

Pétanque Practice

Improve your confidence



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Introduction

A need for training new players emerged in our club; prompting me to conduct weekly training sessions. After the first year, I decided to put together some ideas on paper and “Pétanque Essential” was the first document. The feedback I received was the need for a practice guide. “Pétanque Practice” is the second document.

Warm-up

Warming up is the best way to prevent pain. A warm muscle can handle much more load than a cold muscle. Make sure to start slowly. The following exercises can be done in a few minutes.

If you have no time, make sure to at least warm up your shoulder on the throwing side. It takes a few seconds and it can be done right before your throw.

Feet

Lift one foot off the ground. Slowly rotate your ankle in a circular motion a few times. Repeat in the other direction. Switch feet and repeat.

Legs

Walk in place, driving your knees up toward your chest to activate your hip flexors and quads.

Hips

Place your hands on your hips for balance. Slowly rotate your hips in a circular motion, moving them forward, side, and back, as if drawing a large circle with your pelvis. Then switch in the other direction.

Shoulders

Keep the tips of your fingers on the top of your shoulders and rotate your elbows in a circular motion. Then switch in the other direction. If you have no time to warm up, make sure to do at least this exercise before starting to shoot.

Arms

Swing one arm forward while simultaneously swinging the other arm backward. This can also be performed with some torso rotation to engage your core.

Raise your right arm overhead. Bend your upper body to the left in a reaching motion, keeping your hips, shoulders, and ears in a straight line. Switch arms and repeat the stretch to the other side.

Hands

Start with your hands open, fingers spread wide, and your thumbs extended away from your palms. Make a fist, but keep your thumb tucked inside your curled fingers. Repeat this motion, opening your hand with your thumb out, then closing it into a fist with your thumb in.

Neck

Look straight ahead, then slowly turn your head to the left. Then turn your head to the right. Repeat once.

These are examples and you can make up your own exercises as well.

Throw a few boules at 4 to 6 meters and progressively move to 8, 9 and 10 meters. This seems like a lot of preparation, but think how long it takes to recover from a sore elbow, shoulder...

Video

The use of video is an important tool to assess your throw. It is objective. You cannot see the details of the movement and the release of the boule with your own eyes in real time.

It also provides additional information like the angle of the pendulum, the angle of release and other such details. The data can be analyzed and compared with other players to gain insight, and help each other improve.

A partner or a trainer should take a video of you pointing and shooting. First from the side of the throwing arm and then another video taken facing you. It should be

with a wide enough angle to see the arc of the boule, its landing and where it stops. All of this information is helpful to assess your throw.

Making videos regularly allows you to see your progression so that you can adapt further training accordingly.

Here are a few examples of what you should look for in the video:

- Position of the feet.
- Alignment of the body: legs, hips, shoulders, head and arms.
- Movement of the feet and body during the throw.
- Pendulum:
 - Angle of the backswing.
 - Angle at the release point.
 - Angle of the projection of the boule.
- Breaking the wrist.
- Timing of the opening of the wrist.
- Angle of the opening of the wrist.
- Weight transfer during the forward swing.
- Angle of the forward movement of the head and bust during the throw.
- Height of the right and left shoulder during the throw.
- Flexion of your leg on the throwing side to absorb the forward motion.
- Lateral movement of any part during the throw.
- Position of the non-throwing arm.
- Overall stability before, during and after the throw.

A phone setup for HD video with 30 frames should work fine. The 60 frames option will create a bigger file with more frames that may be helpful in some particular instances. No need to record in slow motion.

You will need software to analyze the video in slow motion. I use Kinovea on my PC but there are other programs available on different platforms.

Making use of this tool will add another dimension to your pétanque practice!

Throwing of the jack

A simple way to throw the jack is to hold it with the tips of your fingers and use the same throw as you would with a boule. You need to be able to throw the jack at all the distances. What is even more important is to throw it at a valid distance and position.

Change the distance for each throw. Start at 7 meters, followed by 9 and finish at 8 meters.

Throw the jack as close as possible to a sideline without going over. After a few tries you will feel confident in how close you can get to the sideline.

Be prepared and think about where you want to throw the jack. And think about why here and not over there. Throwing the jack is the first action in any end and that should be part of your strategy.

The distance is very important and you should be able to throw at any desired distance consistently.

Pointing

In these exercises you do not pass or fail. You practice using game situations.

Alternate between short, long and medium distances: 6, 10, 8 or 7, 9 and 8.

Defensive point

Throw the Jack and point behind the jack and aligned with it. Point the second boule in front and aligned with the jack.

In this exercise it is more important to be aligned with the jack than to be close.

Point a third boule right in front of your second boule as a “devant de boule.” If the third boule stops and touches the second one it is better. But do not push the boule.

Obstacle boule

Place an obstacle boule 20 inches in front and aligned with the jack. Do not use one of your boules as the obstacle boule. Point your 3 boules on the right side to

get the point without touching the obstacle boule. Point 3 more boules on the left side of the obstacle boule.

Reduce the distance of the obstacle boule to 10 inches to the jack and repeat.

The use of right and left side spin might be helpful in this exercise.

Repeat the exercise using 2 obstacle boules side by side, 4 inches apart.

Offensive point

Place an opponent's boule 20 inches in front and aligned with the jack. Place one of your boules one inch on the left side of the opponent's boule that has the point. You play on your boule with the goal of making 2 points with each boule played. One point is not enough. Put the boules back into the original setup after each boule you play.

Repeat with your boule on the right side of the opponent's boule.

Then change the distance to the jack to 10 inches and repeat with your boules on the left and right side.

This situation is very common in a game and you will decide to push or not depending on how confident you feel.

Breaking the wall

Your team has a good point and the opponent's team played all their boules. Many boules are in front and you don't want to risk shooting. Maybe this is a good time to break the wall.

You need to carefully observe, think and choose an opponent's boule that is in the way. Point on that boule a bit stronger to move it just enough out of the way to make your boule stay close enough to add another point. You may play straight on that boule or on the side to rebound "faire le bec."

To set up this exercise, use your imagination giving one of your boules the point and placing 5 opponents' boules in front of the jack anywhere you see fit to simulate a real game situation.

Backspin will help your boule stop upon impact with another one. Use less backspin if you want your boule to continue rolling a bit more after pushing another boule.

If two opponents' boules are close together side by side, it is quite easy to play in between the two to push them away and stay; because your boule will rebound between the two and stop.

Moving the jack

Put the jack and a boule on the side about 4 inches apart. Add a couple of boules about 20 inches further back.

Point and move the jack to give the point to the 2 boules in the back. Even better make 3 points with your boule.

The pointing challenge

When you see a good point in a game situation, think about how you would point to make a better one.

There is always a solution. Are you able to find it and execute it? Train yourself to find the best solution and review it after each boule played.

Pointing is not only throwing your boule close to the jack. Pointing is analyzing the situation and executing the solution that will put your team in the best position. You have a lot of different options. Your experience will help you choose the one that you can execute.

You don't know if you can do it until you try. This practice will give you more confidence.

Shooting

An experienced golfer once told me, "I see these people at the driving range and they hit ball after ball but they repeat the same mistakes because they do not know how to swing correctly."

Before you start to practice shooting, you should think about how to improve the mechanics of your throw: your body posture, your pendulum, your hand release and your breathing.

The 45-second wait

Place a boule at 6.5 meters from the circle; about 4 inches in front on either side but not aligned with the jack. Imagine this is the first boule played in an end and you have to shoot it.

This is a common situation and the shooter is under a lot of pressure especially if his first shot misses.

Shoot your first boule and if you miss, wait 45 seconds (this is important) and try again with the 45-second delay until you hit the target. Then move the target to 9.5 meters and finally to 8 meters.

During the 45-second wait, think about what you need to do to improve your next shot. It is better if someone else keeps track of the time and lets you know when the 45 seconds have passed.

In a tournament you must be able to make a decision and concentrate within that one-minute timeframe. You must learn to gauge 60 seconds in order to make the most of it.

Stress simulation

You play a friendly game and you shoot everything. The next day you play in a competition against a team you know is very good and you cannot shoot a boule.

It is difficult to simulate the stress you will encounter during an important game in a competition. Here is an exercise that is for practice only. Do not do this during a competition.

Drop three boules and the jack on the ground. You want a random position but you also want all three boules and the jack to be close together. You need to shoot the boule with the point alone. You have 3 boules.

Start at 7 meters. But before you start shooting, stand right behind the circle, look at the boules and say in your head about 5 to 10 times: If I miss, I lose the game. At the same time breathe in and out rapidly with very short breaths.

Then without hesitation, step into the circle. Take a slow deep breath and shoot immediately. Take the time to do your regular routine to shoot but do not take the time to walk the court. Repeat and shoot as many boules as necessary until you hit the target.

Repeat at 10 meters and finish at 8 meters.

Of course, this is the opposite of what you want to do in a competition. This exercise is to simulate stress in order to help you manage it.

“Plein fer”

Shooting “plein fer” means hitting the target boule directly. First you must focus on your technique.

Here are two areas to focus on:

- Bring your arm as high as possible during your backswing to generate a pendulum as wide as possible. This will help you generate power without forcing.
- At the end of your forward swing, just when you release the boule, the opening of your hand is crucial to give some curve to your throw. The little movement of opening your hand is amplified because the boule is at the extremity of your arm.

Drop three boules and the jack on the ground at 7 meters. You want a random position but you also want all three boules and the jack to be close together. You have 3 boules to shoot the boule with the point “plein fer,” meaning you must land directly on the boule without touching the ground first. Only when you succeed and shoot the boule with the point alone, “plein fer,” can you move to the next distance.

Repeat at 9, 6, 10 and 8 meters.

Shooting “plein fer” consistently is really hard. It is so easy to go back to your old way of shooting – low and way in front of the target. This is especially true when you play against a good team and you are stressed.

Focus on your hand release and work on the opening of the wrist. This is the key to giving the necessary curve to the trajectory of the boule to hit “plein fer.” Instead

of forcing your throw, use a wide pendulum and accelerate the speed of the forward swing. This should give you enough power to shoot far enough without forcing. That is how you can improve your consistency, especially at 9 or 10 meters.

You need to shoot consistently on or over the target. Condition yourself to think that any boules shot over the target are good. This step is required to be able to overcome years of shooting in front of the target rather than on the target.

After a few hundred boules, or a few weeks if you play 2 or 3 times a week, you will notice a difference. You will also notice that a lot of times you think you will go over and you end up right on the target.

Conclusion

Think about what you want to achieve and create your own exercises. This Pétanque Practice is to give you a few ideas to get started.

Let's share, have fun and play more Pétanque!

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Focus on the next boule not the previous one.

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Comments and suggestions are welcome:

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