

Choosing Equipment

To play a game of Petanque you will need:

- * Up to 3 boules each
- * A jack (one per team is fine)
- * A tape measure (one per team is fine)
- * A cloth for keeping your boules clean

Penicuik Petanque Club have a small stock of boules which you can borrow at a very reasonable rate on a short term basis, and we sell jacks for £1 each. As you become more familiar with the game you will want your own set of boules and this factsheet will give you a few pointers about selecting the right boules to suit your game.

Firstly you need to decide whether you wish to play social games only, or whether you wish to play more seriously in competitions. The reason for this is only certain boules are suitable for competitions.

Social players will probably be content with 'leisure boules' or sometimes called 'dog boules'. Most commonly they are sold in sets of 8 or 12 in an attractive carry case. They are often very shiny when new and come in a range of different striped patterns. The quality of manufacture of leisure boules varies considerably, even within the same set, and they can behave quite erratically as they are often very lightweight. They are not allowed in serious competition (although Penicuik Petanque Club will allow leisure boules in its own competitions as we do not believe in excluding anyone!). There are good and bad leisure boules. One of the better types are 'Obut Weekend' as they have a higher quality manufacture than most leisure boules. Or, if you would like unusual decoration on your boules, have a look at 'Obut Tatou'. Both are sold in sets of 3 for around £30.

Competition players should seriously consider purchasing their own set of competition boules. There are strict rules about how competition boules are manufactured. They are always engraved with their weight in grams, the makers name and a serial number and they come with a certificate to confirm they are approved by the international governing body. You will need a set of 3 if you wish to play in competitions at other clubs, national championships or international qualifiers.

Which Competition Boules Should I Choose?

Competition boules come in a very wide variety of sizes, weights, hardness, materials and patterns. First and foremost your boules should feel comfortable. The following points may be technically helpful, but there is no point choosing a boule which is correct on paper, only to find it feels all wrong! Ask to play a game with someone else's boules and get the feel of different boules. This will give an idea of your preferences. Then use the following points to guide you or even better, discuss with the club coach.

Weight & diameter

The really important decision which needs to be made is which weight and diameter you should choose. This is primarily about comfort, the boule needs to rest neatly in your hand (see 'How to Throw A Boule' factsheet) and should remain comfortable within the swing. For this reason if you have small hands a small diameter will work best and vice versa. The boules should also not be so heavy as to be difficult to throw over long distances; you should be able to throw well beyond 10 meters. Many shooters prefer lighter boules as they rebound less and are easier to throw so they carry over very long distances, while often pointers will use heavy boules as they 'dig in' to the ground on contact. A good guide for the beginner is to choose boules weighing 700-720 grams (medium weight), but there is no right or wrong answer.

Pattern (striations)

The common thinking is that the more detailed the pattern on your boules (heavy stripes), the better grip is achieved in the hand, and the more the boule will grip when it hits the ground. It is for this reason that pointers tend to prefer patterned boules. Shooters are not generally looking to improve their grip and therefore they tend to select smoother boules with no or very little decoration. If you are not sure whether you are a pointer or a shooter yet, you should probably choose a boule with a pattern as smooth boules can be difficult to hold for the beginner.

Having said all of that most people choose the pattern based on how nice they look or simply that they are different from anyone else's they know, which are as good reasons as any! You will find, however, after a couple of games you will be able to pick out your own boules without much thought anyway, even if they seem to be identical to someone else's (the weights and serial numbers are very unlikely to be the same).

Hardness

The importance of hardness is debateable. It is argued that soft boules rebound less when they strike another boule, meaning they are more likely to stay within the head. For this reason they are preferred by shooters. But soft boules are much more expensive and do not last as long (they become dented over time and the engraving becomes worn or disappears completely). Hard boules are perfectly adequate for the beginner as they will last a lifetime.

Material

This is purely down to choice and budget. If you are feeling very flush you can choose a stainless alloy, such as stainless steel. These have the advantage that they do not rust and so require very little maintenance. But carbon steel is cheaper and performs just as well in play. Carbon steel does rust however, so they come coated in chrome or sometimes a matt black finish. The coating wears off in time

and you will need to protect the boules against deep rusting. Rubbing the boules with an oily rag after a wet game is usually sufficient. A spray of WD40 before they are put away for the winter will keep your boules from rusting badly. A small layer of rust is not harmful however, and will usually be worn off after a game or two.

Good starter boules

There are 3 makes of competition boules which are ideal for the beginner. They come in a range of patterns, weights and diameters and cost around £40-50:

Obut Match
JB TC Evolution
La Boule Noire COU

Good luck! Remember you will also need a bag or case to carry your boules in. There are many purpose made cases available, but you can really use anything you like. A second hand photographers camera bag works very well (try ebay), or an old football sock will do!

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Colin Stewart
Penicuik Pétanque Club