

Pointing

Pointing is the term used to 'place' your boule. Very often the objective is to place your boule nearer the jack than your opponent, but it is also used in defensive situations if you feel you need to limit your opponent's scoring opportunities.

In the factsheet 'How to throw a boule' we presented techniques for the physical action of pointing. There are a variety of techniques used by players, rolling, the half-lob (where the boule has sufficient elevation to carry about half way down the piste before it touches the ground) and the full lob (where the boule has a high trajectory with lots of backspin to carry most of the distance and stop very quickly after hitting the ground).

This factsheet focuses on the main points to consider when pointing, namely:

- Where do we want our boule to rest? A tactical decision which we expand upon later.
- Are there any features of the head or terrain which may cause a problem?

There are a multitude of different features which could cause problems. Firstly, and perhaps most obviously, you should assess the condition of the ground on which you are playing.

Slopes

Sloping ground is an obvious problem. If you are playing up or down hill you will need to adjust the weight of your shot to compensate. Slopes from side to side introduce a stiffer challenge and you may need to make substantial adjustments to your shot to compensate:

- If you use a rolling technique the boule will travel much like a putt in golf, and therefore aiming up the slope is necessary to avoid your boule ending up some distance from the desired resting place.
- Using a lob action means the boule will not be so influenced by the slope. This will require a great deal of backspin to ensure the boule does not kick off the slope. In addition adding side spin can assist with counteracting the influence of a slope by causing the boule to 'dig in' to the slope. (Side spin techniques are detailed later in this factsheet).

Terrain surface

You should assess the surface between the circle and target resting spot to determine whether there are any soft or hard places, thick or thin gravel toppings or any pitch marks (a mini 'pot hole' made by a previously played boule). All of these will have an influence on how your boule will perform. If your boule lands on a very soft part it may stop dead, a pitch mark could send the boule off at a funny angle and so on.

It is vital therefore to pick a suitable landing spot for your boule. If you are able to consistently land in the desired area you will be able to overcome the challenges of an uneven terrain.

To make your job a little easier you are allowed to smooth over one pitch mark before you play a shot. You are not allowed to 'garden' the play area however, so you cannot remove stones, smooth over large areas or remove any obstacles (wind-blown obstacles such as leaves and litter can be removed, but twigs, weeds are deemed to be a feature of the terrain and cannot be moved).

Blocking boules

From time to time you may find a boule is blocking your desired path. There are a number of options of how to deal with this.

- If it is one of your own boules or those of a teammate you can either play a different line to pass the boule or perhaps try and promote it to a better position. Bear in mind that if one of your team's boules is in your way it is most likely to be in the way of your opponents too (and so may be best left alone, depending upon the game conditions).
- If the boule is an opponent's, stop to think about whether you are likely to pass it – if you think it would be better for the boule to be removed then call upon the shooter to get rid of it (if it would be prudent to do so given the game situation). The less of your opponents' boules there are in play, the better your chance of scoring.

On occasion you may need to place side spin on your boule to pass an opponent (or counteract a slope as above). Side spin is imparted from the throwing action. As we mentioned in the 'How to Throw a Boule' factsheet a straight throw is achieved by the knuckles facing directly up the way (as you look at your knuckles the middle finger is at the 12 o'clock position. If you rotate your wrist so that the middle finger is at the 2 o'clock position this will impart clockwise sidespin which will cause your boule to spin right to left on contact with the ground. Equally if the wrist is rotated so the middle finger is at the 10 o'clock position this will impose anticlockwise spin, causing the boule to spin from left to right on contact with the ground. This requires a great deal of practice to master, but can have impressive results.

Very uneven surface

If you come across a very uneven surface, perhaps with large stones, bits of brick sticking up etc it is necessary to try and give your points as much elevation as you can safely manage and a lot of backspin. The reason for this is it is virtually impossible to predict how your boule will react to an uneven surface if you roll your boule, in fact it is a lottery. The elevation removes much of this uncertainty and by carefully selecting your landing spot you can improve your chances of resting near the ideal position. I have seen a lot of good players come unstuck on very rough terrains if they try to roll their boules.

This only gives a flavour of the things a pointer has to consider. Due to the high number of variables I believe pointing is more difficult than shooting.

Tactical decisions

Deciding the ideal place to point your boule to will very much depend upon the game situation, here are some common scenarios:

Your team to play first – offensive pointing

In the situation where you are opening the end, it is most often advisable to leave your point directly in front of the jack (or on the easiest line to the jack). It is, however, not generally a good idea to rest very near the jack, particularly if your opponents are good shooters. The chances of that boule remaining in the head for very long are slim.

A good opening boule is one which is directly on the line to the jack, 12-18 inches short. This gives your opponents a bit of a headache. The boule is sufficiently far enough away for them to be tempted to point rather than shoot. But they will have the problem of a very prominent blocker in their way. There is a chance they will knock your boule closer still to the jack, and there could now be two blocking boules in the head, making life more difficult for the shooter.

If your opening boule finishes beyond the jack it is more or less wasted. Your opponent not only has free reign of all of the space in front of the jack, but if they are a little heavy (or very savvy) they could use yours to rest against and be closer to the jack, a very effective offensive point.

Defensive pointing

If you are faced with the situation that your team are at a boule disadvantage and you have to play your team's last boules, a good defense is to block the front of the jack (or the easiest line to the jack) if possible. By doing so you are making life difficult for your opponent, the aim being to limit their opportunity to score points with their boules in hand. They may make an error and move your boule closest – turning your defensive shot into an offensive weapon!

Another option, when faced with a seemingly impossible position above is to rest your last boule directly onto your opponents closest boule to the jack (but don't get too close to the jack, see below). You may sneak closer, either now or after an error from your opponents. The added advantage of this tactic is that it discourages your opponents from shooting your boule away as there is a good chance they will remove their own instead.

When your opponents hold a strong boule advantage, try to avoid resting on the jack if at all possible. By doing so you will present your opponent with a good opportunity to move the jack to an open space (a shoot on the boule resting on the jack will see the jack ping off). Your defence is now very weak and your opponent could score very heavily.

Often a boule which looks to be very short can cause your opponent problems. If they are not a proficient pointer a very short boule might very well be enough to put them off. A very short boule can be much better than one which is only 18 inches beyond the jack.

Practice these scenarios frequently as pointers need to be proficient in dealing with a whole variety of situations and conditions.