

# History of Pétanque

Boules (French pronunciation 'bull') is a collective name for a wide range of similar games in which the objective is to throw or roll heavy balls (called boules in France) as close as possible to a small target ball.

Boules games are often played in open spaces (town squares and parks) in villages and towns. Dedicated playing areas for boules-type games are typically large, level, rectangular courts made of flattened earth, gravel, or crushed stone, enclosed in wooden rails or back boards.

In the south of France, the word boules is also often used as a synonym for pétanque.

In France in the second half of the 19th century a form of boules known as jeu provençal was extremely popular. In this form of the game players rolled their boules or ran three steps before throwing a boule. Pétanque originally developed as an offshoot or variant of jeu provençal in 1910 in the town of La Ciotat near Marseilles. A former player named Jules Lenoir was afflicted by rheumatism so severe that he could no longer run before throwing a boule. In fact, he could barely stand. A good friend named Ernest Pitiot was a local café owner and he developed a variant form of the game in which the length of the pitch was reduced by roughly half, and instead of running to throw a boule, he stood stationary in a circle. They called the game pieds tanqués, "feet planted" (on the ground), a name that eventually evolved into the game's current name, pétanque.

The first pétanque tournament was organized by Ernest Pitiot, along with his brother Joseph

## Petanque is a game for both sexes and all ages



Pitiot, in 1910 in La Ciotat. After that the game spread quickly and soon became the most popular form of boules in France.

Before the mid-1800s, European boules games were played with solid hard wood balls. The late 1800s saw the introduction of cheap mass-manufactured nails, and wooden boules gradually began to be covered with nails, producing boules cloutées ("nailed boules"). After World War I, cannonball manufacturing technology was adapted to allow the manufacture of hollow, all-metal boules. The first all-metal boule, la Boule Intégrale, was introduced in the mid-1920s by Paul Courtieu. The Intégrale was cast in a single piece from a bronze-aluminum alloy. Shortly thereafter Jean Blanc invented a process of manufacturing steel boules by stamping two steel blanks into hemispheres and then welding the two hemispheres together to create a boule. With this technological advance, hollow all-metal balls rapidly became the norm.

## Global Spread

After the development of the all-metal boule, pétanque spread rapidly from Provence to the rest of France, then to the rest of Europe, and then to Francophone colonies and countries around the globe. Today, many countries have their own national governing bodies.

In France, the Fédération Française de Pétanque et Jeu Provençal (FFJPJ) has more than 300,000 licensed members.

There are strong national federations in Germany, Spain, and England. Pétanque is actively played in many nations with histories of French colonial influence. Today, some of the strongest players in the world come from Madagascar and Thailand.

Pétanque was featured at the 2015 All-Africa Games, which were hosted by the Republic of Congo, a former French colony.

Pétanque is not widely played in the Americas. There is a Canadian pétanque federation based in Québec. In the United States the Federation of Pétanque USA (FPUSA) reports that about 30,000 play nationwide. As of December 1, 2015, FPUSA counted 2141 members in the US, in 52 affiliated clubs.

On the international level, the governing body of pétanque is the Fédération Internationale de Pétanque et Jeu Provençal (FIPJP). It was founded in 1958 in Marseille and has about 600,000 members in 52 countries as of 2002.

## International Competitions

There are a number of important world championship tournaments.

The FIPJP world championships take place every two years. Men's championships are held in even-numbered years, while Women's and Youth championships are held in odd-numbered years.

Perhaps the best-known international championship is the Mondial la Marseillaise de pétanque, which takes place every year in Marseille, France, with more than 10,000

participants and more than 150,000 spectators. Pétanque is not currently an Olympic sport, although the Confédération Mondiale des Sports de Boules has been lobbying the Olympic committee since 1985 to make it part of the summer Olympics.

## Pittonque

Pittonque is the name of the Pitton pétanque club. The club was established to encourage people in the Pitton area to play the game of pétanque. We play on a terrain behind the village hall. The club has around 40 members organised into four teams.

During the main season, April to September, our teams play in two leagues on a home and away basis. These leagues have two divisions with promotion and demotion between them.

Two teams play in a Tuesday league, The Hop Back League, the other two teams play on Thursdays in the 3 Counties Social Petanque League.

The club holds a number of internal competitions during the season plus singles and doubles competitions outside of the main season.

To play pétanque you need very little equipment, mainly a set of three boules.

## The Pittonque Club



## Club Information

