an area of at least 4 x 15 metres). You can even take your boules with you on holiday and play wherever you stop; no need to join a club.

The rules are simple: Two teams of one or two players, each using three boules, or three teams of two players using two boules each, have to toss their boules to land closest to a marker called a *cochonette* (the "jack" in bowls). To start the game, a player's circle of about 50 cm is drawn, and a designated player tosses the jack in any direction to land between 6 and 10 metres away. That player then tosses the first boule, followed by a player from the other team. Thereafter the sequence of play is determined by the lie of the boules: the team who has a boule closest to the jack defers to the other team. One point is awarded for each ball closer to the jack than any of the competitors', and the game ends when a team reaches a score of 13.

In pétanque the boule is tossed, not rolled, and it is done from a fixed position (*pétanque* is corrupted from the Provençal French for "planted to the ground"). The boule is normally tossed with the palm of the hand facing down. The game developed from an older French game, *jeu provençal*, which involved three strides before a toss of 15–20 metres. In 1910 an ageing champion, who could no longer manage the strides, invented this new game, which is now played by people of all ages all over the world. ■